In the tenth-century compilation known as the *De Cerimoniis* the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos likens the order and dignity of the ceremonies of the imperial Palace to the harmonious movement given by the Creator to the universe. The Palace, at the centre of the terrestrial order of the empire, was seen as the reflection of the divine order. Through the Christianization of the imperial cult of Late Antiquity, the emperor’s person was considered sacred, as was the palace where he lived and all he did. The Byzantine term ‘palace’ (*palation*) comprised the meanings both of the physical setting as well as the society surrounding the emperor, corresponding roughly to ‘court’ in the western tradition (*De Cerimoniis* 1935–9: 1. 2; Toynbee 1973: 185–200; Mango 1980: 218–22; Kelly 1998: 139–50).

In official titulature the older terms *augoustos, autokrator,* and *despotes* remained in use, but from the time of Herakleios the emperor was generally called *basileus,* whereas the Latinate *augousta* was preferred to *basilissa* for the empress. In order to reinforce the dynastic aspect of the imperial office, Leo III created for his son Constantine (V) the legitimating title of ‘porphyrogennetos’, or ‘purple-born’, given to children of a reigning emperor—a concept which would become essential under the Macedonian emperors. And it was Constantine V who fixed the use of court titles given to members of the imperial family, promoting his sons to the office of caesar and nobelissimos (Bury 1911: 35–6; Dagron 1994; McCormick 2000).
High state officials were called collectively the ‘senate’ (synkletos, synkletikon systema), or ‘those in government’ (hoi en telei, hoi archontes). Approximately half were military officials (strategos, domestikos, droungarios, etc.), and a military career was one way of obtaining a place in the upper levels of Palace society, if not the imperial office itself. The highest civil offices (caesar, magistros, anthypatos, etc.) were held by close associates and relations of the emperor. There was also a Palace clergy. The middle and lower offices—military, civil, and ecclesiastical—were to be bought, the fee being relative to the salary or roga. A member of the Great Company of guards with a roga of up to twenty nomismata paid 16 litrai; for every seven nomismata over twenty, the fee increased by one litra. Officials of the Table, or the Vestry, or members of the body of Noble Sons, with a roga of ten nomismata, paid 6 litrai—one less than those wishing to enter the order of imperial clerics. The imperial eunuchs, the cubicularii (koubikoularioi), also paid for their office. They formed the emperor’s escort and were a very influential body in the Palace. The imperial bastard Basil Lekapenos who took the cause of Constantine VII against his own natural family was granted in return the supreme office of parakoimomenos, or chamberlain, and thus supervised not only all the officials of the Palace but the entire imperial administration, being responsible only to the emperor. Though he was subsequently dismissed by Constantine, Basil was reinstated as parakoimomenos by Nikephoros Phokas and also received from him the honorific title of ‘President of all the Senate’. Later, he connived in the murders of both Phokas and Tzimiskes and then ran the empire as regent for Basil II until the latter excluded him from power. A great patron of the arts, it was apparently Basil Lekapenos who ordered the final compilation of the De Cerimoniis (De Cerimoniis 1829: 692–4; Bury 1911: 120–1; Featherstone 2004).

At the lower end of the scale, there were scores of minor employees of the Palace: diaitarioi, or servants attached to the various buildings, doorkeepers, lamp-lighters, etc., and there were certainly a great many slaves about whom we have little information. The employees of the Hippodrome and the circus factions were also on the rolls of the Palace.

Estimates of the number of the human element of the Palace in the middle Byzantine period, based on calculations of invitations to banquets and space occupied by the court in the galleries of Hagia Sophia during ceremonies, vary from one to two thousand persons. All relations between them were regulated by a rigid system of precedence according to rank (Kazhdan and McCormick 1997; McCormick 2000).

The nature and working of the Byzantine court can best be illustrated by a description of the ceremonies of the ‘Great Palace’ of Constantinople. Though its general extent can be identified on the map of modern Istanbul, the Palace has long vanished and its structures and ceremonies can only be reconstructed on the basis of written sources.

Built by Constantine on an upper terrace of ground overlooking the Sea of Marmara, the original palace began at the Augustaion opposite Hagia Sophia and
Fig. 1 Sketch-plan of the Upper and Lower Palace, with the Walls of Nikephoros Phokas

(adapted from W. Müller-Wiener, Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul, 1977: 232)
stretched southward along the Hippodrome, with which imperial ceremonial was still very closely bound. For the early period our main source is the excerpts from the sixth-century Magister Officiorum Peter the Patrician, with descriptions of ceremonies of the fifth and sixth centuries. The poems of Corippus in praise of Justin II also give a vivid glimpse of the old palace on Justin’s accession and an audience given to the Avars. Another important source, the Kletorologion or Banquet Book of Philotheos dates from 899. By this time the old palace was used only on special occasions and the everyday life of the emperors and court had shifted to newer buildings on a lower terrace beside the Sea of Marmara, centring on the emperor’s Koiton, or private apartments, and the adjacent Chrysotriklinos, or Golden Hall.

The use of the term Palace was now restricted in the sources to the precinct on the lower terrace (Bury 1907; Cameron, A. M. 1976; Oikonomides 1972: 81–235).

Thus by the tenth century such celebrated buildings of the old palace as the Chalke or Brazen Gate on the Augustaion, the Consistorion or audience hall, the Great Triklinos or dining hall of the Nineteen Couches, the Augusteus where imperial marriage ceremonies traditionally commenced, and even the Kathisma or imperial box on the Hippodrome, were no longer considered parts of the imperial residence. Like the Magnaura, the former Senate House on the Augustaion which was still used for grand occasions of state, the old buildings—now some 600 years old—were little more than museum pieces. The old halls were maintained, however, in a dubious state of repair for use on special occasions. It is this rambling ensemble of the old and new palace which figures in the multifarious compilation of the De Cerimoniis and which is often thought of as a functioning whole. But this is a distorted view which prevents one from appreciating the Byzantines’ ingenuity in using the Palace—in particular the dilapidated ancient parts of it—for imperial ideological ends. It also obscures the historical reality. The emperors now went to the old palace only on special occasions. Rather, it appears that a number of high officials came to live in this area, just as in the earlier period they had had their mansions in the vicinity of the old palace, for example, the palace of Lausos on the other side of the Hippodrome. Theoktistos, regent for Michael III, built himself a mansion in the place called the Apsis (probably the Peristyle and Apsed Hall of the Walker Trust), and fortified it with an iron gate and a guard (Mango 1997; Bolognesi and Featherstone 2002).

By 969 the defence, and no doubt the maintenance, of the entire complex was perceived as unnecessary by the military emperor Nikephoros Phokas, and he constructed walls surrounding the newer Palace on the lower terrace, cutting it off completely from all the older buildings except the Kathisma, which was now the principal means of access from the city. The old main entrance, the Chalke, though restored and rebuilt in the Komnenian period, was now used only for ceremonial processions to and from Hagia Sophia. In fact, Phokas’ walls presaged the eclipse of the Great Palace. The complex on the lower terrace, now sometimes referred to as the palace of the ‘Boukoleon’, survived intact until the Fourth Crusade, but the
Komnenian emperors preferred to live in the palace of the Blachernai which they expanded and embellished. During the sack of the city in 1204 the Great Palace was pillaged, and the Palaiologan sovereigns followed the Komnenians in residing at the Blachernai. However, according to the fourteenth-century ceremonial book of Pseudo-Kodinos, they went to the Great Palace—whatever was left of it—on such occasions as imperial coronations (Pseudo-Kodinos 1966: 252–63).

This continual clinging to the Great Palace is significant. It was preserved as long as possible in order to impart to the reigning sovereign the legitimacy and glory of the past. This conservative tendency, typical of the Byzantine government, is marked in the *De Cerimoniis*, our main source for the court: the greater part of it is filled with descriptions taken from older documents of obsolete ceremonies in the old buildings. It tells us frustratingly little about the everyday ritual in the actual Palace at the time of its composition. Such splendid structures as the Sigma-Triconchus exedra where, we know from the history of Theophanes Continuatus, the emperor Theophilos preferred to spend as much time as possible, or the Nea Church, built by Constantine VII’s grandfather Basil I, are mentioned only in passing.

Central to the everyday court life by the tenth century was the Chrysotriklinos. Dating from the reign of Justin II, this octagonal hall was the interface between the private apartments of the emperor and the public parts of the Palace. Similar in form to the church of Sts Sergios and Bakchos or S. Vitale in Ravenna, the Chrysotriklinos, with its seven side vaults hidden behind curtains and eastern apse open to the central space, was contrived to invest the coming and going of the sovereign and his appearance to his subjects with appropriate solemnity. Here the emperor conducted routine functions such as promotions of officials, banquets, and, above all, the ‘Daily Procession’ when officials assembled in the adjoining halls of the Lausiakos and Ioustinianos to await possible summons by the emperor.

The orientation of the apse to the east was not the only element resembling a church. The apse contained an image of Christ, probably in mosaic, under which the emperors sat to receive the veneration of their subjects and guests. The main entrance was on the western side, which opened onto a terrace where there were the entrances to the halls of the Lausiakos and Iouustinianos. The vault immediately to the left of the apse gave on to the chapel of St Theodore, which connected with the Phylax, or Treasury, of the Palace. The vault in front of St Theodore’s served as a vestry. The central vault on the northern side gave on to the Pantheon, about which all we know is that it was big enough for at least one high official to wait in before ceremonies, and the vault immediately to the left of the western doors gave on the Diaitarikion or steward’s room, where the Papias, or doorkeeper of the Palace, had his quarters.

The central and westernmost vaults on the opposite, southern, side of the Chrysotriklinos gave on to the private apartments of the emperor and empress respectively. The remaining vault, just to the right of the eastern apse, is the
Fig. 2 Chrysotriklinos with surrounding buildings
probable location of Constantine VII's Aristeterion, or breakfast room, where other members of the imperial family, including the children, could come from the Koiton to join the emperor for dessert in the company of select guests at the end of banquets in the Chrysotriklinos (Featherstone 2005).

From the two comparatively scanty chapters of the De Cerimoniis on everyday ritual we learn that the Palace was normally opened every morning after Matins. The Hetairiarch, or chief of the Company of guards, first opened a complicated passage from the courtyard of the Daphne, in the old upper palace, leading to the Lausiakos, and then, together with the Papias, opened the western doors of the Chrysotriklinos. Then they opened the Ioustinianos, and passing through it, opened the gate on its opposite end which, through a porch called the Skyla, gave on to the so-called Covered Hippodrome. This latter was a part of the old upper palace, and the gate in the Skyla was the most direct entrance to the newer lower Palace. Corresponding in position with the so-called 'Stadio' of Domitian's palace on the Palatine, the Covered Hippodrome was not a race course at all, but a rectangular garden surrounded by galleries. It was here that imperial officials awaited the daily opening of the Palace and entered to take their places 'in procession', that is, in the order of their rank, on benches in the Ioustinianos. Courtiers defended their precedence in this 'procession' with fierce tenacity, and failure to rise from the bench when a more senior official passed by could be grounds for a charge of lèse-majesté against the emperor, a capital offence. The daily procession was the survival of the Roman Salutatio Augusti or, more particularly, the Cottidiana Officia, when the emperor greeted high officials. As in the case of its classical antecedent, however, we cannot know whether all imperial officials came for this procession every day: no particular officials are mentioned for weekdays. The attendance of even the highest officials—Magistroi and Patrikioi—is indicated on ordinary Sundays, but the procession was held on such Sundays only when the emperor so desired. Unfortunately, the De Cerimoniis tells us nearly nothing about where or how the everyday business of administration was conducted. There is mention of the daily opening of bureaus (asekretia) beside the Lausiakos, where the Logothete of the Course (Logothetes tou Dromou), or chief official for foreign affairs, awaits his summons by the emperor. We must assume that a fair number of officials were admitted to these bureaus each day (Winterling 1999: 117–38).

The procedure for the everyday procession was the following. At the end of the first hour, thus at about 7 o'clock, when all had taken their places, the head of the weekly rota of servants assigned to the Chrysotriklinos knocked thrice on the doors of the Koiton. This was as close as anyone but the servants of the bedchamber, the koitonitai, got to the emperor's private apartments. At the emperor's command, the koitonitai opened the doors and vested the emperor in a skaramangion, or coloured silk tunic. Entering the Chrysotriklinos, the emperor went into the eastern apse, bowed before the image of Christ and sat down, not on the main throne in the centre of the apse, which was left empty on ordinary days—a sort of imperial 'low
mass’—but on a golden sellion or chair to the left of it. He then summoned the Logothete, who entered through the western curtains drawn aside by the Papias. On entering the first time, the Logothete, as everyone else, fell to the floor in proskynesis, or obeisance—the salutatio had given way to the adoratio already in the late antique period. The emperor then commanded the Logothete to bring in whomever he desired to see. On non-feast days, when there was no special business, the Papias gave the minsai, or dismissal (from the late Latin missa) by shaking his keys at the end of the third hour, around 9 o’clock. On hearing this, the officials made their way out of the Iouustinianos to go home. A note states that the same order was followed when the Palace was opened in the afternoon, though no exact times are given.

A further note informs us that when receiving foreign dignitaries the emperor sat on a purple-covered sellion to the right of the throne, as on Sundays, wearing a gold-bordered cloak with pearls and, if he desired, a crown. On Sundays, before the minsai were given the Artoklines or banquet-master read out the names of those invited to dine. Banquets were held in the Iouustinianos or in the Chrysotriklinos itself. The emperor sat at a table set apart from the others, the apokopte. With him sat only his family and the very highest officials such as the Caesar and Zoste Patrikia, who were most often his relations, and the patriarch. Other officials were seated at other tables in proximity to the emperor according to their rank (De Cerimoniis 1829: 518–25; Treitinger 1956: 84–92; Winterling 1999: 29–32).

This was the bare minimum of everyday ritual. On most days it would have been augmented by other ceremonies which, depending on their solemnity, were either performed completely in the lower Palace or involved going to Hagia Sophia as well. Lesser religious feasts were celebrated on the lower terrace, with a liturgy in one of the Palace churches, such as the Theotokos of the Pharos on the terrace beside the Chrysotriklinos, or St Basil’s chapel in the Lausiakos. A banquet generally followed. Such personal celebrations as the emperor’s birthday or the newly revived Brumalia were also confined to the lower terrace, with a ballet in the Sigma–Triconchus complex and a banquet in the Chrysotriklinos (De Cerimoniis 1935–9: n. 86–7; De Cerimoniis 1829: 599–607).

Promotions of all but the highest officials were performed in the Chrysotriklinos, for example those of a strategos, or, at a higher level, a Patrikios or a Zoste Patrikia. Like state receptions in the Magnaura and celebrations in Hagia Sophia on great feast days, the promotion of a Patrikios or a Zoste Patrikia involved the full assembly of all the officials. The Chrysotriklinos now took on a more solemn aspect. The emperor wore his crown and sat on the central throne, not a sellion at the side, and the cubiculii stood in a semicircle in the apse behind him. Beginning at the curtains before the western doors, the Papias censed the Chrysotriklinos with a thurible, and then censed the emperor. The officials were admitted according to their rank in a series of eight entrées or ‘curtains’—so called from the drawing of the curtains to admit them—and performed the proskynesis under the eye of the Master of Ceremonies. When all had entered the candidate was brought in
to the emperor and invested in his or her office, whereupon the whole assembly acclamed the emperor with the shout ‘Many Years’. Then all went in procession through the old palace, and the emperor and the new Patrikios or Zoste Patrikia were acclaimed at set points by the circus factions. The procession continued to Hagia Sophia, where the new dignitary received communion and the blessing of the patriarch. A Patrikios would then be escorted home by the factions, whereas a Zoste Patrikia would proceed to the Magnaura, where she herself was the object of another ceremony of proskynesis by the wives of imperial officials admitted in eight ‘curtains’ according to their husbands’ rank. She then returned to the lower Palace, where, being usually a member of the imperial family, she lived (De Cerimoniis 1935–9: i. 51–60; 63–6).

Now, we note here that the actual rite of promotion of a Patrikios or Zoste Patrikia was performed in the Chrysotriklinos. Likewise, foreign envoys were received there to conduct the real business of their visit, standing at a distance from the seated emperor. But their first audience was always held with great pomp in the Magnaura and followed by an itinerary through the old palace. As in the promotion of a Patrikios and Zoste Patrikia, however, these old buildings served as little more than a ceremonial backdrop on the way from the lower Palace to Hagia Sophia or the Magnaura. The same is true even on great feasts such as Easter and Christmas, when the emperor went in a grand procession, or prokensos, to Hagia Sophia, though every effort was made on these occasions to bring the old palace back to life. Very early in the morning all the paraphernalia—the Great (processional) Cross of St Constantine, the Rod of Moses, the Roman sceptres, the ptychia (whatever they were!), and all the rest—most of which were now kept in the Treasury beside St Theodore’s, were taken out and set up in what was apparently their traditional place in the old Palace. The imperial crown and vestments were also sent up from the lower Palace and laid out in the Octagon beside the old Koiton on the courtyard of the Daphne. On this day the lower Palace was not opened as usual but all the imperial officials and the circus factions went directly, in their parade clothes, to set points in the old Palace along the itinerary to be followed by the emperor. The most important stops were the Augusteus, where the servants of the Chrysotrikilos and the Company of guards acclaimed the emperor; then St Stephen’s Church beside the Hippodrome, where the emperor revered the Cross of St Constantine; then the Octagon, where the emperor was vested and crowned for the feast; then back through the Augusteus, where the Logothete was waiting to perform the proskynesis; then to the porch of the Augusteus, called the Golden Hand, where the emperor received the proskynesis of the magistroi and other high officials; then across the Onopodion for the proskynesis of the Droungarios of the Fleet; then to the Consistorium where another cross of Constantine and the Rod of Moses were set up and the Protasecretis and imperial notarii were waiting; then through the porticoes of the Candidati, the Exkoubita, and the Scholae, where the emperor was acclaimed in Latin—now generally unintelligible—by the imperial
guards who bore as many of the ancient banners and standards as could be kept in repair. Next came the Tribounalion, where the emperor was acclaimed by the circus factions. Then he proceeded through the Propylaion of the Holy Apostles to the Chalke Gate for more acclamations by the factions; and from there he went to Hagia Sophia for the liturgy (De Cerimoniis 1935–9: 1. 3–28).

For state receptions in the Magnaura, imperial officials went directly at the first hour of the morning to the Magnaura, and the emperor went privately, as he always did when not taking part in a formal procession, through a system of corridors which brought him up from the lower Palace to the Magnaura. There, after the emperor had taken his place on the throne of Solomon, vested in cloak and crown, the assembly of officials would be admitted by the eight ‘curtains’, each preceded by ostiarioi, or porters, carrying wands. When the visiting foreigner was brought in and bowed down in proskynesis the organs would sound. And as the Logothete asked the questions prescribed by protocol, the throne’s automata came into action: lions on the steps up to the throne roared and wagged their tails, and birds sang in trees. The automata obligingly stopped for a time to allow the foreigner to speak, and then started again as he went out (De Cerimoniis 1829: 566–70).

Such is the reception reported by Liudprand, whose Antapodosis and Legatio are a rich source for the Byzantine Court; and the De Cerimoniis records three such receptions for Arab envoys and another for the princess Olga of Russia during the reign of Constantine VII. As in the case of other allied foreign sovereigns, Olga was apparently granted an imperial title: that of Zoste Patrikia; and, in accordance with the ceremonies for this rank, she received in turn the proskynesis of the wives of imperial officials admitted to a second reception ‘by curtains’ in the Ioustinianos, together with the empress Helena and her daughter-in-law, the wife of Romanos II (Liudprand 1997: 147–50, 187–218; De Cerimoniis 1829: 583–95; Tinnefeld 2005).

After such receptions or after the liturgy in Hagia Sophia, the emperor normally returned to the Koiton privately through the corridors, whereas the officials and foreign guests who were invited to dine made their way to the Palace through the old buildings on the upper terrace. By the tenth century banquets were almost always held in the Ioustinianos or the Chrysotriklinos, where we find the only mention of kitchens in the De Ceremoniis. On special occasions banquets might be accompanied by the choristers of Hagia Sophia and the church of the Holy Apostles, who stood behind the curtains of the side vaults of the Chrysotriklinos. The playing of organs marked the entry of the various courses of the meal. On great secular holidays there might also be a ballet, either before the banquet in the Sigma–Triconchus complex or in the Chrysotriklinos during the meal. On each of the twelve days of Christmas, however, ancient custom was preserved and banquets were held in the Triklinos of the Nineteen Couches, reclining in the Roman style. The organization of these Christmas banquets, with the complete list of the court officials and employees invited and where each one was placed in the hall, is
described in detail in the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos (Oikonomides 1992: 165–85; see also Oikonomides 1997).

Another part of the old palace where particularly ancient ceremonies persisted was the Kathisma in the Hippodrome. Six lengthy chapters in the *De Cerimoniis* describe in detail the procedure for races and the appearance of the emperor on such holidays as the anniversary of the City on 11 May. These chapters contain precious information, taken from older sources, concerning various ceremonies connected with the races and which incorporated late antique imperial ideology. But again, we must be wary of antiquarianism. For a true glimpse of the Hippodrome in the Middle Byzantine period the description of the races put on—or, we might say, staged—for Arab envoys in 946 is much more telling. Here, as in ceremonies elsewhere which have nothing to do with the Hippodrome, we see that the circus factions were now reduced to a purely ornamental function as chanters of acclamations and dancers. Moreover, the races themselves appear as little more than another pretext for the extravagant display of costume; there is an apparent disregard for sport, equal honours being given to the winning and the losing faction. All this would suggest that the Hippodrome, once a place where the ruler confronted the populace and the factions took a live interest in the races and issues of the day, had also become, by the tenth century, a sort of museum piece, with stylized ceremonies repeated at set dates in the year and to impress foreign visitors (*De Cerimoniis* 1829: 588–90; Cameron, A. D. E. 1976: 231–308; Dagron 2000; Mango 1981: 344–50).

Whatever the nature of the ceremonies of the Hippodrome, the Kathisma was included within Phokas’ walls of 969 and races continued to be held until 1204, though in the Komnenian period the Hippodrome was also used for western-style entertainments such as jousts. Though conservative in character, Byzantine court ceremonial evolved and reinvented itself. True, in the later tenth century the Consistorion is still referred to as the ‘hall where canopy hangs and the magistroi are promoted’, as though such promotions were still performed there. But we note that the very name of the hall had been forgotten, not to mention its original function; and we cannot be sure of the continuity of this or other ceremonies. For his coronation in 963 Nikephoros Phokas omitted altogether the old palace and Hippodrome, which had figured at least partially in coronations since that of Leo II, and improvised a military acclamation at the Golden Gate outside the city copied literally from an account of the coronation of Leo I in 457. This was followed by a triumphal entry through the Golden Gate and procession along the Mese, amidst the acclamations of the populace, to Hagia Sophia for coronation by the patriarch. Phokas’ choice not to commence his reign in the old palace, much of which his walls would soon eliminate, and to enter through the Golden Gate was perhaps connected with the reconstruction of this latter as a triumphal arch in this same period (*De Cerimoniis* 1829: 438–40; Mango 2000: 181–6).

The Great Palace has been described as a ‘dam against the river of change’. The measures of Nikephoros Phokas diminished its role in imperial ceremonial, but this
was not enough for the Komnenian emperors who, fifty years later, moved the court to the Blachernai where it remained until the end of Byzantium and from whence Palailogan ceremonial was passed on to western courts through the Pseudo-Kodinos (Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 195–6; Pseudo-Kodinos 1966: 23–123).

**References and Further Reading**


