THE FEAST OF POKROV,
ITS BYZANTINE ORIGIN, AND THE CULT
OF GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR AND
ISAAC THE PARTHIAN (SAHAK PARTCEV)
IN BYZANTIUM

In the following paper I will try to show that the feast of Pokrov emerged from Armenian traditions in Byzantium and is preserved in Byzantine traditions in Russia. Thus, the article contains two major parts, “Byzantino-Slavica” and “Armeno-Byzantina,” with a third section as a kind of conclusion.

The cult of St Gregory the Illuminator in Byzantium from the middle of the ninth to the early tenth century and its role in the ideology of the Macedonian dynasty and its earlier background is another main subject of the following study.1

Part One: Byzantino-Slavica

1.1. Introduction

The feast of Saint Pokrov, Ἁγία Σκέπη, is presently known in both Russian and Greek liturgical traditions, but the Greek service appeared in the nineteenth century as a translation from Russian Slavonic.2 The feast of Pokrov seems to be completely unknown to the Byzantine rite.3 This is not to say that it was never known there. The

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1 This paper is dedicated to the memory of Michail Fëdorovich Murianov (1928–1996), whose articles opened to me the Byzantine background of the early Russian liturgy, and Karen Nikitich Youzbashian (1927–2009), who introduced me to the world of Armenian studies and to the twists and turns of Armeno-Byzantine relations under Photius and in the Macedonian period.

2 Wortley 1971, 149–151. See the list of abbreviations at the end of the article.

3 In 1682, the Moscow correctors of the Russian liturgical books stated that they found nothing of the service for Pokrov in the Greek liturgical books. Сф. А. А. Дмитриевский, Праздник в честь Покрова Пресвятой Богороди-
Russian tradition — that is, the tradition of the Church and its hagiographical documents — insists that, quite to the contrary, the feast was established in Constantinople and was accepted in Russia, which was part of the Constantinopolitan patriarchy. There is, however, another Russian tradition, a scholarly one that begins in the late nineteenth century. This tradition insists that the feast is of Russian origin and was established either in Kiev (Sergij Spasskij 1898)⁴ or Vladimir (Medvedeva and Voronin, in the late 1940s)⁵ or Novgorod (Yusov 2009) somewhere in the pre-Mongolian period (before 1237). According to this viewpoint, the evidence of the feast’s Byzantine origins that is found in documents from the Russian Church is not to be taken at face value because it represents nothing more than the requisite claims of authority. Of course there are other opinions, even among the Russian scholars. I will mention some of them below.

The hypothesis of a Vladimir origin of the feast is the most popular among Soviet and post-Soviet scholars. It was refuted in detail by Mariia Pliukhanova already in 1995⁶ but it is still maintained by some scholars, although without any answer to Pliukhanova’s criticisms.⁷ For some Russian scholars this hypothesis has been transformed into

цы и величание для него [А. А. Дмитриевский, The Feast in Honour of the Pokrov of the Most Holy Theotokos and the Megalinarion for it], Руководство для сельских пастырей [Guidance for Village Priests (Kiev)] (1885) № 46, 311–316, here 312–313.

(4) Spasskij 1898.

(5) The idea has been mentioned since the nineteenth century. At that time, Ostroumov published his supposition in a non-scholarly Church review in 1911 [М. А. ОСТРОУМОВ, Происхождение праздника Покрова <The Origin of the Feast of Pokrov>, Приходское чтение <Parish Reading> (St Petersburg) (1911) Nr 19. 401–412]. His paper was a work of journalism rather than scholarship. His claim was then substantiated by N. N. Voronin and his disciple E. S. Medvedeva, first in the latter’s thesis (unpublished but widely quoted by Russian art historians to the present): Е. С. Медведева, Этюды о суздалских вратах [Essays on the Suzdal Gates]. Диссертация на соискание ученой степени кандидата искусствоведения (Moscow, 1947) (unavailable to me). Cf. Voronin’s summarizing paper: Н. Н. ВОРОНИН, Из истории русско-византийской церковной борьбы XII в. II. Праздник Покрова [From the History of the Russo-Byzantine Church Struggle in the Twelfth Century. II. The Feast of Pokrov], BB 26 (1965) 208–218.

(6) М. Плюханова, Сюжеты и символы Московского Царства [The Themes and Symbols of the Muscovite Tsardom] (St Petersburg, 1995) 52–59.

(7) Loseva 2009, 130.