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# Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

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Vol 9, No 1 (2024)

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Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

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doi: [10.12681/cjp.33960](https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.33960)

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### To cite this article:

Savelieva, M. (2024). Mythological Aspects of Supreme Power Concept by Eusebius Pamphilus. *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 9(1), 157-171. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.33960>

# Mythological Aspects of Supreme Power Concept by Eusebius Pamphilus

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## Abstract

*The article deals with one of the earliest Christian interpretations of the supreme secular power created by Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Caesarea, during the life of the first Christian emperor Constantine the Great. It is proved that the concept by Eusebius contains mythological ideas transformed in a Christian context. In particular, the main focus of the interpretation of the Lord is the recognition of Him as Pantocrator [Παντοκράτωρ – the Lord of all] endowed with infinite power and authority over the Universe. Such an interpretation reconstructs archaic ideas about the deity as the centre of power and says nothing about his mercy and justice. This concept became the basis for the argumentation of the absolute nature of the Christian emperor's supreme power – Basileus [Βασιλεύς]. The Lord, communicating with Basileus through His Son, Christ the Logos, gives him the sacred right to reign and thus makes him godlike [Friend of God – Θεός, divinely favoured] – an icon of the Lord of all. Another mythological feature of Eusebius' interpretation of supreme power is the solution to the problematic relationship between the reign and the priesthood. Eusebius believed that the Lord's endowment of Basileus with the right to reign obliges him to perform priestly functions at the same time. The purpose of Basileus' priesthood was to enlighten his flock about the essence of the Word of God, and not to observe religious rituals. In this way, the role of the basileus-priest differed from the Patriarch. Thus, the mythological nature of the concept by Eusebius of Caesarea is the fact that he unconsciously replaced various semantic connections. This happened because he could not explain the essence of supreme power and its value to society in a different way. The foundation of Eusebius' mythological thinking is the beginning of the synthesized rationality (historical understanding of the real past) and myth (substitution of history by religious tradition) of the history of the Byzantine Empire.*

**Keywords:** *myth; power; reign; priesthood; rationality; history; image; Logos*

## I. Introduction

The ideas of Byzantine monarchs and thinkers about the nature of supreme power are largely determined by specific characteristics of the historical formation of the Byzantine Empire. In particular, there is still no consensus among researchers regarding the date when Byzantium became a political entity. Therefore, the process of its gradual organisation can be considered among the factors in the formation of supreme power idea that is unlike anything else. So to speak, the exceptional circumstances of the emergence of the Roman Empire gave rise to beliefs in the exceptional nature of its governance.

The history of Byzantium gives the impression of a mythical empire – it seems that as such it has always existed, even when it did not exist.<sup>1</sup> Being a part of various people, cultures and states, the future capital of the Second Rome asserted its universality and inviolability for centuries, while with the fall of the First Rome in 476, it freed itself from a political opponent and gained completeness and self-sufficiency. This is one of the reasons for the conception that the power of Basileus, as if emerges from infinity, rises from the depths of time, declaring its pre-eternity as the great prophecies declared: the pre-eternity of the Lord who walked here; the pre-eternity of Jerusalem and Rome; the pre-eternity of Constantinople, which appeared due to God's will under the hands of the Greeks and Romans to embody the religious idea born in the bowels of Judea – becoming a synthesis of three great cultures and civilizations.

The historical myth is formed as a consequence of the distortion and mutual substitution of cultural and historical connections, in particular, the substitution of an individual, physical subject by a collective, symbolic subject. Rome considered itself Athens' and Alexandria's successor, existed in this world and equipping it according to its own laws to eternal life here and now. Jerusalem arose as the Promised Land acquired by God's will. Constantinople regarded itself as the heir, earthly and heavenly, of both Rome and Jerusalem. It appeared in history of humankind in order for all humankind to pass Christ's way through the cross, to prepare its believers for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven, so that they would be able to meet the Second Coming

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<sup>1</sup> Petr Aleksandrovich Saprionov, *Vlast' kak metafizicheskaja i istoricheskaja real'nost'* [Power as a Metaphysical and Historical Reality] (Saint Petersburg: Cerkov' i kul'tura, 2001), 426. I employ here the BGN (United States Board on Geographic Names) and PCGN (Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use) romanisation system for the Russian language for all the transliterated titles or words.

in the correct state and mood. You should not passively wait for the last Judgment, you should come to it raptured and cleansed from sin as much as possible. The mission and fate of the Basileus consisted of this task: his reign was nothing more than a repetition of the path of the God-man and the desire to save humanity during life, transforming it on the basis of Godlikeness into God-manhood – introducing it into the bosom of God during life in this world. Consequently, the seizure of geographical space, the political submission of people, as well as the emphasized isolation from them were not a priority of Byzantine policy: it is significant that for a thousand years of its existence Byzantium did not expand its geographical borders. In this sense, the end of the earthly existence of the Byzantine Empire was not predetermined historically and logically, but comprehended by each of its believers as an eschatological idea and put into practice as soon as another monotheistic religion was formed and strengthened nearby.

In other words, Byzantium did not need a historical myth or religious history as the basis of its existence, as long as it had a religious myth in which it acted as the subject of the historical continuity of the Christian idea. This religious myth could only be preserved by making it a form of supreme power. Therefore, instead of reforming foreign policy in order to expand new lands and arrange them in accordance with the norms and ideals of Eastern Christianity, Constantinople saw its destiny in implementing a strong conservative domestic policy to create an accurate earthly model of the Heavenly City. At the same time, it expanded and strengthened the authority as spiritual metropolis for foreigners and neighboring states, implementing the principle of universality of the Christian idea as its *supra-worldliness*, thus representing the autocratic imperial power as *world-powerful* (κοσμοκρατορική). If Byzantium still had to fight, then the wars were defensive and solely for returning lost territories, as evidenced by numerous treatises on the art of war.<sup>2</sup> Constantinople, as the capital of the Heavenly City,

<sup>2</sup> It is about the Byzantine–Ottoman wars, since 1299 and a series of military conflicts with the Pechenegs in the IX–XII centuries: Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. Elizabeth A. S. Dawes (Cambridge and Ontario: Byzantine Series, 2000); Nikifor Grigora, *Istoriya romeev* [Byzantine History], trans. R. V. Yashunsky, Vol. I (Saint Petersburg: Svoe izdatel'stvo, 2013); Georg Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. Hussey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), VI, VII; Gennadiy Grigor'yevich Litavrin, *Vizantiyskoe obshchestvo i gosudarstvo v X-XI vv.* [Byzantine Society and State in the X–XI centuries] (Moskva: Nauka, 1977); Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press, 2009), 49–94, 124–136; *Maurice's Stratégikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); *The Taktika of Leo VI. Text*, trans. George Dennis (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010), 12–15; Vasilij Grigor'yevich Vasil'evskiy, *Vizantiya i pechenegi* [Byzantium and Pechenegs], in

the location where the image of the King of Heaven remained, needed to create conditions for the voluntary involvement of people in the shadow of Eastern Christianity, and not to pursue a policy of physical enslavement and political subjugation. This idea of synthesis (in fact, mutual substitution) of politics and religion was argued in ideas about the nature of imperial power for centuries.

## II. Mythological interpretation of Basileus' godlikeness

The earliest documents that initiated a controversial theological understanding of the foundations of the supreme secular power are *De laudibus Constantini* (335) and *De vita Constantini, Libri IV* (337),<sup>3</sup> written by Bishop Eusebius Pamphilus of Caesarea. From the first line, the interpretation of the Lord as Pantocrator, the Almighty, is striking:

Today is the festival of our great emperor: and we his children rejoice therein, feeling the inspiration of our sacred theme. He who presides over our solemnity is the Great Sovereign himself; he, I mean, who is truly great; of whom I affirm (nor will the sovereign who hears me be offended, but will rather approve of this ascription of praise to God), that HE is above and beyond all created things, the Highest, the Greatest, the most Mighty One; whose throne is the arch of heaven, and the earth the footstool of his feet.<sup>4</sup>

In the same way Christ is presented by Eusebius. He consciously focused on neither the supernatural essence, nor the creationist content, nor the mercy in relation to people, but the authority and functions of the supreme Judge:

His being none can worthily comprehend; and the ineffable splendor of the glory which surrounds him repels the gaze

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*Trudy* [Works], ed. Vasilij Grigor'yevich Vasil'evskiy, vol. I, 1-175 (Saint Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1908).

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, "Oration in Praise of Constantine," in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, Oration in Praise of Constantine, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series II, vol. 1*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: The Christian Literature Company; Oxford and London: Parker and Company, 1890), 581-610; *ibid.*, "The Life of Constantine the Great," 481-559. George Ostrogorsky even believed that all Byzantine historiography begins with Eusebius. Georg Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. Hussey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 44.

<sup>4</sup> "[...] There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Romans. 13:1. Eusebius, "Oration in Praise of Constantine," 582.

of every eye from his Divine majesty. His ministers are the heavenly hosts; his armies the supernal powers, who own allegiance to him as their Master, Lord, and King. The countless multitudes of angels, the companies of archangels, the chorus of holy spirits, draw from and reflect his radiance as from the fountains of everlasting light. Yea every light, and specially those divine and incorporeal intelligences whose place is beyond the heavenly sphere, celebrate this august Sovereign with lofty and sacred strains of praise. The vast expanse of heaven, like an azure veil, is interposed between those without, and those who inhabit his royal mansions: while round this expanse the sun and moon, with the rest of the heavenly luminaries (like torch-bearers around the entrance of the imperial palace), perform, in honor of their sovereign, their appointed courses; holding forth, at the word of his command, an ever-burning light to those whose lot is cast in the darker regions without the pale of heaven [...]. Our own victorious emperor renders praises to this Mighty Sovereign, I do well to follow him, knowing as I do that to him alone we owe that imperial power under which we live.<sup>5</sup>

It is these functions of power and force that are directly bestowed by the Lord to Basileus.

Thus, formally coordinating his thought with the biblical principle of the God-ordination of the supreme power, Eusebius emphasizes that the emperor cannot be similar to Him as the Creator, but cannot help being similar to and cannot help following Pantocrator, equipping the earthly world in the image and likeness of the Heavenly world:

This is he who holds a supreme dominion over this whole world, who is over and in all things, and pervades all things visible and invisible; the Word of God. From whom and by whom our divinely favored emperor (θεῶ φίλος βασιλεὺς), receiving, as it were a transcript of the Divine sovereignty, directs, in imitation of God himself, the administration of this world's affairs.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 583. Θεῶ φίλος is stable expression used by Eusebius: “But God was the friend, protector, and guardian of Constantine, and bringing the plots which had been formed in secrecy and darkness to the light, he foiled them.” Eusebius, “Church History from A. D. 1-324,” in

As it can be seen, Eusebius does not simply repeat or interpret Scripture, but continues Apostle's thought in a way that differs significantly in defining the functions of a ruler.<sup>7</sup> Eusebius, in response, introduces a strong and partly provocative term, with its straightforwardness and mythological immediacy very reminiscent of the ancient Egyptian court status of *the Semer*.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the thinker seems to hint that, unlike a simple Christian and a subject of Byzantium, Basileus is connected with the Lord Jesus Christ not only by faith, but also by something more tangible and substantive.<sup>9</sup> It is a paradox, but this homage to paganism was done solely for the sake of strengthening the authority of the power of the Basileus. The thinker insisted that Constantine more than once by his own experience (!) cognized the divinity of the Saviour, and not in words, but in deeds, preached this truth to everyone. That is, he did not necessarily perform any miracles; Basileus' initiative to convene the Council of Nicaea could well be regarded as an activity for the triumph of Divine Truth. Eusebius spoke of the fact that Basileus had a stable and constant relationship with the Lord, and he turned to Constantine almost like an apostle to Christ with a plea to perform a miracle.<sup>10</sup>

As we see, Eusebius is trying to show that the status of the emperor not only raises, but transforms a man of mould in the eyes of the public. This transformation does not affect the very human essence of the Basileus, but changes public perception, that is, by the will of the Lord, new

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*Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890-1900), 630.

<sup>7</sup> St. Paul says: "[...] For he is God's minister to you for good. [...] he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil." Romans, 13:4.

<sup>8</sup> There is a kind of Egyptian title, defining an official's status in the nobility *smr-wēt(j)* "courtier" (literally, "unique associate"). James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 39-40.

<sup>9</sup> In general, this view was consistent with the general ambiguous state of faith of the early Christians. The emperor died in 337, and grief-stricken subjects performed very suspicious ceremonies in his memory: "Our enemy of God accuses the Christians of worshipping with sacrifices the image of Constantine set up upon the porphyry column, of paying homage to it with lamp-lighting and incense or praying to it as to a god, and of offering it supplications to avert calamities." Philostorgius, *Church History*, trans. Philip R. Amidon (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical literature, 2007), 35.

<sup>10</sup> "Yourself, it may be, will vouchsafe at a time of leisure to relate to us the abundant manifestations which your Saviour has accorded you of his presence, and the oft-repeated visions of himself which have attended you in the hours of sleep. I speak not of those secret suggestions (*ἐναργεῖς*) which to us are unrevealed: but of those principles which he has instilled into your own mind, and which are fraught with general interest and benefit to the human race." Eusebius, "Oration in Praise of Constantine," 610.

knowledge about the essence of the ruling subject is formed without actually changing his essence. Because if his essence completely changed and became divine, then his actions, functions, goals and individuality itself would become incomprehensible for the public and fall out of the general picture of the world. This happens only after the physical death of the Basileus. Describing this situation, Eusebius stated:

He is more like his Saviour, who after the manner of seeds of corn multiplied with the blessing of God, and instead of one grain produced an ear and filled the whole wide world with his fruit. Just like him the Thriceblessed instead of one became manifold by the succession of his sons, so that he is honoured also by the setting up of portraits among all the provinces along with those of his sons [...].<sup>11</sup>

It can be assumed that, the lifetime transformation by the Logos means, on the contrary, the spiritual enrichment of the subjects and the improvement of their perception of the supreme power. Because transformation comes from the thoughts of God. Therefore, it does not matter how the status of Basileus is acquired and transmitted – by inheritance or election; in any case, the principle of supreme election as a consequence of the original Divine choice underlies the assertion of secular power.

Being on the semantic edge of the Divine and the human, the status of the Basileus is ambivalent: it is grandiose and inaccessible to any mere mortal, but inalienable from the Lord, because it is predicative to Him. Being “His Friend,” the status of a Basileus has a valuable meaning in the undivided attitude of belonging to Him. Thus, he is not independent like any servant of the Lord, but at the same time, he is clothed with the qualitative attitude of the Lord – love and need, the impossibility of the Almighty to do without him.

So, Eusebius contributed to the process of forming the idea of supreme power, according to which Basileus is not an earthly incarnation or a temporary body shell of the Heavenly King, as it was, say, in Ancient Egypt, and is not an abstractly deified person by status, as in Rome. Basileus is *the image (icon) of the one Lord of all*. In other words, he does not embody the full divine essence (then he would be God incarnate), but only that hypostasis of God that a person needs to comprehend for a righteous life. This is the difference between God-likeness and God-incarnation. The emperor is godlike as the close bearer of certain divine characteristics. While as a ruler, he is absolute in his likeness to the Al-

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<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, “Life of Constantine,” 558-559.

mighty. His absoluteness lies in the fact that he uses and improves all his human qualities to demonstrate his likeness to the Almighty. Basileus has reason, courage, mercy, justice, humility, etc., in order to be realised in god-likeness and thereby draw closer to the Lord. Therefore, remaining a person, he leads the retinue of the Lord, being truly transformed under the influence of the Divine Logos, the Word of God.<sup>12</sup>

And leaving for another world “as if brought back to life he manages the whole administration, and Victor Maximus Augustus by his very name (αὐτῷ προσρήματι) commands the government of Rome.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in Eusebius’ interpretation of the god-likeness of Basileus, mythological features appear: the basis of god-likeness is not just enlightenment by the sacred divine Logos and not a connection with the Almighty through Him, but the possession of power and authority as a result of this enlightenment, which is consonant with the rule of the right of the strongest. Basileus finds his place in the veneration of the Almighty, co-reigning with Jesus Christ, acting as the first and beloved conductor of the Word of God to His flock and his subjects, and performing sacred rituals to His glory. Thus, according to Eusebius, *the reign* (βασιλεία) as an essential feature of the Basileus makes sense only in conjunction with the *priesthood* (ἱερωσύνη), the service of the Lord; in isolation from each other, the reign loses its ability to govern, turning into tyranny and arbitrariness;<sup>14</sup> the priesthood turns into idolatry.

### III. Ἱερωσύνη and βασιλεία as the essential components of the supreme power of Constantine the Great

Eusebius believed that everything that is a manifestation of the Divine Essence does not become different in relation to It but as if continues,

<sup>12</sup> After all “this only begotten Word of God reigns, from ages which had no beginning, to infinite and endless ages, the partner of his Father’s kingdom. And [our emperor] ever beloved by him, who derives the source of imperial authority from above, and is strong in the power of his sacred title, has controlled the empire of the world for a long period of years.” Eusebius, “Oration in Praise of Constantine,” 583.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, “Life of Constantine,” 558.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to understand that the ratio of the kingdom and the priesthood at this stage of functioning and comprehension is not yet “consent,” that is, *the symphony*, as Justinian will later present. Two hundred years after Eusebius, the church would become such an autonomous institution that they would need mutual equalization of rights with the state. In the meantime, the church is entirely subordinate to the state and exists mainly thanks to the mercy of Basileus. Therefore, Eusebius quite sensibly interprets the relationship between the reign and the priesthood as the *identity* of the two aspects of the activity of the Basileus. The correctness of Eusebius is confirmed by the convening of the Council of Nicaea (325) by Constantine I and his direct participation in it.

multiplies this Essence in independent substantial and accidental manifestations. The Word co-reigns with the Lord-King, being not created like man and the world, but pronounced by Him (manifested absolutely and directly, as the Whole from the Whole). And therefore, communicating directly to Basileus through grace, endows him with exclusivity among mere mortals. This exclusivity is the reign.

The royal essence of Basileus explains his priestly function: who else but the Friend of God, who has assumed the ability to ascend and rule through the Word from Jesus Christ, is able to interpret Him to his people in the best way? As soon as the Divine Logos made Basileus a virtuous and true representative of earthly power, no one else but him would be able to enlighten his subjects on the need to create the earthly foundations of the Heavenly City. The most accurate way to comprehend is through faith as a sensual form of true knowledge. Consequently, Basileus must convey the faith to every subject by personal example and direct participation in religious ceremonies and rituals. According to Eusebius, once hosting the bishops Constantine said:

[...] On one occasion, when entertaining bishops to dinner, he let slip the remark that he was perhaps himself a bishop too, using some such words as these in our hearing: ‘You are bishops of those within the Church, but I am perhaps a bishop appointed by God over those outside’ (ἀλλ’ ὑμεῖς μὲν τῶν εἴσω τῆς ἐκκλησίας, ἐγὼ δὲ τῶν ἐκτὸς ὑπὸ θεοῦ καθεσταμένος ἐπίσκοπος ἂν εἶην.)<sup>15</sup>

By this example, Eusebius distinguished between Basileus and the Patriarch in favour of the former, while the latter was a supporting and servant figure, only the first among the religious ranks<sup>16</sup>:

[...] To the Church of God he paid particular personal attention. When some were at variance with each other in various places, like a universal bishop appointed by God (οἷά τις κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος ἐκ θεοῦ καθεσταμένος) he convoked councils of the ministers of God. He did not disdain to be present and attend during their proceedings, and he participated in the subjects reviewed, by arbitration promoting the peace

<sup>15</sup> Eusebius, “Life of Constantine,” 546.

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest. The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 81.

of God among all; and he took his seat among them as if he were one voice among many [...].<sup>17</sup>

The patriarch is responsible for the state of cult and Christian idea, while the emperor is the embodied torch of Divine truth in the human image. He is not God, but His spiritual likeness. And in order to spread this sensual experience, he, as a Friend of God, needs a patriarch, the servant of the Lord, to help him.

Speaking about the rights and duties of Basileus to perform priestly functions, Eusebius insisted that these rights are given to the monarch not through the ceremony of Anointing, but directly from the Lord, about which there were corresponding instructions in the Holy Scriptures: in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul writes about Melchizedek, spending parallels with Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> Eusebius develops this idea, drawing a parallel between Jewish and Byzantine rituals: if Melchizedek was not consecrated by any anointing oil, especially prepared, and not even belonging by descent to the priesthood of the Jews, than Basileus is not consecrated by any oil too.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, according to the logic of Eusebius, the priesthood of Basileus is neither his coercion nor accident, but a direct consequence of *God-ordination* of the supreme power. *God-stated* supreme power as a symbolic demonstration of its legitimacy in the ritual of crowning the kingdom does not give such authority; the Thinker argues this with the fact that modern rituals of God-statedness differ from the rituals of God-ordination of Christ and the first kings, and therefore cannot be considered sufficient to confirm the sacred nature of Basileus. Christ as the embodiment of virtue in its pure form and heavenly life,

[...]being anointed not with oil made of material substances, but with the divine oil of gladness. It thus indicates his especial honor, far superior to and different from that of those who, as types, were of old anointed in a more material way.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Eusebius, "Life of Constantine," 494-495.

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews, 6:20; 7:3.

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, "Church History," in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, Oration in Praise of Constantine, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series II, vol. 1*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: The Christian Literature Company; Oxford and London: Parker and Company, 1890), 86.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Basileus necessarily undergo the ceremony of Anointing with oil made by a man to affirm the fullness of awareness of accepting the power of Christ through Basileus in society. The emphasis of this ritual on its individual substantive aspects reveals its mythological character: the symbolism of the ritual does not in the least detract from the idea of God-ordination of supreme power, and this power is such under any circumstances, because the Lord endows a mere mortal with the radiance of His Logos, and the mortal becomes Basileus, the blessed holder of knowledge about the Word. Just as the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples of Christ, the Divine Logos descends on the Basileus, endowing him with the knowledge of the Truth and forever linking him with Christ. Of course, it happens that the Lord tests His flock, and allows an impious and unvirtuous hierarch to ascend the throne; in this case, without violating the principle of God-ordination of power, he will not be God-stated. The true Basileus is the one “who has formed his soul to royal virtues, according to the standard of that celestial kingdom.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus, in order to be divinely chosen, one must be wise like the Old Testament kings – consciously and heartily accept the authority of the Lord of all, consume His Logos-Truth into oneself, and follow His example in earthly governance by one’s actions. This is the charisma of Constantine as the basis of the virtue of his royal policy. And this is *the philosophy* of all his acts. He is not just a believing sovereign, but a *true* believer.<sup>22</sup> And in this sense, Eusebius considers him the only or the first among the philosophers on the throne, a believer in order to understand himself and, therefore, the whole world entrusted to him.

All these merits made it possible to honour Basileus as Equal-to-the-Apostles after his death. Eusebius in *Life of Constantine* presented this not as the idolatry of the flock, but as the natural order of things, which was based on the infinite faith of Constantine himself.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, “Oration in Praise of Constantine,” 585. And such is the emperor Constantine, “whose character is formed after the Divine original of the Supreme Sovereign, and whose mind reflects, as in a mirror, the radiance of his virtues. Hence is our emperor perfect in discretion, in goodness, in justice, in courage, in piety, in devotion to God: he truly and only is a philosopher, since he knows himself, and is fully aware that supplies of every blessing are showered on him from a source quite external to himself, even from heaven itself.” *Ibid.*, 586.

<sup>22</sup> In accordance with the covenant Πίστει νοοῦμεν (understand through faith). Hebrews, 11:3.

<sup>23</sup> Describing the temple of the Twelve Apostles erected by Constantine, the thinker noted that Basileus “had prepared the place there for the time when it would be needed on his decease, intending with supreme eagerness of faith that his own remains should after death partake in the invocation of the Apostles, so that even after his decease he might benefit from the worship which would to be conducted there in honour of the Apostles. He therefore gave instructions for services to be held there, setting up a central altar. So he erected twelve repositories (θήραξ) like sacred monuments (στήλας ἱεράς) in honour and memory of the company of the

The installation of Constantine's tomb among the twelve arks likens Basileus to Christ among the twelve disciples. Although Eusebius does not say this directly, his following reflections lead to precisely this conclusion:

Alone of mortals the Blessed One reigned even after death, and the customs were maintained just as if he were alive, God having granted this to him and no other since time began. Alone therefore among Emperors and unlike any other he had honoured by acts of every kind the all-sovereign God and his Christ, and it is right that he alone enjoyed these things, as the God over all allowed his mortal part to reign among mankind, thus demonstrating the ageless and deathless reign of his soul to those with minds not stonyhard.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Eusebius' interpretation of the essence of the supreme imperial power clearly demonstrates that his thinking did not completely overcome of pagan norms and formally retained many features of the myth, which was quite natural. Observing the rapid strengthening of the position of Christianity and its rapid spread throughout the territory of the Empire and beyond, the thinker hastened to believe in the possibility of the earthly achievement of the heavenly ideal of social system. Being a happy witness of the emergence of the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. and the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., Eusebius expected the imminent establishment of the Heavenly Kingdom on earth and the seat of Constantine at the right hand of Christ Pantokrator. The manifestation of mythological aspects in ideas about supreme power is not only a consequence of the remnants of paganism and the instability of rational norms of thinking. It is also the desire to perceive power as a concrete public phenomenon, close and understandable to the public consciousness, historically necessary and not alienated from every citizen. The monarch, who directly performs priestly functions, is positioned not as a formal ruler, but as a sovereign, which is with his whole soul and heart one with the Lord and his people.

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Apostles, and put his own coffin (λάρναξ) in the middle with those of the Apostles ranged six on either side." Eusebius, "Life of Constantine," 555. Garth Fowden, "The Last Days of Constantine: Oppositional Versions and Their Influence," *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 146-170.

<sup>24</sup> Eusebius, "Life of Constantine," 557.

Two hundred years later, in the reign of Justinian I, the impossibility of the Heavenly City on earth and the reign of Basileus as a Friend of God was finally realized. Justinian legalised the interpretation of the emperor's status as a disciple, servant, and imitator of the Lord, and forever separated the priesthood from the reign, favouring the former and establishing a *symphony*<sup>25</sup> relationship between them. On the one hand, this streamlined power relations, on the other hand, it made the Basileus's persona more symbolic and abstract and weakening of his connection with the people.

Nevertheless, the mythological nature of ideas about the supreme power declared by Eusebius did not disappear from the theological discourse and even received quite a strong development over time, as later writings testify. In particular, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, referring to Constantine the Great, pointed out that the exclusivity and holiness (ἄγιος) of the Basileus are manifested not only in themselves, but also in unity with objects that the emperor uses during sacred rites and ceremonies:

[...] and it shall not be in the authority either of the emperor, or of the patriarch, or of any other, to take these robes of state or the diadems from the holy church of God. And mighty dread hangs over them who are minded to transgress any of these divine ordinances.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, over the centuries, there was preserved the irrational connection between the subject and the object.<sup>27</sup> It is expressed in particular in the very name of Constantine VII:

The epithet 'Porphyrogenitus', that is, born in Porphyry, a special location of the palace, meant that the parents of

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<sup>25</sup> "The greatest gifts that God, in his celestial benevolence, has bestowed on mankind are priesthood and sovereignty, the one serving on matters divine, and the other ruling over human affairs, and caring for them. Each proceeds from one and the same authority, and regulates human life. Thus nothing could have as great a claim on the attention of sovereigns as the honour of priests, seeing that they are the very ones who constantly offer prayer to God on the sovereigns' behalf. Hence, should the one be above reproach in every respect, and enjoy access to God, while the other keeps in correct and proper order the realm that has been entrusted to it, there will be a satisfactory harmony, conferring every conceivable benefit on the human race." Peter Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian. A Complete Annotated English Translation*, trans. David J. D. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 97-98.

<sup>26</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, trans. R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 67-69.

<sup>27</sup> Gennadiy Grigor'yevich Litavrin, *Kak zhili vizantijsy* [How did the Byzantines live?] (Moskva: Nauka, 1974), 50.

the Basileus then occupied the imperial throne, and, therefore, the 'Porphyrogenitus' had rights that, if not legally, then, by virtue of custom, gave him a number of advantages over 'non-Porphyrogenitus'. Of the 35 emperors in the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, hardly every third hold this proud title.

This connection is a mythological form of the relationship between man and the world; its violation was understood as the basis for the violation of the Law of God. This testified to the continuation of the Christian myth in the thinking of Byzantine theologians and the support of this myth in the public consciousness, which tends to remain conservative.

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