DIMITRI OBOLENSKY *B. J. Harris*

Dimitri Dimitrievich Obolensky
1918–2001

BY THE TIME THAT HE completed his fiftieth year, Dimitri Obolensky had been Professor of Russian and Balkan History at the University of Oxford for nearly seven years and had achieved distinction in a number of fields. But it was a work then in progress that drew together his literary and historical talents to spectacular effect, offering a new vision of the development of East European history across a thousand-year span. A well-paced narrative and reliable work of reference within a clear conceptual framework, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* is likely to remain indispensable for anyone interested in exploring the pre-modern history of Europe east of Venice and the Vistula. The distinctive texture of the book not only derives from its blend of careful scholarship and bold advocacy of an idea. There is also a tension, well contained, between the scrupulous presentation of the facts and possible interpretations arising from them and passionate recall of the religious affiliations and values that once had underlain eastern Christendom.

In middle age, Obolensky liked to quote the response of one of his contemporaries to a questionnaire: 'Place of Birth: Petrograd; Place of Upbringing: Leningrad; Place of Residence: Paris; Preferred Place of Residence: St Petersburg'. Obolensky's life did not bear out this cycle precisely, but what had been a forlorn hope tinged with irony became, against all expectation, a fact of geography. While still an active scholar, Obolensky witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union and his birthplace's recovery of its original name, St Petersburg. He was cautious about the prospects for peaceful change, having observed a succession of apparent 'thaws' that

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reverted to frost. Obolensky records in his own memoir included in *Bread of Exile* that his father's younger brother, Peter, returned to the Soviet Union soon after Stalin's death, 'in the short-lived and mistaken hope that freedom was on the rise'.[1] Obolensky made his views clear in his address delivered upon receiving an Honorary D.Litt. from the University of Birmingham in July 1988; he referred to the prospect that 'evil' might now be overcome and expressed hope for the future of the peoples of the USSR and Eastern Europe. This forthrightness surprised some, given his usual public reticence. In private, certainly on first meeting, Dimitri Obolensky was apt to be equally reticent. Yet on closer acquaintance, a vein of wry humour would emerge from behind the courteous bearing.

Both the sentiments and the correct façade reflect Obolensky's origins and background. Devotion to his native land mingled with patrician disdain for nationalism and a certain reluctance to wear one's heart, or credo, on one's sleeve. He would remark, deadpan, on the 'Socialist Realist' features of the early Rus princes, which the celebrated Soviet archaeologist Gerasimov had 'reconstructed' from their skulls.

Birth and education

Prince Dimitri Dimitrievich Obolensky was born on 1 April 1918 in Petrograd. Both his parents were of ancient and distinguished lineage. Countess Maria Shuvalova was the daughter of the City Governor of Moscow at the time of his assassination in 1905. Her mother, Alexandra, had many years earlier received a proposal of marriage from the future Nicholas II, which she turned down with a presence of mind that would have served the Romanov throne well. Obolensky recalled from family tradition that when Nicholas asked 'Would you like us never to part?' she replied 'What a good idea! I will marry Paul Shuvalov, and you will appoint him your equerry: in this way, we won't part.'[2] The answer was worthy of one of Dimitri Obolensky's paternal ancestors, Princess Olga of Kiev, who likewise outwitted a marriage proposal from the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus.[3] The Obolenskys could trace their ancestry back to Riurik, the first known head of the Rus princely

[1] D. Obolensky, *Bread of Exile. A Russian Family* (London, 1999), p. 215.

[2] Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, p. 61.

[3] Olga reportedly pointed out that Constantine, as her god-father, was debarred by Church law from marrying her: *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, trans. and ed. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 82.

dynasty and father of Olga's husband, Igor. Obolensky would occasionally refer, with a shy smile, to the eleventh-century Prince Oleg of Chernigov as 'my ancestor'. The name of Obolensky is threaded through the history of Muscovy and Imperial Russia. While individual members of the family had scholarly inclinations, the family's outstanding characteristic was unstinting service to the tsar balanced by a sense of decency and the common weal.

Obolensky's father, Prince Dimitri Alexandrovich Obolensky, evinced these qualities, and his memoir of life in Imperial Russia is that of an observant, nature-loving landlord who took his public duties seriously.[4] The humour and stoicism running through the memoir remained with him through the vicissitudes that followed the October Revolution. Such, at least, is the impression given by his son's affectionate reminiscences, which recount, *inter alia*, his misapplied zeal as a night-watchman in Paris.[5]

Bread of Exile, Obolensky's last publication, is a series of family portraits from memoirs, notes and diaries. The book conveys in dreamlike contrast the rhythms of pre-Revolutionary life and the pillar-to-post existence of the émigré world in which Obolensky himself grew up. Obolensky's own memoir gives a fairly detailed picture of his childhood and education. His mother and grandmother travelled with him from Petrograd to the Crimea; then, as the Bolshevik armies approached early in 1919, they were evacuated on a British warship. The 'brief, unhappy marriage' of Obolensky's parents ended, Maria re-married Count Andrey Tolstoy, and from 1923 they lived in Nice. These years Obolensky described as 'the happiest years of my life'.[6] In 1929 financial pressures obliged Count Tolstoy to transfer the *ménage*—which included an English nanny—to Paris, where a larger Russian community resided and where prospects of employment looked brighter.

Dimitri Obolensky's life underwent another abrupt transition when he was sent to Lynchmere, an English preparatory school run by the former tutor of Count Tolstoy in Russia, one Harry Upfield Gilbert. Obolensky was soon immersed in the genial brutality of English private education, literally so in the case of the ritual 'plunge'. Before breakfast, each one of the small, naked boys had to swim two lengths of an often icy swimming pool and anyone who tried to heave himself out prematurely would have

[4] Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, pp. 22–30.
[5] Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, pp. 214–15.
[6] Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, p. 202.

his fingers stamped on by the ever-watchful Gilbert, to the roar of 'Get back, you rotter, get back!'[7] Nevertheless, Obolensky remained grateful for Gilbert's teaching of classical Latin and years later, he would present his fiancée, Elisabeth Lopukhina, with the collected adventures of Bulldog Drummond as an introduction to the more extrovert sides of English life.

Obolensky received his secondary education principally at the Lycée Pasteur and grew conscious of the kaleidoscopic quality of the Russian émigré communities in Paris. Avant-garde artists, writers, civil war veterans and ancient bloodlines were forced together in the common and unremitting quest for daily bread. Count Tolstoy, a capable man of the world, found employment in a film factory, but budgeting was tight and luxuries came fitfully: invitations to lunches with the smart set gave the young Obolensky an opportunity to ignore parental frowns and gorge. One fixed point in this flux was Obolensky's redoubtable mother, whom he adored. Another was his membership of the Russian Orthodox Church, and Obolensky served as an altar boy in Russian churches in Nice and Paris. Obolensky was not one to speak readily about his religious convictions, but his faith was profound and abiding and he would receive the sacraments regularly until the time of his death.

Obolensky's secondary education in pre-war Paris nurtured his interest in moral philosophy and also made him alert to subsequent trends in French thought. He would often acknowledge the value of Fernand Braudel's work in drawing his attention to historical geography and the unfolding of *la longue durée*, and in *Bread of Exile* he records his post-war friendship with the great historian of the seventeenth-century Russian Church Schism, Pierre Pascal.[8] One of Obolensky's first international accolades was the bestowal of an Honorary Doctorate of the University by the Sorbonne in 1980.

Obolensky won a scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge and went up in Michaelmas Term 1937 with the intention of reading Moral Sciences, but switched to Modern and Medieval Languages and proceeded to take Firsts in both Russian and French. He enjoyed the social life of Cambridge, making lasting friendships and gaining in self-confidence. He also excelled at tennis, for which he was awarded a Blue while an undergraduate.

Upon graduation in 1940, Obolensky was willing to enlist in the armed forces, but was handicapped through being a 'stateless person',

[7] This vignette, which Obolensky was fond of relating in later years, is recorded in *Bread of Exile*, pp. 207–8.

[8] Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, pp. 226–7.

possessor of several possible identities or none. In the event, he embarked on research into the history of the Balkan Dualists known as the Bogomils. Obolensky himself acknowledged that the choice of topic was determined by his supervisor, Elizabeth Hill, then Lecturer in Slavonic Studies. It was an inspired choice, drawing upon Obolensky's knowledge of Slavonic languages, fascination with the Orthodox Church and its past, and concern for the basic questions about Good and Evil that the Bogomils themselves had purported to answer. Later Cambridge gossip had it that Obolensky and Steven Runciman were working on the same subject in Trinity at the same time. This is untrue. Runciman left Cambridge at the end of Obolensky's first undergraduate year, and had virtually completed his book on Dualism by the outbreak of war, but this was only published in 1947 as *The Medieval Manichee*. The undeniable overlap in their research work did not prevent Obolensky and Runciman from later becoming friends, and Obolensky would serve as his honorary assistant at the ceremonial for renaming a street in Mistra after Runciman in 1976.

Obolensky completed his dissertation with remarkable speed and on the strength of it was elected to a Prize Fellowship in Trinity in 1942. The Fellows made him welcome, and he looked back with gratitude and affection to friends such as Patrick Duff, Denys Winstanley and George Kitson Clark. But the young scholar did not lose touch with the wider world or with his religious community. For two years he held the post of Temporary Assistant Keeper in the Department of Printed Books in the British Museum, and so spent much of his time in London. It was probably during this period that he was ordained Sub-Deacon in the Russian Orthodox Church. He would periodically exercise his ministry in the Russian cathedral in Ennismore Gardens for some time after the war, reading the Epistle and other parts of the Services. One of those present would recall, long afterwards, how 'his fine, resonant voice—with his beautiful articulation of the Slavonic texts which he loved so much—filled every corner of the large church'.

While working in the British Museum, Obolensky also received a powerful intellectual stimulus relating to his field of study from the Czech-born scholar, Francis Dvornik. Dvornik was doing research in the library, but he was also a Catholic priest and Obolensky fondly recalled the comfort and 'little kindnesses' he brought to those working in the library 'while the German bombs were falling on London'.[9] Dvornik had

[9] D. Obolensky, 'Father Francis Dvornik', *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 2 (1954), 1–9 at 9.

already rescued the missionaries Cyril and Methodius from relative neglect by historians and was then writing important studies on East–West relations, showing how much the different branches of Christendom still held in common in the earlier Middle Ages. His ecumenical outlook appealed to Obolensky, as did his meticulous scholarship. Obolensky would sometimes say that he learnt from Dvornik the technique of organising complex subject-matter and providing 'signposts' for the general reader. Obolensky's mastery of this technique is already manifest in the work which emerged from his Prize Dissertation as *The Bogomils*.[10] The formidable problems concerning their beliefs, the origins of those beliefs and the reliability of the (mostly hostile) sources about the heretics are handled with great clarity and insight. Later reprinted, this is still the fundamental survey of the subject in a Western language.

Obolensky's command of the history of eastern orthodox religious history and culture in the Middle Ages was at once recognised as magisterial. In 1946 he had been made Lecturer in Slavonic Studies in the University of Cambridge, and in January 1949 he took up the newly created post of Reader in Russian and Balkan Medieval History at the University of Oxford. Moving to Oxford with his wife Elisabeth, Obolensky was elected to a Studentship at Christ Church, Trinity's sister college, in 1950.

Life and work in post-war Oxford, 1949–71

Obolensky's post in Oxford gave him scope to pursue his historical interests and future lines of research were set out in 'Russia's Byzantine heritage'.[11] In this wide-ranging paper, Obolensky surveyed the nature of Russia's debt to Byzantium and addressed the question of whether the regions and peoples of the Balkans and Russia had enough in common to be viewed as a cultural unit. He took issue with A. J. Toynbee over the 'totalitarian' nature of Byzantium and whether such totalitarianism, as institution or *mentalité*, might have passed on to Kievan and eventually Soviet Russia. His remarks about the dynamics of the interplay between the Byzantine Church and holy men, on the one hand, and the imperial Establishment on the other have not lost their force. Nor has his point that Peter the Great looked to the West for models when he determined

[10] D. Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge, 1948) (repr. Twickenham, 1972; New York, 1978).
[11] D. Obolensky, 'Russia's Byzantine heritage', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 1 (1950), 37–63.

to subsume the Russian Church within his newly-fashioned State. This study had been reprinted four times by the end of the twentieth century[12] and the issues raised in it would recur in Obolensky's later publications and, in direct form, one evening in the Kremlin (see below, p. 262).

Obolensky's early years in Oxford saw him teaching Russian literature as well as the history of Russia and the Balkans. His lectures, in particular, were much admired: standing straight and poised, he would deliver them in mellifluous tones without notes, aiming, as he once put it, 'to talk to' his audience. Students were encouraged to make the imaginative leap to the worlds of the early Slavs, epic poems, migrating nomads and displaced Byzantine missionaries.

The principal fruit of these years was *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse*. Ranging from the *Lay of Igor's Campaign*—of whose authenticity Obolensky was a staunch champion—to a poem by Aleksandr Tvardovsky,[13] Obolensky's prose translations and introduction were a labour of love, tracing with insight the development of Russian poetry from the *byliny* of early Rus. Obolensky felt deep affinity for the poems of Pasternak, particularly his evocations of the Russian land. Anna Akhmatova he described as 'the greatest living Russian poet'[14] and noted her rare ability to interweave private emotions with the march of historical events. Obolensky's respect for Akhmatova took an active form and he was instrumental in arranging for her visit to Oxford in 1965, when she was awarded an Honorary D.Litt. A cherished ambition which ill-health prevented him from achieving in the 1990s was to revise *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse* and include a new generation of Russian poets whose voices had yet to be heard in the West.

Obolensky derived great pleasure from his membership of Christ Church, making presentations to visiting groups of school-teachers and attending College meetings. He would tell stories (against himself) of the effect of his occasional interventions in them. Obolensky formed many lasting friendships in the college, among them Charles Stuart (a fellow-sufferer at Lynchmere), Henry Chadwick and Ronald Truman. Obolensky also made his mark after dinner, where his skills at card games were renowned and sometimes yielded modest financial winnings. The junior,

[12] Details may be found in the bibliography of Obolensky's works compiled by D. L. L. Howells (see below, n. 64).

[13] The celebrated editor of *Novy Mir*.

[14] *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. xxiv. See also Obolensky's obituary of Akhmatova, where he terms her 'Russia's greatest woman poet', *The Times*, 7 Mar. 1966.

card-playing members would occasionally tease the older, more staid members of the House by leaving their wager slips—with several noughts added—lying around the Senior Common Room. Obolensky also played his part in university administration, whose more arcane features afforded him quiet amusement. A member of the Modern History Faculty Board for much of the 1960s, and serving as Chairman in 1971–2, Obolensky was thought to exercise a calming influence; he later commented, however, that he had 'too thin a skin' to feel entirely comfortable in the post.

In the 1960s, Obolensky's long-standing interest in the interrelationship between Russian history and the Greek-speaking world and the Orthodox Church began to bear fruit. His understanding of Byzantium owed something to Father Gervase Mathew, Lecturer in Byzantine History, as he readily acknowledged.[15] But it was also advanced through contacts with America. Obolensky retained close ties with his mother and stepfather, who lived in New York, as did his second cousin, John Meyendorff, the theologian and church historian. Meyendorff's studies on the later Byzantine spiritual movement known as Hesychasm were inspired by, and themselves affected, Obolensky's later works. Another friend and scion of the Russian *émigré* communities in Paris between the wars was Fr. Alexander Schmemann, an authority on the Orthodox Church liturgy, who had moved to New York in 1951.

Obolensky had a lasting and creative association with the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies in Washington, DC. During his first Fellowship, in 1952–3, he encountered A. A. Vasiliev, the venerable but jovial Russian Byzantinist. Vasiliev would reminisce about his own master, the founder of Byzantine studies in Russia, V. G. Vasilievsky, whose advice to the young Vasiliev, upon completing his doctoral thesis, had been to 'take a couple of girls, travel widely, and learn Arabic'.[16] Another prominent figure in Dumbarton Oaks was Obolensky's mentor, Francis Dvornik, while one of the warmest and most enduring friendships forged with near-contemporaries there was with Ihor Ševčenko; Obolensky was ever appreciative of Ševčenko's critical acumen and fertility of ideas.

Through the 1960s the lines of Obolensky's historical thought began to unfold. His contribution to the commentary on Constantine VII's treatise, the *De administrando imperio*, concerns the celebrated chapter 9,

[15] See, for example, Obolensky's 'Russia's Byzantine heritage', 58 and Note K on 63.

[16] This advice from Vasilievsky was relayed by Obolensky, with due qualifications, to the present writer upon completion of his own thesis.

describing the Rus' journey each spring to trade their wares in Byzantium. Lucid and erudite, it remains the surest guide to a chapter which has fuelled many and acrimonious debates, including the 'Normannist question' about the origins of the Rus.[17] Obolensky also turned his attention to Byzantium's diplomatic dealings with the peoples to its north, offering a wide-ranging yet coherent survey in 'The Empire and its Northern Neighbours, 565–1018'.[18] His admiration for the missionary enterprises of Cyril and Methodius, and keen interest in the literary language and translated texts which they and their students furnished to the Slavs, were reflected in conference papers.[19]

These publications displayed Obolensky's strengths as a rigorous source critic and as a cultural and diplomatic historian capable of synthesis. They did not, however, allow much outlet for his literary impulses, or amount to a vision of the overall pattern of development of Eastern Europe. These various sources, well-springs and streams would at last merge together and turn into a mighty river, worthy of Russia itself, in the work that is virtually synonymous with his name.

The Byzantine Commonwealth

The title of Obolensky's masterwork[20] encapsulated his thesis that much of 'Eastern Europe' in the broadest sense (including European Russia) belonged at one time or another to an overarching politico-religious order. Obolensky expressly drew on the works of earlier scholars such as Franz Dölger, Georg Ostrogorsky and André Grabar, who had suggested that a 'family of princes' had been an important element in Byzantine political thought and diplomacy. Other Christian rulers were supposed to have a quasi-familiar relationship with the Byzantine emperor, as 'brothers' or 'sons'. Over those rulers who had accepted baptism from him or his predecessors, such as the Bulgars, the emperor claimed spiritual parenthood. Obolensky linked this concept with the broader Byzantine claim

[17] See R. J. H. Jenkins (ed.), *De administrando imperio. II Commentary* (London, 1962), pp. 16–61, repr. in Obolensky's *Byzantium and the Slavs: Collected Studies* (London, 1971), no. 5.

[18] J. M. Hussey (ed.), *Cambridge Medieval History*, IV.1, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 473–518; repr. in *Byzantium and the Slavs*, no. 2.

[19] D. Obolensky, 'The heritage of Cyril and Methodius in Russia', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 19 (1965), 47–65, repr. in *Byzantium and the Slavs*, no. 10; 'Cyrille et Méthode et la christianisation des Slaves', *Settimane di studi del Centro italiano di studio sull'alto medioevo*, 14 (1967), 587–609, repr. in *Byzantium and the Slavs*, no. 11.

[20] D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500–1453* (London, 1971).

that all Christians owed the *basileus* deference, and argued that the sphere of influence created by those polities which adopted Christianity from Byzantium constituted a kind of 'Commonwealth'. Acknowledging that the circumstances and nature of conversion varied greatly between peoples, and that their adherence to Byzantine institutions and behavioural and cultural norms was labile, Obolensky investigated the uses to which the leaders of the most prominent and enduring structures put the texts, techniques and ideas which they took from Byzantium. He paid particular attention to the literary language that Cyril and Methodius created for the Slavs. Although account is taken of other peoples who partially or wholly came within the Byzantine Orthodox fold, for example the Hungarians and the Alans, the spotlight is on the Slavonic-speaking peoples, notably the Serbs, Bulgarians and Rus. A narrative of relations between these peoples' leaders and Byzantium is provided for the period up to the eleventh century. Thereafter, cultural ties and the circulation of ideas and spiritual values between the various components of the Commonwealth come to the fore. This is not inappropriate, seeing that the territorial empire collapsed in 1204 and was only partially restored from 1261, while a Byzantine Commonwealth was emerging 'as a recognisable cultural and political entity'.[21] The alteration in the book's treatment of the later Middle Ages corresponds with one of its main themes: the interest shown by external political and spiritual leaders in Byzantium's rich stock of religious texts, examples of piety and visual media, notably art and architecture. The attempts of rulers such as Stefan Dušan to appropriate these and, arguably, to take over the 'God-protected city' of Constantinople itself provide a narrative thread for these later centuries. The birth-pangs and convolutions of new political formations and their various adaptations of Byzantine law and art are made more comprehensible by a scene-setting chapter at the beginning of the book. There, the landscape and the communications network of Eastern Europe is presented, with due emphasis on the tortuous nature of the river-valleys and passes running through the Balkan massif. The reader is left to wonder that, in such broken and, to the north of the steppes, infertile terrain, a series of complex structures should have arisen at all.

Initial reactions to the publication of *The Byzantine Commonwealth* in the United Kingdom were favourable, if somewhat muted. Reviewers recognised its value as an introductory survey: an 'outstanding' feat of synthesis which would 'long remain the standard work' on the history of

[21] Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, p. 203.

Eastern Europe.[22] Perspectives and circumstances in Eastern Europe were rather different. The new publication was itself the talk of the Fourteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies convened in Bucharest in September 1971, where Obolensky's paper on 'Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges'[23] received enthusiastic applause. Set against the background of the Cold War and occurring shortly after the 'Prague Spring', the Congress amounted to a declaration of Romania's own close affinity with East Rome, in ostensible defiance of Moscow: indeed, Nicolai Ceauçescu's use of Byzantium's aura for self-legitimisation gave a new edge to concepts such as the Byzantine Commonwealth.

The most forthright recognition of the book's importance, and the more substantive critiques, came from scholars outside the United Kingdom or from adherents to political creeds which still seemed set to redraw the intellectual map. North American reviewers recognised that this was the first major survey of Byzantium's relations with the rest of Eastern Europe and the first careful assessment and comparison of the receiving cultures.[24] The then-Soviet Byzantinist, Alexander Kazhdan, accepted Obolensky's basic concept of a Commonwealth whose ideological core was orthodoxy,[25] but two other scholars, G. G. Litavrin and Robert Browning, raised objections to the very concept of a Commonwealth that was some sort of functioning political entity.[26]

Obolensky's book cannot be said to have rapidly engendered works by other scholars, following up or supplementing its main theses. A noteworthy exception is John Meyendorff's *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia*, which acknowledges Obolensky's inspiration and provides important evidence of the waves of exchanges between far-flung communities in the orthodox world in the fourteenth century.[27] More than twenty years passed, however, before the appearance of a work applying Obolensky's thesis to other aspects of Byzantium: Garth Fowden's *From Empire to*

[22] Review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 Nov. 1971, p. 1423 [David Talbot Rice].

[23] D. Obolensky, 'Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges', *Actes du XIV Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines, Bucharest 1971*, I (Bucharest, 1974), pp. 303–13; repr. in his *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe* (London, 1982), no. 1.

[24] See, for example, P. Charanis, *Speculum*, 48 (1973), 394–6; A. E. Alexander, *Slavic and East European Journal*, 16 (1972), 270–2; D. Abrahamse, *Slavic Review*, 31 (1973), 657–8; J. V. A. Fine, Jr., 'The Byzantine political and cultural structure', *Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines*, 1 (1974), 78–84.

[25] A. Kazhdan in *Vizantiiskii Vremennik*, 35 (1973), 261–2.

[26] G. G. Litavrin in *Voprosy Istorii* (1972), no. 5, 180–5, esp. 182–3; R. Browning in *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972), 812–15.

[27] J. Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia. A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1981), especially pp. 2–3.

Commonwealth. The title was deliberately evocative of what Fowden termed the 'Second Byzantine Commonwealth', in succession to the 'First' eastern Roman empire of late Antiquity. Fowden differs from Obolensky in making no claim that the emperor functioned as an active law-maker or sovereign. He emphasises instead the value of a monotheistic creed as the binding constituent of a commonwealth, while acknowledging that the memory of former military might supplied a certain edge. But in the voluntary aspects of membership of commonwealths lay their advantage, 'provid[ing] most people with a practical frame of reference wider than the state to which they were immediately subject'.[28] Such traits in the western Christian 'empire' were also attracting attention from medievalists, and the importance of consensus based on shared religious beliefs, rites and values as well as material interests was gaining recognition.[29]

Material findings and new methodologies have also made a contribution towards re-appraisal of Obolensky's thesis. Archaeological excavations have shown that an economic nexus spanned the territories associated with the Byzantine Commonwealth and although the trading pattern is certainly not coterminous with them, there is (as Browning had suggested)[30] a connection. Thus the countless finds in the land of Rus of amphorae and cross-medallions originating in Byzantine regions register the pulse of demand for oil and wine used in religious rites after the adoption of Christianity by the Rus ruling élite.[31] Research is underway into the properties attaching to particular substances in Byzantine eyes, and the forces which they could supposedly conjure up. Byzantinists now appreciate the fineness of the line between invocation of legitimate saints, relics and wonder-working icons on the one hand, and recourse to other, unauthorised, incantations and powers on the other.[32] These extraordinary forces could be represented as at the emperor's command, as befitted his unique and God-given status, endowing his diplomatic gifts of

[28] G. Fowden, *From Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), p. 169.

[29] See e.g. J. L. Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice. Carolingian Royal Ritual', repr. in her *The Frankish World 750–900* (London, 1996), pp. 99–131.

[30] Browning, *EHR*, 87. 814.

[31] See T. S. Noonan and R. K. Kovalev, 'Prayer, illumination and good times: the export of Byzantine wine and oil to the North of Russia in Pre-Mongol times', *Byzantium and the North. Acta Byzantina Fennica*, 8 (1995–6) (1997), 73–96; id. 'Wine and oil for all the Rus! The importation of Byzantine wine and olive oil to Kievan Rus', ibid., 9 (1997–8) (1999), 118–52.

[32] The lurking presence of 'magic' in Byzantine society was demonstrated by the contributions to H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, DC, 1995). See especially Maguire's introduction, pp. 1–7.

gold and other valuables with an unearthly charge. Such products of the sacred palace were 'not only a sign of the emperor's overlordship, but also a conduit of his protection'.[33] Conversely, those who crossed the emperor or injured his subjects might fall foul of the hidden forces at his disposal. A Byzantine chronicle tells of a statue deemed to be an 'image' (*stoicheion*) of Symeon of Bulgaria which stood in Constantinople; at the very moment when the statue was deliberately shattered, Symeon dropped dead.[34] Whether true or false, the story is likely to have been propagated by Byzantine diplomats, and belief in the occult powers of the monuments and statuary of Constantinople—prophetic, prophylactic and obnoxious—was still widespread and intense on the eve of the Fourth Crusade.[35]

Mentalités of this sort are not likely to have been confined to the Byzantines, even if they were seldom articulated or even admitted in the written word. Strong support for the concept and, at some level, reality of the Byzantine Commonwealth is provided by social anthropology, a discipline which Obolensky himself utilised, when he applied the concepts of 'cultural diffusion' and 'acculturation' to set out the workings of Byzantium's sphere of influence. Byzantium had a wealth of credentials to act as an 'exemplary' or 'superordinate centre', with 'acquisitional societies' seeking material gifts, marks of respect, regalia and participation in its religion.[36] These societies, mostly lacking in organised priesthoods, literacy and advanced technical skills, more or less correspond with those adjudged by Obolensky to belong to the Byzantine Commonwealth. Southern Italy, Venice and Georgia did not, in this sense, constitute 'acquiring societies': although their elites shared cultural values, common strategic interests and, sometimes, even a language with the Byzantines, they did not need to acquire fundamentals such as the Christian religion or advanced technical skills from them. Obolensky's exclusion of them from the scope of his Commonwealth thus gains some vindication and his vision of the Commonwealth was, in more than one respect, ahead of its time.

[33] H. Maguire, 'Magic and money', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), 1037–54 at 1039.

[34] Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), pp. 411–12; L. Simeonova, 'Constantinopolitan attitudes towards aliens and minorities, 860s–1020s. Part One', *Etudes balkaniques* (2000), no. 3: 91–112 at 106–7.

[35] R. Macrides, 'Constantinople: the crusaders' gaze' in R. Macrides (ed.), *Travel in the Byzantine World* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 193–212 at pp. 205–7.

[36] M. W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal. Art, Trade and Power* (Austin, TX, 1993), pp. 173–209. See also C. Geertz, *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980).

Characteristically, Obolensky did not enter into polemics with the early critics of *The Byzantine Commonwealth*. Apart from a paper on 'Nationalism in Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages' delivered before the Royal Historical Society on 15 January 1971,[37] he wrote little further about the theoretical underpinnings of the Commonwealth. Obolensky did not lose sight of earlier interests, contributing the chapter on early Russian literature to the *Cambridge Companion to Russian Studies*, a three-volume project which he planned and saw through the press with his co-editor Robert Auty.[38] Obolensky's interest in historical geography and 'the unchanging land'[39] is shown in studies on the Crimea and the key Byzantine stronghold on its coast, Cherson.[40] The changing doctrines of the Bogomils also received their due.[41] However, some of Obolensky's most important studies were those filling in parts of the framework of his principal thesis.[42]

After completing *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, Obolensky conceived of the idea of writing a set of biographies; this eventually took the form of his book, *Six Byzantine Portraits*.[43] The book is devoted to six personalities of the eastern orthodox world, ranging from the Balkan-born Slavonic-speaker Clement, archbishop of Ochrid, to Maximos the Greek. These individuals belonged to disparate milieus and can hardly be said to have held a common political agenda. It is, for example, questionable whether Clement, the loyal collaborator with Symeon of Bulgaria, can be considered 'Roman-thinking' in quite the same vein as Theophylact of Ochrid. And while Vladimir Monomakh had a Byzantine mother and used her illustrious family name—Monomachus—on his earliest seals, it was during his political ascendancy that the Greek language was replaced

[37] D. Obolensky, 'Nationalism in Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, 22 (1972), 1–16 at 11, repr. in Obolensky's *The Byzantine Inheritance of Eastern Europe* (London, 1982), no. 15.

[38] D. Obolensky, 'Early Russian Literature' in R. Auty and D. Obolensky (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Russian Studies*, II (Cambridge 1977), pp. 56–89, repr. in *The Byzantine Inheritance*, no. 8.

[39] The phrase is Hugh Trevor-Roper's, writing of *The Byzantine Commonwealth* in *The Sunday Times*, 5 Dec. 1971, p. 39.

[40] 'The Crimea and the North before 1204', *Archeion Pontou*, 35 (1979), 123–33, repr. in *The Byzantine Inheritance*, no. 21; 'Byzantium, Kiev and Cherson in the tenth century', *Byzantium and its Neighbours*, V. Vavřínek (ed.) (= *Byzantinoslavica*, 54 (1993)), 108–13.

[41] D. Obolensky, 'Papas Nicetas: a Byzantine Dualist in the Land of the Cathars', C. Mango and O. Pritsak (eds.), *Okeanos. Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday* (= *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 7 (1983)), 489–500.

[42] See, for example, 'Some notes concerning a Byzantine portrait of John Palaeologus', *Eastern Churches Review*, 4 (1972), 141–6 and figs. 1–3, repr. in *The Byzantine Inheritance*, no. 10.

[43] D. Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits* (Oxford, 1988).

by Slavonic on princely seals. Nonetheless, the aggregate of individuals who make up what might be called the 'thinking quotient' of the Commonwealth held a number of beliefs and fundamental values in common, albeit without subscribing to a single, clear-cut, code of earthly conduct. Participation was essentially voluntary, as might be expected in respect of the exemplary centre that Constantinople constituted. And while a case can be made for Athos as being the true centre of the Commonwealth from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards, this did not entail dissolution of the ideal of a Christian order under 'Roman' imperial tutelage. So long as an unimpeachably orthodox emperor reigned in Constantinople, no other orthodox potentate could afford overtly to disengage from or wholly to ignore that ideal, even if the *basileus* had no direct impact on their own regime. With his gallery of portraits, Obolensky provided a rejoinder to those who objected to the lack of evidence of active imperial law-making in his Commonwealth. Ragtag as these and other lesser-known members of the 'international society' were, they were engaged in a polyphonous yet not incoherent 'discourse' extending beyond conventional definitions of 'religion' or 'culture'. It was Obolensky's signal achievement to have discerned this phenomenon and to have attempted to portray its dynamics.

Life after the Commonwealth

The Byzantine Commonwealth was conceived—and much of it was actually written—in Katounia near Limni, on the island of Euboea. Philip Sherrard of King's College London, the authority on Eastern Christian spirituality and Mount Athos, had bought a group of cottages there, and these were let out to his friends. Obolensky belonged to this circle and he and his wife spent weeks, sometimes months, of summer vacations at Katounia before and after publication of the *Commonwealth*. Their cottage was small and almost spartan, but Elisabeth, helped by her Parisian upbringing, could transform modest materials into *haute cuisine* and evenings were enlivened by dinner with the Sherrards, among others. Obolensky is still remembered in Katounia for his throbbing bath-time bass and reciting Pushkin in the sea.

Friendships nurtured in Katounia, and which remained firm for the rest of his life, included those with John Campbell, the historian of modern Greece and Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford, and with Patrick Leigh Fermor. He would often stay at the latter's house at Mani, in the southern

Peloponnese, and Leigh Fermor wrote movingly, upon Obolensky's death, of 'his kind, youthful, scholarly and spectacled glance'.[44] Not far from Limni was the residence of Francis Noel-Baker, whom Obolensky had known since their undergraduate days together in Trinity, and sometimes there would be long Sunday lunches at the 'Noel-Bakery'.

Obolensky's friendships stretched far beyond the English-speaking colonies of Euboea and Athens. He spoke Modern Greek fluently and had many contacts and friendships with Greek and Greek-born scholars,[45] especially in the universities of Athens and Thessaloniki, where he presented papers that were later published.[46] He was a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Athens, and among his friends was the distinguished historian and politician, Andreas Stratos. Obolensky contributed a study to one of the volumes commemorating Stratos, and in this he demonstrated conclusively that there is no good reason to doubt Theophylact of Ohrid's authorship of the *Life* of his distant predecessor Clement.[47] Theophylact might describe himself as an exile from Constantinople, in whose court circles he had flourished, but this did not hold him back from care for the souls and material welfare of his Bulgarian flock, or from writing approvingly of Clement's use of Slavonic in his pastoral work. Theophylact is, in fact, a prime example of the binary—or multiple—identity of many members of the Byzantine Commonwealth, and perhaps Obolensky sensed in him a fellow-spirit.

Obolensky's affection for Greece encompassed its landscape, people and poetry. He would sometimes say that he went there 'in order to live', in the full sense of that word. It is no accident that he continued to travel to Greece in old age, when few other long-distance journeys appealed, and sojourns there seemed to reinvigorate him. He spent happy, sun-lit, weeks staying with his cousin-by-marriage, Chloe Obolensky, on the island of Spetsai, over the Easter and in the autumn of 2001. Obolensky appreciated the intricacies and imagery of modern Greek poetry, and could quote extensively from it, albeit not as readily as from Russian verse. Citations from Kavafy and Seferis prefaced the first edition of *The*

[44] *Daily Telegraph*, 7 Jan. 2002.

[45] Among these were Dionysios Zakythinos and, of younger generations, Hélène Glykatzi-Ahrweiler, Anthony-Emil Tachiaos and Angeliki Laiou.

[46] Respectively 'The Byzantine impact on Eastern Europe', *Praktika tes Akademias Athenon*, no. 55 (Athens, 1980), 148–68, repr. in his *The Byzantine Inheritance*, no. 3 and 'The cult of St Demetrius of Thessaloniki in the history of Byzantine–Slav relations', *Balkan Studies*, 15 (1974), 3–20, repr. in *The Byzantine Inheritance*, no. 4.

[47] D. Obolensky, 'Theophylaktos of Ohrid and the Authorship of the *Vita Clementis*', in *Byzantium: Tribute to Andreas N. Stratos, II, Theology and Philology* (Athens, 1986), pp. 601–18.

Byzantine Commonwealth. A sense of the Greeks' role in upholding eternal values against the odds may have contributed to Obolensky's reverence for Mount Athos. He visited the 'Holy Mountain' several times and was, in Hugh Trevor-Roper's words, 'transformed' by his experience there. The majesty of the mountain and the cells for contemplation exerted a powerful hold on Obolensky. He wrote of 'walking from monastery to monastery' and noted with satisfaction the resurgence of many of the monasteries in the closing decades of the twentieth century.[48] It must be conceded that Trevor-Roper's reaction upon his one and only visit was characteristically Gibbonian. Years later he remembered Athos as peopled with 'dirty old monks', although he had found the (Russian) house of St Panteleimon more congenial.

Differences in outlook did not stand in the way of a firm friendship from the time of Obolensky's arrival at Christ Church, when Trevor-Roper was the Junior Censor. On several occasions they travelled in the Balkans together and they served as British Co-Chairmen of Anglo-Bulgarian and Anglo-Romanian Conferences of Historians (in 1973 and 1975 respectively). As well as allowing for the presentation of serious historical papers,[49] these affairs paraded the national pride and Party loyalty of the hosts. Obolensky would later claim greater success in keeping a straight face than Trevor-Roper through the unrelenting speeches, a faculty that had also been to his advantage during the games of after-dinner poker in Christ Church, and the surrealia of life in the Communist Balkans did not escape their eyes. In Romania, they discovered that no one under the age of forty was permitted to attend their lectures, for fear that they might corrupt the young. On another occasion, they were greeted at the railway station in Bucharest by a deputation of *apparatchiki*, who warned them of the serious risk that their train might catch fire. The local committee of the Party had determined that the train should proceed on the basis that going uphill was acceptable, but downhill would be unwise. As their carriage began to lurch on its way, the two travellers' gaze rested on the bottles of Veuve Cliquot which they had brought with them. It would, they decided, be a pity to waste such very fine champagne if the train did catch fire during one of its unavoidable descents.

[48] Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, p. 238.

[49] The proceedings of the conferences received coverage from M. Nikolaeva, 'Anglo-Bulgarian scientific conference of historians', *Etudes balkaniques* (1974), no. 1, 141–2; A. Pantev, 'Scientific meeting between Bulgarian and British historians', *Bulgarian Historical Review* (1974), no. 1, 95–9; A. Pippidi, 'Colloque anglo-roumain', *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, 14 (1976), no. 1, 168–70.

Happily—Trevor-Roper would later recall—they arrived in Cluj unscathed and with the Veuve Cliquot well accounted for.

Obolensky was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1974 and gave the Raleigh lecture on History in 1981.[50] He was not averse to taking on major administrative duties, having borne the burden of being General Secretary of the Thirteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Oxford in 1966 and of seeing the proceedings to press.[51] Obolensky, who was knighted in 1984, served as Vice-President of the British Academy from 1983 to 1985. His administrative talents were put to good effect, and from 1985 until 1993 he was Chairman of the British National Committee of the Association Internationale d'Etudes du Sud-Est Européen.

Ties with the United States of America, where he was a Foreign Member of the American Philosophical Society, were not forgotten. He paid several visits to Dumbarton Oaks and—together with, among others, Robert Browning—he conducted lecture tours to colleges on behalf of Dumbarton Oaks with the aim of alerting students to the existence and opportunities of Byzantine Studies. He had also, at various stages, been a Visiting Professor at Yale, the University of California at Berkeley, Wellesley College Massachusetts, and Princeton. Obolensky carried on with these activities after retiring from his Oxford Professorship in 1985. The dinner held one summer's evening in Christ Church to mark his retirement was convivial, while redolent with memories. To Obolensky's right, frequently chortling, sat a dear friend, Isaiah Berlin, 'the guest from the Future' whom Anna Akhmatova had encountered in Leningrad in early January 1946.[52] Lines from her poem form the final words of Obolensky's *Bread of Exile*. As well as becoming an Emeritus Student of the House, Obolensky was in 1993 elected a Senior Associate Member of St Antony's, where he became a familiar figure.

Obolensky's personal life, however, was not unclouded. His marriage to Elisabeth had included long periods of apparent companionship and, as the foreword of *The Byzantine Commonwealth* acknowledges, she

[50] D. Obolensky, 'Italy, Mount Athos and Muscovy: the three worlds of Maximos the Greek', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 67 (1981), 143–61.

[51] J. M. Hussey, D. Obolensky and S. Runciman (eds.), *Proceedings of the XIII International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Oxford, September 1966* (London, 1967).

[52] Their extraordinary meeting which, in her words, managed 'to confuse the twentieth century' features in Akhmatova's *Poem Without a Hero*; one of its dedicatees is Isaiah Berlin. For an edition of the poem, see A. Haight, 'Anna Akhmatova's *poema bez geroya*', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 45 (1967), 474–96 at 477 and n. 4, 479–80; A. Haight, *Anna Akhmatova. A Poetic Pilgrimage* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 140–3, 146–50.

typed the manuscript of the work twice. Having in common a background in the pre-war White Russian community in Paris, they also shared devotion to the Orthodox Church. The Obolenskys would attend services in the House of St Gregory and St Macrina in Oxford and they played an active part in the project to build the church of the Holy Trinity and the Annunciation in the grounds. Nonetheless irreconcilable differences led to their separation and eventually, in 1989, the marriage ended in divorce.

By the late 1980s, great changes were afoot in the wider world and these would bring Obolensky satisfaction, relief and even joy. The changes were concurrent with an anniversary that was foreseeable and long planned: the Millennium of the conversion of Russia to Christianity in (most probably) 988 or 989. Obolensky published an important paper relating to the event[53] and participated in a number of commemorative conferences. He relished an invitation to attend the great council of the Russian Orthodox Church and its celebration of the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of Prince Vladimir. His status was that of an official lay delegate, but he was welcomed as if to a homecoming. The Church was enjoying new freedoms and, as Obolensky put it, 'listening to laughter'. His election in the same year, 1988, to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts was another straw in the wind. But no one could have foreseen the sequence of events following the fall of the Berlin Wall, a drama which Obolensky himself followed keenly, sometimes from the stage itself. Travel restrictions with Eastern Europe eased rapidly and conferences planned as a means of mitigating the mutual isolation of eastern- and western-bloc scholars turned out to be celebrations. A notable example was the symposium held in Bechyňe, Czechoslovakia, in September 1990.[54] Russian scholars were able to converse freely with westerners in a manner unthinkable only a few years before. Several commented on Obolensky's spoken Russian: elegant, clear and in some ways a voice from the past, yet also a reminder of what their language could achieve.

Another subject of informal discussion at Bechyňe was whether the Eighteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, scheduled to take place in Moscow in the following August, would actually convene, in view of the difficulties with funding and organisation. Obolensky, as the Vice-President of the International Association of Byzantine Studies, was

[53] D. Obolensky, 'Cherson and the conversion of Rus: an anti-revisionist view', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 13 (1989), 244–56.

[54] The 'amazing atmosphere' was remarked upon by the symposium's director, Professor Vladimír Vavřínek, in his preface to the Proceedings: *Byzantium and its Neighbours*, pp. 3–4 at 4.

involved in the sometimes anxious run-up to the Congress. The Congress' plenary sessions were held in the Great Auditorium of Moscow State University and Lenin's exhortations remained emblazoned on the walls on either side of the platform: 'Study, Study, Study!'. The proceedings were, however, opened by Patriarch Alexei, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the colloquia sessions devoted to hagiography, Church history and theology were notably well-attended. To one seasoned western journalist, it seemed as if these constituted an alternative Congress, where 'young Russians, some of them in the black robes of priesthood . . . pressed into the seminar rooms determined to find nothing less than their souls, their roots, their own Russian path to revelation and holiness'.[55] The address which Obolensky delivered at the close of proceedings was rather more feet-on-the-ground, picking out the main scholarly findings and themes that had emerged in the course of the Congress. His avowedly 'more personal' introduction and conclusion were expressed in Russian.[56]

The tenor of the Congress was a far cry from the Bucharest Congress of twenty years earlier, although both provided examples of the invocation of the Byzantine phenomenon for purposes of legitimising local initiatives. Obolensky was among a handful of scholars summoned to the Kremlin one evening to meet the Vice-President of the USSR, Gennadi Ianaev. In his paper-strewn office—complete with camp bed—Ianaev complained that Mr Gorbachev was sunning himself at his villa on the Crimea, leaving him to do all the work. According to Obolensky, who enjoyed recounting the anecdote, Ihor Ševčenko provided the most compelling response to Ianaev's question 'Was there totalitarianism in Byzantium?': Byzantine imperial ideology and aspirations amounted to totalitarianism, but the means to implement them had been lacking.[57] How far Byzantine precedents and a presumed Russian inheritance from Byzantium would have been invoked had Ianaev's own plans succeeded will never be known. What is certain is that a few days after this soirée, Gorbachev was placed under arrest in his villa at Foros (near the Vorontsov summer palace at Alupka, whence Obolensky had 'wisely fled

[55] N. Ascherson, *The Black Sea. The Birthplace of Civilization and Barbarism* (London, 1996), p. 46.

[56] D. Obolensky, 'Le discours de clôture prononcé par le Vice-Président de l'Association Internationale des études byzantines', *Bulletin d'information et de coordination de l'Association internationale des études byzantines*, 17 (1992), 51–6.

[57] The story is recounted in Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, p. 244.

at the age of one' in 1919)[58] and a Committee of National Salvation was proclaimed.

Ianaev had been taking his history lesson from Obolensky and his fellow-Byzantinists on the eve of a bid to put a stop to the ultimate 'thaw'. The failure of the putsch and the dissolution four months afterwards of the USSR opened the way to more overt acceptance of Obolensky's ideas and scholarship in the former Communist countries. His election to the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1994 brought him particular pride, and in the same year a Russian translation of his paper on the conversion of Rus was published.[59] Preparations began for further Slavonic translations of *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, which had already been rendered into Greek and Serbo-Croat. Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe delayed their publication. News of the Bulgarian translation's recent appearance—nearly ten years after being submitted to the publishers—brought Obolensky a wry smile as he lay on his final sick-bed.[60] He had been able to write a brief foreword to the Russian translation of the *Commonwealth*, which was combined with a translation of *Six Byzantine Portraits*. Obolensky acknowledged the shortcomings of 'influence' as a term and concept in cultural history and signalled his preference for Lotman's idea of 'asymmetrical partnership' between an ancient centre and the periphery. He also endorsed the propositions concerning cultural transfer and transplanting of D. S. Likhachev, a scholar whose work on Russian literature and culture he had long admired.[61] Obolensky had been instrumental in bringing Likhachev to Oxford for the bestowal of a D.Litt. in 1967, as he had been for Akhmatova's visit a couple of years earlier.

[58] Rose Macaulay's *bon mot* is cited in Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, p. 186.

[59] D. Obolensky, 'Kherson i kreshchenie Rusia: protiv peresmotra traditsionnoi tochki zreniia' appeared in the flagship Russian journal of Byzantine studies, *Vizantiiskii Vremennik*, 55 (1994), 53–61.

[60] D. Obolensky, *Vizantiiskata obshchnost. Iztochna Evropa 500–1453*, tr. L. Simeonova (Sofia, 2001). Postscripts were provided by the translator and by the pre-eminent Bulgarian Byzantinist, Professor Vasilka Tapkova-Zaimova. Dr Simeonova's postscript includes part of an interview which she conducted with Obolensky in September 1989. This was to have been published in a dissident newspaper but was crowded out by the rush of events that autumn. For the text of the interview, see Obolensky, *Vizantiiskata obshchnost*, pp. 491–501 at pp. 491–4. The volume also contains a useful bibliography of the reviews of *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, based on material supplied by Jelisaveta Allen of Dumbarton Oaks: *Vizantiiskata obshchnost*, p. 511.

[61] The Russian translation was begun after Obolensky had given his consent at the Moscow Congress, and G. G. Litavrin wrote a foreword. For Obolensky's own foreword, dated 7 July 1996, see *Vizantiiskoe sodruzhestvo natsii. Shest' vizantiiskikh portretov*, tr. S. A. Ivanov, N. V. Malykhina *et al*. (Moscow, 1998), pp. 11–12.

Thanks to the new atmosphere, Obolensky was able to travel to Russia without hindrance and to converse with colleagues such as Likhachev, whom he had previously seen only at long intervals. It is probably no coincidence that in these years, Obolensky became more explicit about his Russian roots, for all his caveats against exaggeration of the differences between 'Russian' and 'Western' ways of thinking. Such is the clear implication of the title and the closing pages of his book, *Bread of Exile*. This had been a long-cherished project and the book was dedicated to James Howard-Johnston, whose selfless support and guidance steered it to final publication. Its title alludes to Dante's verses: 'Thou shalt prove how salt is the taste of another man's bread'.[62]

Fixed points, family and old friends remained important as Obolensky passed his mid-seventies and he became increasingly frail. He kept in close contact with his two brothers born to his mother and her second husband: Ivan Tolstoy, based in Scotland and Paul Tolstoy in Montreal. He continued to travel and—as ever—took pleasure in return visits to Cambridge. His old college, Trinity, had elected him to an Honorary Fellowship in 1991, and a dining companion at Feasts would sometimes be Steven Runciman, also an Honorary Fellow of the College. Obolensky savoured Cambridge as a place, and walking down the avenue across the Backs to Trinity in springtime he was apt to quote Housman's lines:

> Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
> Is hung with bloom along the bough.

The stark outlines of the Fen country in winter also appealed greatly. His sister-in-law Margie Tolstoy was able to offer him hospitality just outside Cambridge and he took an interest in new generations of students of eastern Christendom in Cambridge. It was to the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies there that he donated his library in 2000. Among the numerous items are notebooks and personal papers as well as his library of books, periodicals and offprints. The archive has much to offer students of twentieth-century cultural history, as well as Byzantinists and Slavists.[63] Obolensky attended his last International Congress of Byzantine

[62] Dante, *Divine Comedy, Paradise*, Canto XVII, trans. J. D. Sinclair (Oxford, 1971), p. 245; Obolensky, *Bread of Exile*, pp. vii, 246.

[63] At the time of writing, only a fraction of the holding has been catalogued, and its materials have not been utilised in composing this memoir. Enquiries may be directed to The Principal, The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Wesley House, Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5 8BJ; tel: 01223 741350; fax: 01223 741370; e-mail: principal@iocs.cam.ac.uk.

Studies in Copenhagen in 1996, serving as an Honorary President of the International Association.

Obolensky's eightieth birthday was signalled in volume 31 of the *Oxford Slavonic Papers* with the editors' greetings and a portrait of Obolensky on its frontispiece. Beside articles by pupils, the volume contains an invaluable scholarly bibliography of his publications compiled by D. L. L. Howells, Librarian in charge of Slavonic and Modern Greek Books in the Taylor Institution Library.[64] As well as a festive family dinner, attended by both his brothers and their families, a group of former pupils and colleagues held a dinner for him on his birthday in New College, Oxford. There he spoke briefly but from the heart of the value he placed upon their friendship.[65] Ihor Ševčenko observed of his relations with his pupils, in an address delivered at Obolensky's Memorial Service, that 'he loved them all', and 'they tried to repay their debt to him'.

More vital than any of these ties, however, was that formed and long maintained with Chloe Obolensky, the theatre and opera designer. They shared a love of Russia and all things Russian, and Chloe's artistic vision found expression in her book, *The Russian Empire: a portrait in photographs*. Published in 1979, this has a foreword by Max Hayward, a friend of them both. The book offers striking *aperçus* of a vanished world, reminiscent of *Six Byzantine Portraits* (which Dimitri dedicated to Chloe) and in some ways it foreshadows Dimitri's collection of his own family's 'portraits'. Chloe did all that could be done to enrich Dimitri's life and bring him happiness in his later years, making him at home in her residences in France and Greece. In the words of Ševčenko in his memorial address, she 'loved him . . . and remained with him to the end'.[66]

Dimitri Obolensky died in The Cotswold Home, near Burford, on 23 December 2001. Among the condolences came those from the Pushkinskii Dom in St Petersburg, which had itself lost D. S. Likhachev two years earlier. A minute's silence in memory of Obolensky was observed at the Institute of Slav and Balkan Studies in Moscow, and an obituary planned for *Vizantiiskii Vremennik*. The funeral was held in the Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity and the Annunciation, and the Memorial Service in the Cathedral of Christ Church, on 18 May 2002. In the latter church,

[64] D. L. L. Howells, 'The publications of Sir Dimitri Obolensky', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, NS 31 (1998), 1–10.

[65] Those present were Professor A. A. M. Bryer, Dr S. Franklin, Professor S. Hackel, Professor R. Milner-Gulland, Professor G. Smith and Dr J. Shepard.

[66] The text of Professor Ševčenko's address was printed 'instead of an obituary' in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 95 (2002), 399–401, here at 401.

Bunyan's 'To be a pilgrim' rang out and there was a reading from *Six Byzantine Portraits*—on Maximos the Greek's old age and death amid the narrowing cultural horizons of sixteenth-century Muscovy. It is tempting, but misleading, to fasten the labels of 'Russian', 'Greek', 'English' or 'French' onto this man of many worlds. His sympathies were too broad and his sense of justice too profound. His Orthodox loyalties did not contain his revulsion at the bombardment of Sarajevo by the Bosnian Serbs, and he wrote with feeling about Milošević's manipulation of Serbian national traditions to further his own political ends.[67] Perhaps his cosmopolitan upbringing among a high aristocracy fallen on hard times contributed to this outlook, but it is not the whole story. Obolensky's vision of the Byzantine Commonwealth as an international society of personal ties and basic Christian values was one by which he sought to live out his own life, with no small success.

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[67] D. Obolensky, review of N. Malcolm, *Bosnia. A Short History* (London, 1994) in *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 April 1994, 15–16 at 15.