

Ties between Kievan Rus and the Byzantine Empire in the 9th and 10th centuries were mainly of a trade and military nature. The situation had changed however, at the close of the 10th century. Not only had the Kievan Prince Vladimir Sviatoslavich adopted Christianity from Constantinople, he had also taken to wife, Anna Porphyrogenita, the Byzantine princess and sister of Basil II Bulgaroktonos. Vladimir's marriage to a princess born to imperial purple signified a great honour for the Rurik dynasty, an honour not achieved even by the emperor Otto I who requested the hand in marriage of the Byzantine purpleborn or Porphyrogenitus for his son Otto II. Anna also brought her craftsmen and priests with her to Russia, they helped christianize the country. The craftsmen taught local builders to build large stone churches and decorate them with mosaics and frescoes. The introduction of christianity also saw the spread of the culture of the written word.

Another Byzantine princess in Rus was the mother of Vladimir II Monomakh, of whom we have very little knowledge. There is a legend relating to relics connected to his nick-name which he took from his mother after the emperor Constantine IX. The so called legend of Monomakh relics became important in the period between the 15th and 16th centuries, when the great Moscow prince began using the title Tsar.

The last two Byzantine princesses to join the Rus dynasty, did so in the 15th century. One was Marie, the daughter of Andreas Palaiolog, she married the Prince Vasily Mikailovich. The other was Zóé Palaiolog, the daughter of Thomy Palaiolog and niece to the last two Byzantine emperors Constantine XI. a John VIII., she married the muscovite Prince Ivan III. Zóé did not arrive in Rus from Byzantium, but from Rome. She was escorted by ranks of educated Greeks who taught the Boyars diplomacy.

Byzantine princesses who married Rus princes, came from a vastly different environment. They themselves and their delegations had to cope with these changes.

Rus existed alongside Byzantium, who as a result of its christianization, also influenced surrounding empires in much the same way. Dynastic marriages between Rurik and Byzantine emperors, served to strengthen this sphere of influence and raise Russian princes in the eyes of the rest of Christendom.