

Introduction

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WHAT IS BYZANTIUM? THE question is not easy to answer. Is it a place, a time, an idea? Is Byzantium a closed chapter in history books or can it be part of modern Europe? Is it irretrievably lost, a kind of Arcadia – a topos rather than a reality, a nebulous yardstick against which we may measure our dreams and nightmares, a fairytale beyond time and space? Can we actually sail there, or may we only be distant spectators?

There has long been a desire and a need for Byzantium. This need has been more or less detached from the chronological period and the geographical area to which the term Byzantium has been attached by scholars since the sixteenth century, a century after the fall of the empire known to its inhabitants as Roman and to its enemies as Greek. It is widely understood that those objects – textual and material, manuscripts and statues – that were taken to Western Europe from within the empire from the period of the Crusades onwards inspired ‘renaissances’. Generations of scholars and artists, and their patrons, in Western Europe were offered opportunities to contemplate and rediscover their Greek and Roman pasts. In popular historical accounts, the arrival of Byzantine artists and writers, philosophers and theologians, fleeing the Ottoman Turks, has long been used to explain the origins of the Italian Renaissance. But in this tradition, ostensibly positive, Byzantium has been treated not as a creative culture nor even as an incubator of ideas, but rather as if it were a refrigerator, keeping antiquity in a state of preservation until its rediscovery, or reinvention in Western Europe.

An interest in the history of what came to be called Byzantium had emerged in Italy at this time. Shortly after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, inspired by the arrival of émigré intellectuals, Italians learnt Greek and began to translate Greek texts into Latin and Italian. They embraced the later Roman history of the East as their common history, for example that contained in Prokopios’ *Wars*, written in the sixth century. The production of the first Latin translations of Byzantine Greek texts, including works by Prokopios, began as early as 1441. Initially, mining such histories for details of regional and local history was far more compelling than producing editions, but still editions of medieval Greek texts were produced, and the emphasis was on producing a complete run of Byzantine historiography. Interest was spurred by the encroachments of the Ottoman Turks, now masters of Byzantium, who reached the walls of Vienna in 1529.

Augsburg, a southern German city that dominated trade between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, became the first centre of editorial activity. It was through

the commercial family firm Fugger that the father of modern Byzantine studies, Hieronymus Wolf, was forced into editing the histories of John Zonaras. Wolf was private secretary to the nephew of the proprietor of the Fugger business. The Augsburgian tradition continued into the seventeenth century, even as other centres emerged, notably Leiden and subsequently Paris. The first corpus, the *Byzantine du Louvre* (or *Corpus Parisiense*) was edited under the auspices of Louis XIV from 1645 to 1688, and manuscripts flowed into the Royal Library. The complete corpus was reprinted in Venice (1729–33), aimed at a broader readership, even before the last volume was added in 1819. A decade later began the publication of the so-called Bonn corpus, the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, which is only today being replaced by modern editions.

Since the eighteenth century, Byzantium has been made to represent admirable wealth and luxury as well as detestable corruption and decadence. This area is now well studied and the name Edward Gibbon invariably invoked alongside the dismissive judgements tendered by Montesquieu and, somewhat later, Lecky. In varying guises through two centuries, Byzantium has appeared in political conflicts in Southeastern Europe. As the Ottoman empire dissolved, many inhabitants of post-Byzantine lands south of the Danube and Sava rivers embraced Byzantine history and culture as their own and identified it as European. They have done so not to emphasize their common past, however, but to highlight earlier ‘national’ characteristics in opposition to each other. The Greeks, the Bulgarians, Serbs and other Southern Slavs during the period of nation formation in the Balkans formulated distinct, mutually hostile medieval histories and established national museums that have perpetuated divisions. Academic study of the Balkan nation states continues to raise awareness of the importance of Byzantium in competing Greek, Slavic and Turkish national narratives.

We are approaching a juncture where the manipulation of the historical past to suit present political and cultural agendas is increasingly condemned in post-Byzantine lands, and when the common legacy of Byzantium can be seen as broadly unifying. However, there is still no developed field of study concerned with the reception of Byzantium in Europe, as there is a highly developed field devoted to the reception of classical antiquity.¹ And there is still no general cultural history of Europe written for those who live beyond Byzantium, no narrative for Western European, North American or Australasian readers that fully measures the impact and legacy of Byzantium. Popular history books, with notable exceptions, continue to present a vision of Byzantium that has not much changed since the nineteenth century, as an oriental adjunct to the Latin West, the ‘bulwark of Christendom’ against the Muslim Arab and Turk.

¹ This incipient field includes but a few studies: Kolovou 2012 and Marciniak & Smythe (forthcoming); see also Altripp 2011 and Delouis, Couderc & Guran 2013, and note the section “The World of Byzantine Studies” in Stephenson 2010, 429–509.

The nature and meaning of Byzantium, its elusive and ineffable qualities that have for centuries attracted poets, writers and artists rather than the deeds of emperors and saints, now have the attention of scholars. One might date the uptick in this fascination with definition to the inaugural lecture by Averil Cameron, delivered at King's College London in 1990, under the title "The Use & Abuse of Byzantium".² The abuse of Byzantium has more often been in focus than its more positive uses, but Cameron has increasingly advanced a positive programme for remedying the 'absence of Byzantium'.³ Following Cameron's lead in moving beyond discussion of orientalism and eurocentrism, we become better equipped to understand and appreciate the longstanding fascination with the empire and its many cultural expressions. Because regardless of the numerous disdainful comments on Byzantine literature, politics, and religion – penetrating even the linguistic area so that the adjective 'Byzantine' carries negative connotations – there has also been many ways of appreciating and praising Byzantium, often brimming with a desire to identify and appropriate what is specifically Byzantine. It is this desire for Byzantium, how and why it has been wanted, that is the theme of this volume. Contributors explore this question from numerous perspectives, hunting out, finding, displaying, and exposing Byzantium, sometimes in ways now familiar, but also in places and manners previously neglected.



We begin by considering the invention and continuous reinvention of Byzantium in John Burke's "Inventing and re-inventing Byzantium". Burke investigates the 'quicksilver concept' that is Byzantium by identifying and analysing three different but curiously interrelated areas: the contemporary use of medieval portraits of Byzantine emperors, primarily in Greece and Cyprus; the location of these uses within the broader framework of Byzantine Studies in the Greek-speaking world; and the early history of Constantinople's identity as 'New Rome'. By examining the sources, Burke argues that the name 'New Rome' was not an official name for Constantinople at the time of its refoundation by Constantine the Great, but that it was part of a process of reinvention which began shortly afterwards.

The question of reinvention and novelty ties in with the topic of the next contribution, "Was innovation unwanted in Byzantium?" by Apostolos Spanos. Spanos addresses the controversial question of Byzantine innovation, which for a long time was seen as contradicting Byzantine conservatism and therefore as something incontrovertibly negative in the Byzantines' own eyes. Spanos investigates

² Cameron 1992. Subsequently, see Cormack & Jeffreys 2000, Auzépy 2003 and Spieser 2007; note also Stephenson 2010b and Ronchey 2011.

³ Cameron 2003, 2007, 2008 along with the many responses in subsequent fascicles of *Nea Hestia* (largely in Greek), 2011 and 2014.

lexicographic explanations of the word 'innovation' before turning to the study of political and religious texts and, finally, comparing ancient Greek and Byzantine understandings of the concept of innovation. He concludes that the modern idea that innovation was more or less unwanted in Byzantium is contradicted by a large number of different sources.

In the next article we move to the North and the appropriation not of cities, but of identity and cultural heritage. Fedir Androshchuk asks the question "What does it mean to be Greek in Rus'?" and discusses questions of cultural transfer. How can we trace Byzantine identity in material culture when the long history of the empire suggests that we are dealing with many different worlds of Byzantium? Bearing that question in mind, Androshchuk examines Byzantine finds in Sweden and Novgorod in order to understand them as parts of dispersed 'cultural hearths' expressing the Greek or Byzantine within the frame of northern cultural contexts. Without an understanding of such vehicles of cultural transfer, argues Androshchuk, it is quite impossible to imagine the real cultural impact of Byzantium.

We then return to Constantinople to reconsider a crucial historical 'fact': the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453. In "When did Constantinople actually fall?", Olof Heilo opens by discussing the terms 'fall' vs 'conquest' and their respective implications for the understanding of historical events. He then moves on to a comparative study of the event in various sources, the focus of his essay being the underlying narrative conflict of Constantinople always being caught in the middle between East and West, Europe and Asia, Islam and Christianity. In the historiographical tradition, Constantinople often seems to be passively 'wanted' as an object of desire, but not acknowledged as an active historical subject with its own wants and desires. This aspect is still highly relevant in light of recent Turkish and European politics.

Adam Goldwyn then takes us beyond 1453 with his "Life after death in Greek laments about the fall of Constantinople". In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest, survivors turned to the ancient Greek literary genre of lament in order to express their distress. Goldwyn argues that the use of the stylized and formulaic lament entailed a reinterpretation of the City's symbolic meaning in the Byzantine imagination, aiming at salvaging what they could of their existing personal, religious, and political ideologies. These ideologies were then fused with an emergent ideology forged from their experience of the sack and its aftermath, a combination which resulted in a post-conquest ideology more suited to the new realities of their experience as exiles and refugees.

Some of the refugees from Constantinople settled down in Venice, which had a significant Greek presence at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Ersie Burke introduces us to the Byzantine inhabitants of Venice with a special focus on the privileged class of notables in her "Surviving exile" on the Byzantine families in Venice 1453–1600. Venetian state archives hold a wealth of documentation about

these families, especially about their professional and personal lives. Based on this documentation, Burke tells their stories, describes what happened to them after 1453, and explains why they moved to Venice. By examining their transition from privileged to subject status and analysing their impact, if any, on the local community of Greeks, she ultimately aims at analysing how they identified themselves and how the way in which they were identified by others changed over time.

Staying with questions of identity and returning to issues of innovation, Helen Saradi takes us from Byzantium to modern Greece in her study of the three Fathers of the Greek Orthodox Church: “Greek *paideia*, Byzantine innovation and the formation of modern Greek identity”. In the contemporary Greek state, the Three Fathers of the Orthodox Church – St. Basil, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom – are honored as protectors of Greek education for combining Greek learning with the Orthodox dogma. Saradi traces this ideological combination of the Three Church Fathers and Greek *paideia* from the eleventh century and authors such as John Mauropous all the way up to the Greek War of Independence (1821) and the modern Greek state. Greek history, Saradi maintains, was continuous through Byzantium, combining Greek learning with the Orthodox faith.

In the following contribution, Tonje Haugland Sørensen looks at the appropriation of Byzantine artefacts under the title “The mosaic in the apse”. In the late nineteenth century, a medieval mosaic from Murano was bought by the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV and shipped to Berlin. The mosaic, with a depiction of the *deesis*, would serve as the centerpiece in the king’s Neo-Byzantine church, dedicated to peace and the idea of a purer, more archaic Christianity. By applying Jan Assman’s concept of cultural memory to this event, Haugland Sørensen examines how the mosaic was remediated through the lens of memory to serve as a reminder of an idealized and Orientalized concept of Byzantium.

Turning to another kind of artefacts, we move on to texts and manuscripts with “Paul Moore and More Psellos”. Barbara Crostini here asks herself whether we really want more of Psellos, an author in whose surviving manuscripts philologists already seem to be drowning. By examining Paul Moore’s *Iter Psellianum* against newly discovered fragments, Crostini shows how the manuscript tradition may still surprise us by throwing up ‘new’ material that alters the picture we have created of an author and his corpus. New discoveries may accordingly create a renewed thirst for the sources of textual history, bearing unexpected fruits. The importance of combining palaeographical knowledge with historical and literary studies is thus crucial in the field of Byzantine Studies.

In the next article we turn to yet another kind of source material, namely music. While texts written within the realm of the Byzantine empire may more or less unproblematically be referred to as Byzantine, the situation with later Orthodox music is more difficult. Tore Tvarnø Lind approaches the problem from the perspective of anthropological musicology in his “Night at the Museum”. Based on

fieldwork in Vatopedi Monastery, Lind discusses the possible understandings of 'Byzantineness' in relation to the musical tradition at Mount Athos, exploring a topological (discursive) as well as topographical (geographical) space. He argues that the musical Byzantium that is wanted on Athos is alive and well, at least when it is filtered through the concepts of remoteness and tradition.

Helena Bodin helps us to further explore the need and desire for the 'Byzantine' in the modern and postmodern period as we move on "Into Golden Dusk" with her. Bodin views the late twentieth-century Western beholder of Byzantine icons as someone who has adapted to Byzantine theology and aesthetics of icons and now uses Byzantine terminology to discuss not only the art of Orthodox icons per se, but also the most demanding issues of modernism and postmodernism, such as the (im)possibility of representation and semiotic and epistemological problems. Bodin examines and discusses this phenomenon with examples from both literary theories and practices, ranging from Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva to the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer.

In the following contribution we stay within the realm of literary desire but move beyond European borders in Eric Cullhed's "From Byzantium to the Andes". Tangible connections between the Byzantine empire and the American continent are rare and rarely discussed, but in fact the last known descendant of the Palaiologan dynasty, Ferdinando Paleologus, ended his days as a plantation owner on Barbados where he died in 1678. His tombstone caught the attention of the Cuban author Alejo Carpentier, and via his writings the mysterious link to Byzantium gradually developed into a central element in a sustained reflection on the historical narratives of Europe and America. Cullhed examines various such literary transpositions and appropriations involving Byzantium in Hispanic American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Much better known 'Byzantine' poems were written by W. B. Yeats, whose "Sailing to Byzantium" has received an enormous amount of attention also within the field of Yeats studies. In "Perne in a Gyre", Thomas Sjösvärd turns also to the less famous, though no less important, poem "Wisdom", and to the esoteric work *A Vision*. In the latter, Yeats explains that if he were given "a month of antiquity," he "would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato". In many ways, Yeats' works indeed reflect the notion of Byzantium as an ideal state, but Sjösvärd aims at offering a more complex picture of how this ideal is represented, not the least through ekphrastic strategies.

While Byzantium indeed has offered much inspiration for poetry and art, the cinematic field has not quite discovered the potential of Byzantine history. Przemysław Marciniak offers an overview of what has been done so far in his "And the Oscar goes to...the Emperor!". Starting with the silent films of the early 1900s, Marciniak presents and discusses the movies in which Byzantium has been imagined, focussing especially on movies in which the Empress Theodora and the fall

of Constantinople appear. These two themes seem to dominate Byzantine film, but they also represent persistent imageries of what is Byzantine: decadence, fall and decline. Movies may thus be seen not merely as entertainment; according to Marciniak, they can also be deciphered as a political commentary on their own times.

A different but related phenomenon is discussed in the contributions by Isabel Kimmelfield and Paul Stephenson, devoted to the collection and display of Byzantine artefacts in Western European and North American contexts. Artefacts may indeed be seen simply as precious objects, but they most often also represent something to the person who wished to have them. In order to understand the full implications of such trade, we need to ask ourselves questions such as how, when and why collections of Byzantine artefacts were formed. Kimmelfield considers recent grand exhibitions staged by large institutions – the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Royal Academy in London – identifying a fascinating phenomenon that has been used to sell Byzantium: ethnic marketing. Stephenson focusses on earlier exhibitions and temporary displays of Byzantine antiquities in North America, following a short discussion of cultural property laws as they exist today, in contrast to the policy of *partage* that facilitated the collection of Byzantine artefacts in the USA and promoted the study of the subject. Together, they conclude that the acquisition and display of Byzantine objects continue to inspire the desire for Byzantium, since audiences clearly want more.



It is clear that Byzantium or perhaps rather the ‘Byzantine’ has been desired in numerous places and contexts throughout history, and what we find in this volume is merely a small selection of examples. Some of them tie in more directly with the field of reception studies, in their exploration of the use of Byzantine artefacts or literary elements in the creation of new pieces of art or literary genres. What characterizes the present volume is, however, its focus on desire and wanting – something that may go beyond the mere acquisition or appropriation of objects or ideas. Our contributors have not focussed so much on what Byzantium ‘was really like’ as an historical entity in time and space, but how it has been (and still is) described and understood, and for what purposes it has been used – desired or rejected depending on the context. In hindsight we may notice that when focussing on the wanted, very little of the traditionally negative image has appeared. Byzantium is not a less glorious alternative to an ever-admired marble-clad Antiquity. What we find here is rather a series of gleaming gems, no longer hidden by the sooty and incense-scented prejudices of the past.

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