In a year when Display was chosen as the theme of the International Byzantine Congress, we could think of no better offering to this collection in honour of Jean-Michel Spieser than a look at chapter II, 15 of the De Cerimoniiis: Εἰς πολλούς καὶ ἄγαθοὺς χρόνους!

One of the longest chapters of the De Cerimoniiis, II, 15 is made up of numerous sections. The first of these (15.1) is entitled “All that must be observed when a reception is held in the great Triklinos of the Magnaura, when the emperors sit on the Throne of Solomon.” Now, though a reception by the emperor on the Throne of Solomon was quite a show, the description of it here, in keeping with the foregoing chapters of Book II, is rather bald. The purpose of Constantine’s compilation, stated in the preface to Book I, was to restore order in imperial ceremonial (βασιλείας τάξεως), previously fallen into confusion and disarray (φύρδην καὶ οὐκ εὐαρμόστως), and thus assure rhythm and order (ὀνθμόφ καὶ τάξει) in the comportment of imperial power; for thereby the harmony and solicitude of the Creator for the world may be represented (εἰκόνιζομεν), and the imperial power appear more venerable and marvellous to the subjects of the Empire. In the preface to Book II, Constantine says that just as in the first Book he had restored

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1 Many thanks to Jana Grusková and Otto Kresten, οἱ δημηγερόμενοι, for all their encouragement and excellent suggestions.

Abbreviations

Cer Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris De Cerimoniis aulae byzantinae libri duo, ed. J.J. Reiske (Bonn, 1829).


2 Even the sneering Liudprand was obviously impressed by it; see n. 35 below.

3 Cer I, Preface = Vogt I, pp. 1, line 7 – 2, line 24 (εἰκόνιζομεν L).
order to ceremonies for which written descriptions already existed, the second Book would present in orderly fashion other ceremonies which had not yet been set down in writing. Here again his ultimate purpose was political: to render (literally “show”: ἀποδεικνύντες) the imperial power yet more imperial and awesome, and to afford imperial officials as well as the whole body of subjects a way of life and comportment in good order (μετὰ τῆς εὐταξίας); for by this latter, he continues, they themselves may become more venerable and seemly and pleasing to the emperors, as well as respectful to one another and admirable and illustrious to every nation.⁴

Whilst the reader of the first section of II, 15 can entertain such an idealised concept of display through ceremonial order, in the sections which follow (15.2–11), where specific occasions during Constantine’s reign are described, one sees all too clearly how the Byzantines went about showing off in actual practice before foreigners. Here every combination was good; traditional ceremonial order was jumbled; multifarious elements of costume, artwork and movement were mixed from various feasts and functions, making maximum use of the buildings and spaces of the newer and older, now mostly disused, parts of the palace, all with a view to ostentatious display: δι’ ἐνδείξεως.⁵

Of course, aside from the archaeological and art historical interest of sections 15.2–11, they are also of enormous historical importance as a source for Byzantine relations with the Muslim world and with Kievan Rus’. 15.2–7 refer to embassies from the Tarsiote ruler Sayfaddawla and his client the Daylamite Nasr at-Tamali of Amida, as well as from the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordova; and 15.8–11 describes a reception of the Princess Olga together with her relations and merchants from Rus’. There is disagreement amongst scholars as to the dating of these events. The most likely date for the visits of the Muslims is 946, which fits with the number of the indiction given in the title of 15.2 and the days of the week and month throughout the chapter, as well as with the Arabic sources. Furthermore, because the days of the week and month also coincide in the sections on Olga’s visit, some scholars argue that this latter occurred in the same year as well. However, certain details in the text of 15.8–11 point rather to 957, the next year when the days of the

⁴ Cer, p. 516, line 11–517, line 18.
⁵ This expression is used twice to excuse breaking with the traditional order: in 15.2B and 15.4 (Cer, p. 584, line 7 and 590, line 11); and another such exception is said to have been made “on account of the foreigners,” in 15.5 (Cer, p. 591, lines 1–3).