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Byzantine Empresses

"Have you seen a male soul in a female body? Have you seen a female chastity, the memory of which remains with the victory forever? This woman is glorified before men, exalted by angels, crowned by God - wives, imitate her, and you will be honored by God "

John Chrysostom.

Certainly, the central figure of the Byzantine state was the emperor – it was much written about (even by this writer) and it makes no sense here to mention this topic. It is sufficient to say that, being a person whose status is sacred, a Roman (Byzantine) king had unprecedented powers in the political sphere and in the sphere of church government. Being "the Vicar of Christ on earth" (official royal title), "whose duty, indicated God, is to take care of all people," according to St. Justinian the Great (527-565), "for his there is nothing impossible because the emperor ought to care and express concern to save his people." Basileus directly regulated the issues of church governing, and even dogma, including questions of dogma. He did not claim to perform the sacraments and mainly the most important of them - the Eucharist, but he actively participated in them as a clergyman, serving in his holy altar, coming into it during the Liturgy through the Holy Doors, performing duties of a religious man and receiving the sacred gifts as a priest as well.

It seems that there is a natural conclusion that the emperor was a self-sufficient figure, he did not need anyone else beside him, and, of course, he was indispensable. Of course, we are talking about the period when the pretender to the throne became a Roman (Byzantine) Emperor with full power. However, such a conclusion would be contrary to truly historical reality, because close to the emperor, there was a magnificent Byzantine empress, largely supplementing him and directing, and sometimes even replacing, whose status was a little bit different (and in some moments it was not different at all) from the status of her royal husband. It was she who will be the subject of our scientific interest.

Meanwhile, the difficulty of the study is in the fact that, as in the situation with the Roman emperors, the status and powers of the Byzantine queens have never been legally described as a specific and closed list. What was allowed to do for the queen, and what she had to do at any given point of the time was often determined not by the written law and by the church canon, but by the general outlook and sense of justice of the Byzantines (that was carried by the kings themselves), as well as by political tradition and state-church tradition. There is

nothing surprising in it, since one of the features of Byzantine law (as well as canonical one) was its precedential character.

In Byzantium nobody formulated a law for the future, but every time when there was a necessity to resolve this or that conflict (or dispute), to resolve a particular situation, the relevant authorities issued a proper legal act for a particular precedent. It could have the form of a state law or a church doctrine or a judgment. Very often along them and in addition to them there was a legal custom, which was not of the secondary importance.

According to the algorithm known since the days of classical Roman law precedents caused in a specific period of time and by the needs of people, as well as the rules of customary law were fixed in different system books afterwards, some of which were kept till our days. For example, there was a book "Regarding ceremonies" of Emperor Constantine VII (913-959), instructions on military affairs of emperors St. Mauritius (582-602), Leo VI the Wise (886-912) and commander Kekaumenos. As well as the "Code of Theodosius" of Emperor St. Younger Theodosius II (408-450), "Code of Justinian", "Institutions" and "Digesty" by Emperor St. Justinian the Great, "Eclogue", "agricultural law" and "The book of the Prefect" by Emperor Leo III (717-741) and Constantine V Isaurian (741-775), "Prohiron" Emperor Basil I the Macedonian (867-886) and "Vasiliki" by Emperor Leo VI the Wise were also made.

Besides these, there were many other collections of canonical acts, which were obligatory used. Among them there were the Apostolic Constitutions, Rules of the Ecumenical Councils and individual Local Council, canons, data provided by the individual heroes of the faith - the Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, "a rulebook" by John Scholastica, "Syntagma Canonum" by Matthew Vlastar "Nomokanonon" by Patriarch St. Photius (858 - 867, 877-886), the canonical forecasters and scholia, penitential Nomocanon etc. Nothing to say about the comments of canonists and jurists, which referred to "the right of lawyers", were also official regulations and had the equal power along with written laws.

Therefore, to solve this problem, we have the only possibility- basing on ancient traditions, to look for specific precedents that are directly related to the status of the Byzantine empress. And, summing up the observations, we can adjust them to the historical context of the events.

I.

Of course, to study the status of Byzantine empress it is necessary to start from the time of Saints Constantine the Great (306-337), or St. Justinian the Great, or even earlier. It is the result of an ancient political tradition - Byzantine queen was nobody else but the Roman empress. Therefore, let's pay our attention to the precedents caused by the Roman sense of justice long before the time when Christianity became the dominant religion of the Empire.

Even Libya - the wife of Emperor Augustus Octavian (27 to 14 BC), was granted the title of "August", causing the first precedent for the future. The problem was that in the understanding of the Romans the title of "August", which

they gave to Octavian, combined several concepts: "greatness", "omnipotence", "holiness." Now Libya was a person to whom rightfully all these qualities belonged basing on the right.

Messalina, the third wife of Emperor Claudius (41-54), although she did not become Augustus (her own husband was against it), but she received an unprecedented right to sit during a theatrical performance among the Vestals and ride along the streets in a carriage named *carpentum* – that was an essential prerogative of the Vestals as well. Obviously, that her proximity to Virgin aristocrats, priestesses, dedicated to the goddess Vesta, the guardians of the sacred fire, emphasized the sacral segment of her status. In addition, contemporaries clearly focused on its political component. For example, some Greek cities began minting coins with her image, which was allowed only in respect of the emperors.

Agrippa - the fourth and the last wife of Emperor Claudius, also received the title of "August", and the coins with the image of Queen were already minted in Rome. Her name was used to swear as the name of the Emperor, which was a real admission of the Empress as a co-ruler of the king. Finally, in honor of Agrippa her hometown received the status of a colony. It was considered very important for rural settlement and it was honorable as well as it guaranteed many additional rights and privileges for its inhabitants. For example, the municipal system of the colony completely copied the system of government in Rome. Local colonial magistrates were elected by the general law and received funds from the state treasury for their maintenance and travel costs (*ornatio*). And each colonist received some land (*bina jugera*) and the complete right of Roman citizenship.

Very soon the Empress, as well as all members of the imperial family, received the right of personal security, which was provided by oath *sacramento*, made by all citizens of the Roman state. The point was that the personal security was given to the emperors after they accepted the duties of *tribune of the people*, who possessed the exclusive prerogative (*sacrosanctus magistratus*) according to the law. But woman could not be the *tribune of the people*. And, giving her such a great right, thus the Romans stressed the extraordinary role of the Empress among the total mass of women of the Roman Empire. However, and they stresses her role among ordinary men as well.

Faustina, the wife of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180), was given the title "Mother of camps» (*mater castrorum*). The same title was given to Julia Domna, the wife of Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211). She was also named "the mother of Caesar» (*mater Caesaris*), with since 209 - "the mother of August and Caesar» (*mater Augustorum et Caesaris*), and since 211 - "the mother of the camps, the Senate and the homeland» (*mater castrorum et senatus et patriae*).

Subsequently, many kinds of worship and titles became commonplace for the royal women. In honor of the Empress altars and statues were erected, they were considered equal to the rank of gods by the decision of the Senate, throughout the Roman Empire coins with their image were minted. And in 241, Empress Trankvillina, the wife of Emperor Gordian III (238-244), became known as "The Holy Empress" (*sanctissima Augusta*). Finally, the mother of St. Constantine the Great, St. Helen, received the title of "most noble woman" (*nobilissima femina*),

“most noble August”. Throughout the Roman Empire inscriptions of gratitude were carved in stone, statues were erected.

And yet, a Roman woman, even if she was the Empress was far from equal rights with men. There was nothing to say of the fact that the moral side of their life often was not a sample of piety. However, after the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the society attitude towards women in general and towards the Empress in particular was changed; the Empress herself changed as well. Byzantium gave not a secondary role to its Empress. They not only openly used their natural feminine influence on the royal spouse, but they carried out many important political functions themselves. She, like the emperor, had her own quarters, retinue and courtiers. Many of those who served to the Queen themselves gave Basilissa to the posts. In addition, all queens had their own property, which they disposed at their consideration (as a rule they spend it on charity), and they performed special assignments of their spouses or they acted on their own, being actively involved in public problems.

Of course, great influence was made by the IIIrd and the IVth Ecumenical Councils to determine the status of the Byzantine Empress, they solved the problem with the heresy of Nestorianism, which had despised and belittled the feat of the Virgin. It stands to reason, in theocratic society, it was directly related to social and legal status of a woman. When she is considered an instrument of sin, seduced by a forbidden fruit and being a temptation for Adam, it is difficult to talk about its merits. And the term "Giving birth to Christ" which the Blessed Virgin Mary was "awarded" with by the heresiarch Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople in 428-431, this term did not let reveal the high value of her spiritual achievement. And it is absolutely different thing when the whole Church sings to the Woman-Mother of God: "It is impossible for a man to look at God, it is also impossible for Angels to look at him; and You, Vergin, appear in a woman-like look, glorifying him.»

Christ is the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Mother of God is the Queen of Heaven. Since then, the Byzantine queen acquired her highest patron saint and her image in the face of the Virgin Mary. As it was commanded by Christ and His apostles, the Empress became an assistant to her husband in his work and deeds. The Empire did not hear of any frivolity of Christian empresses. Being a modest and pious housewife, a teacher of the future king of Rome, an intellectual woman and a loving mother, Byzantine Basilissa became the standard of Christian virtue. St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople in 398 - 404, who was not keen on flattering to the powerful people, criticized all unrighteousness and easy morals, once addressed to the Empress Eudoxia, wife of Emperor Arcadius (394-408), with the following words: "Mother of the Church, supporter of monks, patron saints, support of the poor." And he added: "I am telling these words not to flatter to the queen, but to respect her piety."

Sixteen empresses and princesses were glorified by the Catholic Church as holy supporters for Orthodoxy accidentally. Here are their names: St. Helena, mother of St. Constantine the Great, St. Theodora, the wife of St. Justinian the Great, St. Eudoxia, wife of St. Theodosius II the Younger, St. Pulcheria, the wife

of St. Marcian (450-457), St. Theodora, wife of Emperor Theophilus (829-842), Princess St. Anfusa, the daughter of Emperor Constantine V Isaurian, Princess St. Sosipater, daughter of Emperor St. Mauritius, the Empress St. Ipomoniya (Elena), wife of Emperor St. Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425), St. Ariadne, the daughter of Emperor St. Leo I the Great (457-474), the wife of Emperor Zeno (474-475, 476-491) and Emperor Anastasius I (491-518), St. Irina, the wife of Emperor Leo IV the Khazar (750-780), St. Plakilla, the wife of Emperor St. Theodosius I the Great (379-395), St. Marcian (Lupakiya, Euphemia), wife of the Emperor Justin I (518-527), St. Irina, the wife of Emperor John II Comnenus (1118-1143), Princess St. Fevronia, the daughter of Emperor Heraclius the Great (610-641), St. Feofania, the wife of Emperor Leo VI the Wise, the nun Maria Mongolian, daughter of Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus (1261-1282).

A typical portrait of the Byzantine Empress is Irene Duca, wife of the Basileus Alexis I Comnenus (1081-1118). Being educated and extremely pious, a real mistress in the female ownership and actually managing the king's property, she saw her duty to educate their children and to be a helper for her husband. Being a patroness of arts, writers and poets, a woman who took care of those who were in need, she appeared in public only in routine court ceremonies, she was wise, modest and prudent, patient and easily appeased, she was a real ally of the royal spouse in difficult times. Modesty and home care did not prevent her to participate in politics actively, and without any doubts, she succeeded in it. Soon Irene began to accompany her husband in numerous campaigns, and the king was very proud of her attention and advice. And at the end of the life of Alexis I, the Queen made an unprecedented influence on him. She followed her husband everywhere and conserving natural reserve, she quickly understood the intricacies of political combinations, always giving the best advice to the king.

In the result of the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the royal status more and more accepted sacred features in the eyes of the citizens, imperial glow began to spread on his faithful life companion as well. Starting from the VIth century, group portraits of kings were made and the Empress was there as well. As the researchers explained, her location near the crowned spouse was not due to legal empowerment of Basilissa, but because of the fact of her inclusion in the sanctity of the Emperor, including honors, arising out of it.

As we can see from the given examples, it almost automatically led to the expansion of the Empress' capacity in a number of cases. In Byzantium piety and moral component became a reliable base for political power of a person. And on the contrary: no matter how high status was endowed a man, lack of moral from citizens to trust him almost automatically gave no chances to recognize his legal and political powers. As we can see, Empress was not an exception as well.

Sacred origination of imperial power in Byzantium was the subject of numerous images. In all of them the emperor and his royal consort either are crowned by Christ or by Virgin Mary or by some saint. In miniature, placed in the Psalms of the XIIth century, the king, the queen, and their son are depicted and each of them is crowned by a flying from the sky messenger of Christ. This detail clearly showed that the royal power was connected directly with Christ. Including

the status of the Empress, who also received the authority from God but not from her spouse. Naturally that from the XIth century as Byzantine emperors, empresses began were depicted with a halo on the head, as saint rulers.

The wedding of the emperor was sacred procedure, and the result of it was getting priestly dignity for the emperor- although, as it was traditionally organized in Byzantium, without any specific content. It was possible to compare basileus with clergyman, deacon or priest - but not with an ordinary man; it was absolutely impossible. Wedding took place in one of the halls of the Grand Palace, called "Avgusteya." There on the table there was royal clothes and a crown, there patriarchs and bishops came as well. During the ceremony emperor wore priest vestments, as a priest, he held a sabbon, as a patriarch he blessed the people.

Wedding of the Queen was also one of the most important ceremonies in Byzantium and the sacraments, comparable with the wedding of the basileus. Near the pulpit, covered with porphyry cloth, there stood two thrones with 4 or 5 steps, on which the king and the queen raised. The Gospel and "the Apostle" were read, then while the Patriarch praying the second part of the procedure began. While the bishop of Constantinople was reading a prayer over the porphyry, the Empress was holding the lighted candles in her hands. The emperor himself imposed a crown on her head, and at the end of the procedure, they went together to the palace adjacent to the church of St. Stephen, where they accepted congratulations of dignitaries. There is no doubt that, summing the Empress to the Altar, the basileus made her the part of his dignity. With the royal crown on her head she went accompanied by the retinue of her courtiers and her people, and the spouse stayed behind, in front of her the banners of military units were put, and the Byzantine people loudly shouted greeting her.

It was very important that if the king and the queen had not been married before the accession to the throne, wedding ceremony followed the coronation one, but it did not precede it. This detail clearly demonstrated that the Empress was involved in the omnipotence, not because she became the wife of emperor. She received the supreme power not for her spouse, but due to an act of wedding, the one that preceded it, and it did not depend on it. Thus she was acknowledged the chosen of the God, and her power was considered to be similar to the power of the spouse, the king.

Since the XIIIth century under the Western influence in Byzantium there was a significant change in procedures of coronation - now it included anointing of Basileus by bishop or patriarch as an essential part of it. Here, there are some details that should be identified. In the West anointing was traditionally regarded as a procedure to pass to the "royal priesthood," as to be alike Christ. According to the apostle John it was Christ who made his faithful followers "kings and priests" (Rev. 1.6). According to Isidore of Seville, the anointing was done initially only for the priests, and kings, and the fact that substantially all the Christians began to anoint while the procedure demonstrated that they now became "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Petr.2, 9). However, the secondary anointing of the king was out of logic and it was directly associated only with the idea of the priesthood.

This idea was expressed in an act of Paris bishops dated 1143: "It is clear for us that, according to the Mandate of the Old Testament and the current church law, only kings and priests can be anointed. Consequently, both of them, the only form the mortal, over whom the anointing is done, led the people of God, gave social and spiritual welfares to the people, as well as to each other. "It is natural, the bishops recognized the emperor's ability as a priest to deliver spiritual gifts, eloquent texts, to the people. Sovereign, being anointed while entering into power, became a new man, a reborn one. As while the tonsure as a monk, he stopped his existence for the old life and started a new one after the anointing.

So it was believed in the West, in the XIII century this tradition was borrowed and in the East, although it was politically motivated. Wishing to prove their equality with the Latin emperors, sitting in the captured Constantinople by the Crusaders, Byzantine kings, being forced to remain in Nicaea for half of the century period, adopted this rite. But for us it is important to emphasize here that this ordinance further drew attention to the priesthood of the king, the sacred character of his power. And as the anointing was done and over the empress, her status also took priest like features; and in any case, it was considered sacred.

As Christ is inseparable from his mother, so the emperor is unthinkable without the Empress. Without her, he was considered the most flawed, and did not fit the etiquette of the Byzantine court. And as in Byzantine forms of ceremonies and worship of basileus had an organic connection with the king's status itself as inseparable segments, breaking the etiquette directly or indirectly cast a shadow on the sacred dignity of the emperor. That was, of course, unacceptable if there were no satisfactory explanations. In particular, the emperor Basil II (976-1025) did not bother to find a wife – taking care of the Roman state day and night, he could not find time for it. But what was tacitly allowed for the emperor by the society, being famous for self-sacrifice and great deeds, it was not allowed for an average basileus. Once the king Leo VI the Wise was forced to marry Augustus, ie Empress, his little daughter Anna from Zoe Zauttsy (the wife of the emperor had already died by this time, and he remained widower), because he could not arrange royal receptions.

And the emperor St. Nicephorus Phocas I (963 - 969), a strict ascetic and follower of monasticism, was forced to marry Theodora - the widow of Emperor Romanus II (959-963), because, as he was convinced by his spiritual mentors king should not be alone.

When the emperor Justin II (565- 574) announced Tiberius (574-582) his successor, people of Constantinople considered that without August king was nothing. And therefore they immediately asked to submit a new queen for them. "We want to see, we want to see August Romans!" - hippodrome parties roared. As a consequence, the emperor Tiberius immediately ordered to crown his wife Anastasia.

When emperors became widowers, political elite and the patriarchs themselves usually insisted on their new marriage. The king represented the men, and the queen appeared as a representative of all the women of the Roman Empire.

Accordingly, palace ceremonies were organized where the Empress was given a considerable role.

On Easter Sunday, when the Emperor received the highest dignitaries in the church of Saint Sofia, in the same church in the choir the Empress met their wives. In Brumaly holiday, which was celebrated in November, the Queen presented gifts to court ladies and invited them to the large staterooms. Like basil, Basilissa had audience, dinners, awarded the distinguished ladies and led small talks.

There is an extant description of a diplomatic reception, at which the holy Princess Olga took part. On 9 September 955 in her honor a ceremonial reception was organized at the Emperor Constantine VII. The Princess was welcome with all the rules of ceremony: she was led through the numerous halls of the Grand Palace and she entered the great triclinium of Mangavra, where there was a wonder of the world - the throne of Solomon. St. Olga was received first by the emperor, and then by the Queen Helena - whose special honor was given not for every foreigner.

On the same day a lavish dinner was made at which the princess was sitting at the same table with the royal couple, and around them songs were sung and the shows were organized. In another room of the palace the tables were laid for the princess retinue, in which there were 88 men - nobles, merchants, military men and 35 women. On 18 October 955, another lunch was made, and at this time the holy princess sat next to the emperor, and the queen was sitting at a separate table with all the imperial family. There is no doubt that the pomp and splendor of the royal palace and the whole Constantinople made an irresistible impression on our ancestors; especially they were struck by shrines and the cathedral of Saint Sophia. Russian princess were baptized, and her godfather was the emperor Constantine VII.

On Palm Sunday Empress with the royal husband received the highest dignitaries and on ordinary days she was near him at the racetrack, at festivals and in the Grand Palace at official events. Moreover, the Empress often appeared in public without the emperor, and in the absence of the spouse they even led the ceremonial entrance to the church of Saint Sophia on Sundays.

II.

Of course, lush and colorful ceremonies, portraits of the imperial couple, which were given the same forms of worship, as for the kings themselves, could not help but reflect on a real role of the queen in the management of the Roman state and the Church. Byzantine empress did not suffer from an inferiority complex, and if they had to be engaged in public affairs, they did it better than many men.

In 408 the Eastern Empire was in the management of two young children of Emperor Arcadius - St. Pulcheria and St. Theodosius II. While the younger brother was growing up, St. Pulcheria, being still a girl, began to rule the power. In church policy she continued the course of her grandfather St. Theodosius the Great: Princess actively pursued heretics and provided preferences for the Orthodox party. In 415 her decrees were published against the Montanists and Eunomians,

prohibiting their meetings under the threat of criminal prosecution. In 416 it was the decree of the Gentiles, who were forbidden to enter the civil service and replace the rulers of the provinces. In 418 civil service was impossible for the Jews, representatives of which were subjected to dismissal from the army.

All chroniclers simultaneously confirm that in public affairs of St. Theodore, the wife of St. Justinian the Great was the first co-worker of the emperor and she had almost more authority than he did. The Empress was an excellent organizer and her court was actually the "intelligent office" of the Roman Empire. St. Theodore knew everything or almost everything that was happening in the country, and at the same time there was no assurance that all of the secrets she shared with her husband. The queen herself said that the emperor did not decide anything without consulting with her, and St. Justinian the Great in fact often wrote that he decided, in consultation "with our pious wife, given to us by the God."

The hardness of her spirit was unprecedented - many men could safely follow her example. It was she who in the critical days of the rebellion "Nika" made a speech for the dignitaries and her phrase became historic: "If you want to save yourself, nobody, even the Emperor, will not stop you. The sea is in front of you, ready for court, and you have enough money to pay for a swim in any direction. As for me, I stick to an old adage: The best shroud is a purple imperial robe! "

Her orders were executed immediately, and if it happened so that the decree of the emperor was contrary to the opinion of the Empress, the female perspective was always chosen. She personally received the ambassadors, and many people wanted to meet with her at first, and then to be presented for the Emperor. While the audience a guest prostrated in front of her and kissed her shoe. She was considered a figure equal to the emperor. As well as St. Justinian she took the oath of officials and patricians, commanders and soldiers. They swore that would serve well to "pious and holy Justinian and Theodora sovereigns, the wife of His Imperial Majesty, and without hypocrisy they would work for the prosperity of the autocracy and the government."

Receptions at the Empress although were rare, but extremely crowded. She was a real defender of the weaker sex in the Byzantine Empire, and any of the women could turn to her with a complaint against her husband or to ask for help. When she traveled, she was accompanied by a retinue that included dignitaries of the Roman Empire and the provinces, which she attended. St. Theodore did much charity work and allocated huge funds for hospitals, monasteries and temples.

It is how a contemporary man of the Empress Eudoxia (1067), the widow of Constantine X Doukas (1059-1067) described her life. "After coming to power at the behest of the royal husband, the queen Eudokia entrusted the kingdom to no one else, she did not choose home life as her destiny and she did not entrust affairs to a nobleman, and began to do everything by herself and took power into their own hands. While keeping a low profile, she avoided unnecessary luxury both in dress and in outputs. Being a sophisticated and experienced woman, she was able to deal with any matters - appointments, civil litigation and collection of taxes,

and in case of necessity she was able to speak in a royal manner - such a great mind was in the queen. "

If the royal couple woman had great talent and willpower, her husband, despite his orders and titles, became a minor figure at her. It happened during the last years of the reign of the king Justin II (he had already been seriously ill), whose wife Sofia persuaded him to make Tiberius as a king, hoping to become the second wife of a new basileus of the Romans, having divorced him with the first one. Fortunately, this combination of an ambitious queen failed.

So it happened to Michael Rangave I (811-813), whose wife queen Procopius had great ambitions and strength of character. Many solutions were taken by the emperor under her pressure. With great difficulty he managed to break a resistance of the wife when on 24 June 813 due to compelling reasons the king stated on abdication of the imperial mantle and adoption of monastic vows.

As you know, the emperor Alexios III Angelos Komnenos (1195-1203) had little interest in public affairs, giving the energy to lush activities and having fun frequently changing golden clothes. It happened so, that his wife Euphrosyne, which could replace her husband, openly scolded him for his laziness and insane extravagance. However, soon she really had to take control of the government in their own hands. The Byzantines were astonished having seen two identical golden chairs made according to the order of the Queen on which she and her husband sat on equal terms during official receptions. Ambassadors often had to pay two visits - one to the queen, the second - to the king, the oftener the Empress canceled the senseless orders of her spouse and gave hers.

If the Empress was a person, she always took an active part in the affairs of the Roman state. Irina, a wife of Emperor St. John Doukas Vatatzes (1222-1254), in spite of a serious injury, which led to her long illness and then death, actively and continuously was a supporter of her spouse. "Both of them ruled the kingdom in a rather dignified manner - says the chronicler - by all means taking care of flourishing of justice and legality and tried their best to demolish the greed and rapacity in the cities. Both of them created temples with a remarkable grace, sparing no cost to make them both great, and beautiful. Having given to the churches, many estates and large annual income, they made them good for monks and ascetics, full of grace and spiritual joy. Not being content with it, they organized hospitals, almshouses that clearly revealed in them the love to God. "

Empress took an active part in selection (or retirement) of the Patriarchs, and with the help of female affection she declined the crowned spouse in favor of her candidacy not secretly but publicly as one having authority. The first precedents caused St. Pulcheria, but even more actively this competence of queens emerged during the reign of St. Theodora, wife of Emperor St. Justinian the Great. St. Irene (797-802) also did not doubt in her rights when she appointed St. Taras (784 - 806) to the See of Constantinople. Then St. Theodora (842-856) did the same, having elected St. Methodius (842 - 846) as Patriarch, and the other the Empress did the same, if they had to make this choice.

To sum up, we can say that, perhaps, except warfare the royal wife executed all the imperial powers: they provided fair and speedy trial, engaged in wide charity and social activities, settled the Church and in every possible way pleased God, hoping for His mercy to the Roman Empire.

III.

In 451 Attila the Hun ruler (434-453) demanded that the emperor of the Western part of the Holy Roman Empire Valentinian III (423-455) gave him to marry the princess Honoria, the king's sister, who lightly fell in love with the barbarian, and he would like to declare himself the heir of the eastern part of the Roman Empire with the help of the future wife. This requirement was told that women of the royal family would not inherit the Roman Empire. But that was only in the beginning of the existence of the Roman Orthodox statehood. Soon afterwards, women became not only to determine the name of the next king, but they also personally inherit the supreme political power.

There is nothing unnatural in the fact that in situations in which the Roman Empire was deprived of its emperor, the queen began to claim for a personal rule. Indeed, if Basilissa was the first friend of the emperor, being united with him by God Himself not only with the sacrament marriage, but also with the sacrament of anointing to the kingdom, so why could not she take the reins in her hands? Of course, it required extraordinary circumstances, but should they occur, queens appeared among the contenders for the throne. Especially if they had very young heirs of the kingdom the regents of which they became upon motherhood.

The first precedent was caused by St. Irina, having become in 797 a single queen of the Roman Empire (although to achieve it she had to remove her son from the power – it was a tragic story in all respects). She strictly followed the rules of the royal etiquette and she was in public in magnificent robes, as emperor, and she ordered to mint the coins with the words, "Irina, a great basil of the Romans, an autocrat."

At sunset of a glorious Macedonian dynasty after very tumultuous events, just two women - sisters Zoe (1042-1050) and Theodore (1042-1056) ruled the Roman state. Old palace ceremonies had to be changed according to the new developments. And now both two Empress sat together on the royal throne, installed in one line, slightly deviated toward the younger sister. Next to them there were soldiers - bodyguards, behind - the closest courtiers to the sisters. Even further there was the second guard, and then the synod (Senate). All state affairs were settled by the sisters together in the presence of dignitaries.

A little later Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055) joined them, who was elected by the sisters as a husband for Zoe - she was the eldest among them, and consequently she had more rights to the throne. Now, in the throne room there were three altars for all three of the Byzantine emperors. Constantine IX Monomachos actually remained faithful to the word which he had given before the coronation. In no way he displeased to the royal sisters, and in official acts there was not only his name, but the names of Theodora and Zoe as well. In addition, the

laws were signed by all the emperors, not to violate the rights of the last representatives of the Macedonian dynasty. Each of the empresses enjoyed a certain freedom of actions and by tacit agreement she could give orders which were obligatory for all parties. It was not until 1050, when Zoe died. Now Constantine IX continued to rule together with Theodore.

But, finally, and Monomachus died, and Theodore became the sole queen of the Roman Empire. Surprisingly, all historians agree that the short period of Theodora's kingdom was marked by the complete absence of any conspiracies and rebellions; there was no evil to the supreme power. In a truly masculine style the queen ruled the Roman Empire, in a firm voice giving orders and humbling aristocratic opposition. And when she heard about the dissatisfaction of some dignitaries, she correctly reminded that it was not the first time she took the Holy See, and continued to reign. While her reigning, the harvests were very good, the war ended, the borders were secure, which had a positive impact on sales. The state treasury replenished quickly.

Understanding the duty as to bring peace to the Church, Byzantine empress had no doubts that their duty was to deal with matters of church and the care of faith. Thus, in no way they were inferior to male emperors. At least three times the holy Empress predetermined the victory of Orthodoxy over heresies: they were St. Pulcheria, St. Irene and St. Theodore. At the same time, two of them at the moment reigned alone, being widows with young heirs to the throne.

St. Pulcheria actively opposed the heresy of Nestorianism, and thanks to her efforts the IV Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon was convened in 451 AD. Having formulated the cathedral Oros, the Council Fathers warmly welcomed the Empress when she appeared, "Pulcheria is a new Elena; you caused jealousy of Elena! Your life is the protection for all! Your faith is churches' glory! Your kingdom shall be for ever! Many years to August! You are the light of Orthodoxy; it creates peace everywhere. Lord, keep the lights of the world! Lord, keep the lights of the Universe! "

And St. Irene struck the first serious blow of iconoclasm, which had filled the entire East. Despite the large number of iconoclasts, including bishops, once in the assembly of the people the Empress of announced St. Taras (784-806), her secretary as a new Patriarch of Constantinople. And in his turn, according to the predefined scenario played out with the queen, he agreed with her choice only when the ecumenical council for the restoration of the veneration of icons took place.

After that, on her behalf and on behalf of the young son of Emperor Constantine VI (780-797) the Empress sent a letter to the Bishop of Rome Hadrian (772 - 795), in which she stated her intention to convene an ecumenical council. On 17 August 786, the Council took place, but with iconoclastic bishops guards and soldiers entered the temple and closed the meeting. There was nothing to do - Empress ordered to follow their request, and the bishops went home. A year later, in 787, the queen announced her decree to reconvene the Ecumenical Council, but in Nicaea, not in Constantinople. It, as you know, was completed with a brilliant victory of icon followers.

The feat of a young widow is really majestic: at this time iconoclasts had a great support in the army as well as among the episcopate and the highest dignitaries. The patriarch of Constantinople Paul (780 - 784), who did not want to be known as an iconoclast, but he was afraid of opposing them, voluntarily resigned and went to a monastery. Having decided to convene, the Empress had not only to demonstrate the nature, but also to think over some fine diplomatic combinations. In particular, the convening of the Ecumenical Council was not possible without the help of Rome, and the Pope would almost for sure state (and did it in effect) his own demands for St. Irina. For example, to bring back the metropolis, which Emperor Leo III the Isaurian had previously transferred to Constantinople department.

In other words, here it was necessary to demonstrate courage and cunning, and the ability to compromise or defend the opinion in spite of everything. Moreover, according to the "Acts" of the Council, as it turned out, almost all the bishops secretly sympathized the icon followers, but did not dare to express their thoughts aloud. And it turns out that one fragile woman, whose any wrong step could lead her and her son to death, was not afraid to do something that hundreds of bishops and dignitaries and the patriarch were not able to do. As you can see, St. Irene was one of those powerful figures who were capable of defying time to change the course of history, not being afraid to be responsible for the actions.

But Iconoclasm had not been completely destroyed and in spring 843 another Empress - St. Theodora, a widow of Emperor Theophilus, convened the Council of Constantinople to declare solemnly about the final victory of truth over heresy. This Council did not have a formal nature, and its decisions should be protected in front of the iconoclasts. Patriarch of Constantinople St. Methodius (842-846) wrote about it much later. "Realizing that nothing will contribute to the security of the Roman Empire, as the end of the church troubles, Queen Theodora, having negotiated with High Officers of the State called the most influential between the monks and invited them to discuss the question of the restoration of icon veneration. When she found out that they all agreed and were burning with the desire to change the religion, she demanded them to choose extracts from the spiritual books in support of the truth, and she pointed to a place in the palace, which was supposed to convene the Council, and addressed a manifesto to the people. So many people gathered together that it was impossible to count them, as not only those who had kept a clean mind at the time of wickedness, arrived, but many of those that shared the heretical views, they were assigned to the church office by the iconoclasts. They changed their minds, and they cursed holy icons to the enemies. "

As you can see, they could be stopped neither with the hosts of the officials, nor with the army nor with heresy of bishops. The higher was the achievement of these amazing supporters of Orthodoxy and the other royal wives, who shared the responsibility for the fate of the Christian universe with their spouses.

IV.

The role of the Empress was so significant, and her sanction was so majestic that the very relationship with the queen or the princess often became a decisive factor in cases when the imperial throne was free. St. John III Doukas Vatatzes was married to Irina - the third daughter of Theodore I Laskaris (1204-1222), an energetic and ambitious woman, whose will and perseverance were crucial in his election as a king. Like some other emperors of the past centuries of Roman history, St. John III Doukas became emperor by right of his wife, and therefore he continued the dynasty of Laskarid without starting his own one. It is necessary to notice that Theodore I Laskaris himself was crowned as an emperor, because he was married to Anna, daughter of Emperor Alexios III Angel Comnenus.

Nothing to say about relationship - often even an opinion of the Empress was decisive in choosing of the next king. It is easy to imagine this scene: the throne is empty, the court parties are actively presenting their candidates, all-powerful palace dignitaries are making Herculean efforts hoping that their own elect will win, so they are trading, fighting (sometimes to the death and injuries). The Army is also not far behind: legions are gathering around the Grand Palace or at the racetrack, crowds of Constantinopolitans are following them. From the Hagia Sophia patriarchal clerics are hurrying to learn the situation and to report to the bishop of Constantinople about it. The patriarch himself, dressed in festive clothes, is slowly passing to the royal residence, that he may sanctify the people's choice or take an active part in the life of crowned heads. Everything is full of noise and fuss, it is buzzing as well.

And Empress appears in front of this motley crowd consisting of thousands of people – she is a widow or mother – and everything keeps silent. She is welcomed with loud shouts "Augustus, the queen! Winner, it is your victory! Give an Orthodox tsar for the Universe! ". Bearers of legions put the banners in front of her; the army gives honors, dignitaries bow in reverence. Finally, she starts to say something, and her words are immediately passed through the ranks, they rapidly discuss and retell them. Empress says someone's name - the name of a new emperor of the Roman power, and almost immediately he appears on the front of the stage. He is loudly and joyously welcomed as a new ruler of the universe, he is dressed in the Emperor's robes, the army bows the spears in front of him, a golden chain is put on his neck and he is taken to the temple for the sacrament ceremony of coronation. What a wonderful balance of one fragile woman and the whole Roman world, obedient to her will and accepting her choice!

Of course, this external idyll did not exist all the time. Moreover, it was often prepared in silent palace rooms, to make the election of a new emperor more spectacular - the Byzantines were deep connoisseurs and admirers of form. But in its essence the above described picture was typical for the Holy Byzantium. And it was wrong to ignore the opinion of the Empress. Michael V Calafat (1041-1042) tried to do it once, and he lost not only the royal power, but also his life. Having dared to be against the Empress Zoe of the Macedonian dynasty, he was dethroned and blinded. On April 21, 1042 Calafat was driven on a mule along the streets of

Constantinople, and then sent into exile to the monastery Eleggmon, where he later died in obscurity.

So, it was St. Ariadne, a widow of Emperor Zeno, who chose the candidacy of Anastasia I, creating the first precedent. Empress Zoe demanded to crown her lover Michael Paflogon IV (1034-1041) as a tsar after the death of her husband Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034). At night urgently being called to the imperial apartments, patriarch did not dare to contradict Basilissa, and on April 12, 1034, on Good Friday a public and solemn procedure to erect Michael IV to the royal throne was held in the presence of representatives of the army and sinklit.

In agreement with her sister Zoe appointed Constantine IX Monomachus as her husband and the Emperor. On June 11, 1042 religious official from the cathedral Hagia Sophia committed a solemn wedding ceremony of them as husband and wife. And on June 12, 1042 the bishop of Constantinople himself Alexius of Constantinople (1025 - 1043) crowned Constantine IX Monomachus.

After the death of the royal sister, Theodora became the Byzantine Empress. But the State needed a man's hand, moreover, the Empress was no longer young, and was preparing to depart to God. On August 31, 1056 Theodore personally gave the imperial diadem to the commander Michael VI (1056-1057), declaring him as a basil. Patriarch of Constantinople Michael Cerularius (1043 - 1059) had no choice as to make the sacrament coronation of Mikhail VI. Just 3 days later Theodore died.

On January 1, 1068, thanks to the choice of the Empress Eudoxia, the widow of Constantine Doukas, Byzantium had a new Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes.

On the day of the death of Emperor John VIII (1425-1448) his future successor St. Constantine XI Palaeologus (1448-1453) was far away, in Mistra. This fact created the preconditions that two persons claimed for the vacant throne (the second was Dimitri - brother of St. Constantine XI). But an aged Empress Helena, by that time nun St. Ipomoniya, settled everything, to whom according to the established legal tradition passed an unwritten rule for the throne. And without hesitation she gave power to the eldest son of St. Constantine XI Palaiologos.

V.

But Byzantium demonstrated opposite examples as well. If Basilissa was unworthy of her royal status, her abilities drastically devalued, and sooner she lost the power. The first example of this topic belonged to the queen Martin, wife of Emperor Heraclius the Great. The Byzantines did not forget that she was the basil's niece and obviously they did not approve of this incestuous marriage. But as they loved the king himself, when he was alive, Martin enjoyed all the benefits of the power (and she experienced troubles too as she often accompanied her husband in the heavy military campaigns against Persia). But as soon as Heraclius died, the situation changed dramatically, and the Romans retaliated Martin, who was believed to be the culprit and the fall of the emperor.

When the royal widow with the children went on a festive procession, she got a nasty surprise. The Constantinopolitans themselves made a hierarchy in the royal family having chosen the eldest son of the late Heraclius, St. New Constantine (641), because he was wearing a purple robe almost since his birth. Martin herself was rejected by the Byzantines in a very offensive form: "You're the only mother of the kings! - The screams from the crowd were heard. - They are our kings and lords! When foreigners are barbarians come to our kingdom, you can not receive them and negotiate with them. God can not let the power of the Romans come to such state! ". As you can guess, shortly after it Martin was finally shifted from the throne.

The second example belonged to a frivolous and unhappy widow of brilliant Emperor Manuel I Comnenus (1143-1180), Antiochian Princess Mary and their son, young king Alexios II Komnenos (1180-1183). She was a beautiful woman, and even extremely beautiful. "In comparison with her, - a contemporary wrote, - absolutely nothing mattered, and even always smiling and golden Venus, and blond Juno, and famous for her long neck and fine legs Elena, who was worshiped by the ancient for the beauty, and indeed all the women, who were proclaimed gorgeous in various books and novels. "In December 1160 Mary entered the temple of Hagia Sophia, where the Patriarch of Constantinople Hrisoverg Luca (1156-1169) married her with Manuel I, and the bride's head was adorned even with the royal crown.

Halas, neither beauty nor san saved her. In 1180 the emperor died, and Mary became a widow. She mortified the flesh not so long and soon she was charmed by a young aristocrat, so that her reputation, especially as a foreign woman was worsened. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the queen gave a clear preference for the Latins but not for the natural Byzantines. Almost every European without rank and status could come to her and get a high position in the government. Ignoring compatriots and not trusting them, the queen trusted important things to the Latins, generously paying for the slightest services. Naturally, they began to treat the Byzantines as people of "second class", and the Romans hated them to an extreme degree.

First Mary - daughter of Emperor Manuel I from his first marriage was against the Queen. She organized a conspiracy against the stepmother, whom she hated a lot, and the conspirators included the representatives of the most famous families of Byzantium. However, the plot was unsuccessful. But the Constantinopolitans unanimously supported the great daughter of Manuel I, who performed under the banner of protecting national interests, and demanded her release from the court and under the arrest. An angry crowd flooded Constantinople, plundering the palaces and the houses of the people close to the queen Mary and to her admirers. "It was a holy war - said a witness of the events Eustathius of Thessalonica, - not because the church people participated in it, or that it started in the fence and in the arches of the church of St. Sophia, but the thought that inspired the mob of Constantinople."

Only with great difficulty Patriarch of Constantinople Theodosius Voraditus (1178-1183) managed to stop the bloodshed. However, for the queen it was out of any importance. In 1183, the future emperor Andronicus I Komnenos (1183-1185) falsely accused her of secret relations with the Hungarian crown and ordered to kill her. The Queen was strangled and her body was buried on the beach. Then a young king died, he was murdered by the order of Andronicus I.

Two stories, separated by three centuries, could demonstrate how important the status of the Byzantine Empress was and at the same time it did not guarantee to be safe from the problems. Constantine VII was only 7 years old when after the death of his father, Emperor Leo VI the Wise and his uncle Emperor Alexander (912-913) he was the only legitimate heir to the throne in the Roman state. Uncle left the order according to which a board of trustees was made for Constantine VII. To the disgust of the queen-widow Zoe Karbonopsina was not included in the board of trustees, as her authority was low. Everybody thought that Zoe inspired Leo VI for the fourth marriage, which was not approved by the hierarchy. Moreover, the first hater of the Empress, Patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas Mystic (901 - 907, 912 - 925) issued an unprecedented decree on behalf of the board of trustees. This document deprived Zoe all the imperial dignity (!) and it was forbidden for her under any pretext to enter to the royal palace. On top of all, by threats against her son, patriarch forced the empress to take monastic vow and to retire to a monastery.

For her luck, the opponents of the Queen acted carelessly and in an excessively aggressive manner, hoping to seize the power in their hands. Cleverly using the mistakes of the enemies, in October 913 Zoe Karbonopsina was released from the monastic rank and she returned to the palace, restored and even strengthened her position. Both parties were in a stalemate which could be resolved only by mutual concessions, negotiations and not entirely sincere mutual obligations. Zoe promised not to encroach on the status of Nicholas Mystic. In return Patriarch gave his word not to intrude into the sphere of politics, not to appear in the royal palace without the permission of the Empress and to remember the name of the queen on a par with the name of Constantine VII on the Liturgy, and it happened for the first time in February 914.

Thus, the recently disgraced Queen actually became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire at the nominal son. Though it did not last long but her authority was still not high enough for the Byzantines to regard her as an adequate candidate for her royal husband. As a result, shortly afterwards she was deprived of the royal dignity upon the request of her son, she was tonsured as a nun again by the name of Anna and sent to a monastery.

The second story also keeps interesting details. After the death of the Emperor Andronicus III Palaeologus (1328-1341), Cantacuzene, the future emperor of Byzantium, John VI (1347-1354), was appointed a guardian of his young son John V (1341-1391). But in opposition to him there were a widow, Empress Anna of Savoy, the patriarch John Cripple (1334 - 1347) and the Minister

of Finance Alexios Apokaukos. Civil war was launched during which the parties took action, which should legalize their status.

On October 26, 1341 in Didimothē Cantacuzene was proclaimed Byzantine Emperor, and the local bishop crowned him with the imperial crown. Almost at the same time, on November 19, 1341, John V Palaeologus was crowned as a king, and Anna of Savoy was declared a co-regent. And yet, following political traditions, John VI Cantacuzene himself ordered to remember his name at the Liturgy after John V Palaeologus and Empress Anna of Savoy. Thereby he recognized the royal status of Anna, as an acting Empress.

After the death of her loyal ally Alexios Apokaukos and the patriarch compromised himself and he was deposed, Anna was almost an autocratic ruler of the Roman Empire. Finally, the civil war, which weakened the state, came to an end. Cantacuzene and Anna of Savoy found a compromise solution, rather well-known for us. Anna of Savoy made a swear to plot nothing against John VI Cantacuzene and he, being crowned for the second time by the Patriarch of Constantinople in his turn, let his daughter Helen marry the Emperor John V Palaeologus. Now, for a while the Empire had 5 kings: John V Palaeologus and his wife Elena Cantacuzene, Empress Anna of Savoy, John VI Cantacuzene and his wife Irina.

Instead of epilogue

It was hardly justified to demonize Byzantine empresses, noticing in the above given examples only fight of passions, court parties and manifestation of women's insatiable ambition. As a rule, queens themselves were not eager to carry out government cares personally, definitely understanding what it meant. For single and young women (widows or orphans) sole kingdom was far from a sinecure that illustrated the history of the mentioned above Empress Eudoxia Ducas. In public she was always so calm, once the queen frankly spoke about the severity of her burden: "I do not need such a long reign, I do not want to die on the throne!"

In fact, they often became hostages to politics and their own status. Byzantium though it was, up to the end of its existence, the Holy Roman Empire, but it was involved in political intrigues, conspiracies and ambitions as well- the state is the state, and the people at all times are subjected to temptations. Their opinion was so important for the Byzantine society, and very often the Empress was in two minds solving the dilemma: either be a tool in someone's hands, toys that were manipulated, or openly declare the rights to the throne to save both herself and the heir. These were the circumstances in which St. Irina found herself after the death of her husband, Leo IV the Khazar, she was forced to suppress numerous conspiracies of the opposition against her son and herself. Later the people recognized the rights of the Empress to realize the royal status. If she met the high image of the queen, her capacity was very wide, almost like a king's one. Otherwise, as a rule Basilissa spent her last days in a monastery, where attracted an

innate sense of Christian piety led her, so widely developed among the Byzantine royal personages.

To sum up, it is necessary to say that like Byzantine Basileus, Byzantine Queens were the first defenders of the Orthodox state, they were that moral wall against which during broke up the waves of enemies and flows of heresies during the incredibly heavy and bloody millennia of Byzantium existence as a Christian Roman Empire.