



# The Routledge Handbook of the Modern Reception of Byzantium

Edited by Niamh Bhalla and Dimitra Kotoula

# THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF THE MODERN RECEPTION OF BYZANTIUM

*The Routledge Handbook of the Modern Reception of Byzantium* provides a systematic and comprehensive commentary on the various ways that Byzantium has been responded to in the modern world and introduces the reader to areas of Byzantine reception not covered to date through its international case studies.

Most studies dealing with the modern reception of Byzantium focus on its role in the formation of national or European identities, or as an exotic “other”, without covering the various spheres of culture, beyond history writing and literature, within which the reception of Byzantium may be discerned. This Handbook responds to the need perceived by scholars and students for a publication that brings definition and clarity to this growing field of Byzantine studies. The volume is structured around seven thematic sections – histories, politics, architecture, art, display, literature and embodied and performative culture – each opened by a substantial conceptual essay from a leading scholar, and expanded through focused case studies that range geographically from China and Argentina to Ukraine, Ethiopia and the Greek diaspora in the United States. Together, 49 contributions from an internationally distinguished roster of scholars illuminate Byzantium as a polysemic signifier: from decadence and bureaucratic complexity to spiritual purity, creative reinvention and nationalist aspiration. Richly illustrated and expansive in scope, the volume gives particular attention to receptions long inaccessible to an English-speaking audience, correcting the field’s historic privileging of Western European perspectives.

An essential reference work for researchers, lecturers and students, the Handbook will be indispensable across Byzantine studies, art history, architecture, cultural history, political thought, literary studies, film and heritage studies.

**Niamh Bhalla** is Assistant Dean, Associate Professor of Art History and Director for Belonging at Northeastern University, London, U.K. Specialising in early Christian and Byzantine art and architecture, and their modern revivals, her work engages with the lived experience of art and visual and material theology. She is the author of *Experiencing the Last Judgement* (Routledge, 2021) and *Newman University Church, Dublin: Architectural revivalism in the British Isles and the authority of form* (2024).

**Dimitra Kotoula** is Curator at the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and teaches Byzantine Art History and Archaeology at College Year in Athens based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Her research focuses on modern receptions of Byzantium, issues of form and function in Byzantine art, with particular emphasis on eschatology, as well as post-Byzantine networks of humanism, artistic exchanges and the post-Byzantine icon.

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# NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND EDITORIAL CONVENTIONS

Greek transliteration follows the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Well-known names appear in their conventional Latinate or English forms. Modern Greek book titles are transliterated or translated to better serve the essays. Russian and Eastern European languages are generally transliterated according to the ALA-LC Romanization Tables (Library of Congress), including book titles; however, authorial discretion has been respected. Author names are transliterated according to their own preferences. Place names follow conventional English forms or individual author preference, which may result in variant spellings. Non-English publication titles are given in transliteration or translation throughout, as best serves the context of each essay. Abbreviations for journals and series follow *L'Année philologique*. While the editors have sought consistency throughout for the benefit of our readers, familiarity has also been prioritised and ultimately, individual contributor preferences have been respected where strongly held, reflecting a recognition that the modern study of Byzantium is shaped by diverse linguistic, cultural, and national traditions.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Jenny Albani** is Independent Scholar specialising in Byzantine Art History, based in Greece.

**Christine Amadou** is Professor of the History of Ideas at the University of Oslo.

**Caroula Argyriadis-Kervegan** is Professor for Legal History at the CY Cergy Paris Université, France.

**Jennifer Ball** is Professor of Byzantine Art History at the City University of New York, U.S.A.

**Charles Barber** is Donald Drew Egbert Professor in the Department of Art & Archaeology at Princeton University.

**Niamh Bhalla** is Assistant Dean, Associate Professor of Art History and Director for Belonging at Northeastern University, London.

**Stacy Boldrick** is Associate Professor of Art Gallery and Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, U.K.

**Mark Byron** is Professor of Modern Literature at the University of Sydney, Australia.

**Pablo A. Cavallero** is full Professor of Greek Language and Culture at the University of Buenos Aires, Rep. Argentina.

**Dragan Damjanović** is Professor at University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Art History Department.

**Maryna Domanovska**, PhD (History), is Associate Professor in the Department of Ukrainian Studies, Philosophy Faculty at V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Kharkiv, Ukraine.

### *Contributors*

**Andrii Domanovskyi**, PhD (History), is Correspondent for the “Army In form” Information Agency of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine.

**Vassiliki Dimitropoulou** is Art Historian at the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Athens, Greece.

**Antony Eastmond** is A.G. Leventis Professor of Byzantine Art at The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London.

**Marco Fasolio** is Lecturer of Medieval History and Latin Palaeography at the University of Eastern Piedmont, Italy.

**Ivan Foletti** is Professor of Medieval Art History at the Masaryk University, Brno, CZ, and Privatdozent in Church History at University of Helsinki.

**Nazénie Garibian** is head of the Medieval Art Studies Department at the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts “Matenadaran” (Yerevan, Armenia) and Professor of Art History at the National Academy of Fine Arts of Armenia.

**Giovanni Gasbarri** is Researcher at the Institute of Heritage Science (ISPC) of the National Research Council of Italy (CNR).

**Lora Gerd** is Chief Researcher at the Saint Petersburg Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences.

**Irene Gviashvili** is a freelancer at the Max-Planck-Institut-Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Italy.

**Marios Hatzopoulos** is Assistant Professor of Historical Sociology at the University of Crete.

**Liz James** is Professor of Art History at the University of Sussex, U.K.

**Catherine Jolivet-Lévy** is Director of Studies Emeritus at the École pratique des hautes études, Université PSL (Paris Sciences et Lettres).

**Aleksandar Kadijević** was Professor in the Department of Art History at the University in Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy, Serbia.

**Thomas Kaffenberger** is Fellow for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at the Villa I Tatti, Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence and at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington.

**Dimitra Kotoula** is Art Historian at the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Professor of Byzantine and Medieval Art History at A College Year in Athens.

**Kostis Kourelis** is Professor of Architectural History at Franklin & Marshall College, U.S.A.



## *Contributors*

**Markéta Kulhánková** is Senior Researcher at the Czech Academy of Sciences and Associate Professor at the Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic.

**Francesco Lovino** is Assistant Professor in History of Medieval Art at the Università degli Studi di Ferrara, Italy.

**Alexios Mainas** is an Independent Scholar, Essayist and Poet.

**Nikolaos Maliaras** is Professor of Musicology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.

**Przemysław Marciniak** is Research Professor of Byzantine Literature at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland.

**Anna Mgaloblishvili** is Professor of Art History at the Caucasus University, Georgia.

**Diana Mishkova** is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History of Southeastern Europe and Director of the Centre for Advanced Study, Sofia.

**Mikael Muehlbauer** is an Independent Scholar.

**Robert S. Nelson** is Emeritus Professor at Yale University/University of Chicago.

**Glenn Peers** is Emeritus Professor of the History of Art at the University of Texas at Austin and Syracuse University.

**Yuri Pyatnitsky** is Curator of the Byzantine collection in the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia.

**Sarah Riccardi-Swartz** is Assistant Professor of Religion and Anthropology at Northeastern University.

**Yuri R. Saveliev** is Professor of Byzantine and Russian Art History at the Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia.

**Ufuk Serin** is Associate Professor of Architecture at the Middle East Technical University (Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi), Ankara, Türkiye.

**Panagiotis Theodoropoulos** is a librarian at the Library of the Church of Greece.

**Panayotis Tournikiotis** is Professor Emeritus of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens, GR.

**Maria Vassilaki** is Emerita Professor in Byzantine Art History at the University of Thessaly, Greece and a member of the Benaki Museum Board of Trustees.

### *Contributors*

**Alicia Walker** is Professor of Medieval Art and Architectural History at Bryn Mawr College, U.S.A.

**Andrew Walker White** currently holds joint appointments with the faculties of Art and Art History, Religious Studies, and Classics at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.

**Elizabeth Dospěl Williams** is Penny Vinik Chair in the David and Roberta Logie Department of Fashion, Textiles, and Jewelry at the MFA Boston and Associate in Research with the Standing Committee for Medieval Studies, Harvard University.

**Şule Kılıç Yıldız** is an art and architectural historian at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye.

**Chen Zhiqiang** is Professor of History at Nankai University, Department of World History.

## PART I

# Introduction



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# 1

## SAILING TO WHERE?

### The Polysemic World of “Byzantium” and Its (Mis?)Perceptions

*Niamh Bhalla and Dimitra Kotoula*

In 2016, while debating immigration in the face of an impending Brexit, the European Union Commission of the House of Lords commented that the Points-Based System for those wishing to enter the United Kingdom had now reached a level of complexity that even a Byzantine emperor would have envied. Labyrinthine political structures and merciless bureaucracy – the privileging of process over outcomes and abstract political theorising over pragmatism – are just a few of the many perceptions that have shaped the meaning of the adjective “Byzantine” as it developed in common parlance across most European languages in the modern period. Since Hieronymus Wolf (1516–80) embedded the term in academic discourse, despite his disdain for the civilisation, extending the name of the old Greek city of *Byzantion* to the medieval Roman Empire as a whole and allotting it a place in the emergent periodisation of history by western European scholars, Byzantium has been a polysemic term laden with a diverse and often deeply conflicting range of connotations. From decadence, decay and perpetual, inevitable decline, to religious purity or degeneration, from social utopia to model for autocracy (perceived positively and negatively) and from creative atrophy to material luxury, visual superiority, authority and prestige, Byzantium has held an enduring, but fundamentally conflicted, role in shaping modernity.

Reception of what was, in fact, the eastern half of the Roman Empire as it survived into the Middle Ages began long before the modern period. However, this Handbook, by definition, addresses the most confounding aspect of this phenomenon: the invention and crafting of “Byzantium” as a term and concept that began in earnest in nineteenth-century Europe – its various manifestations, connected to a greater or lesser extent to the historical entity that this retro/exonym claims to represent. The creation and re-creations of Byzantium, the interplay of references to the original *relatum* and its perceived characteristics, intensified during the modern era in response to the pressures and possibilities transforming European societies – from the development of modern nation states to industrialisation, the birth of both modern academia and modern art, and the decline and reassertion of faith traditions.

These reimaginings were generative forces, spawning a further array of neologisms: “Byzantinism”, “Neo-Byzantinism”, “Neo-Orthodoxy”, “Grecianising”, “the Byzantine Revival”, “Byzantinomania” and the “new Byzantine”. The dynamism of these re-makings, and the meaning-defining vectors that these compound signifiers constituted, generated

even greater distance from the historical entity at issue. They reflected in some cases not only which “Byzantium” they were responding to but also the purposes of their creation. Many of these terms are explored here by means of a series of case studies that provide parameters that can help us understand and interpret the heterogeneous phenomenon of the modern reception of “Byzantium”.

The variety of “Byzantiums” responded to in this volume and the range and disagreements of terminology – which have purposely been left unresolved through the editorial process – embody the nebulous essence of Byzantine receptions from the early nineteenth century to the present. Each “Byzantium” here shares a loose connection to the medieval Roman Empire, an often-selective interpretation of what was of definitive importance in relation to the identity of that entity (its visual culture, religion, political structure and more) and the desire to create a usable past of benefit to the present.<sup>1</sup> The spheres of modern response to Byzantium – roughly divided here into history making, politics, visual culture, architecture, institutional displays/exhibitions and performative/embodied responses – selected and engaged with those elements from the past that could serve contemporary creative, political and intellectual purposes while disregarding those deemed irrelevant or constraining.

### **Byzantium Before Byzantium**

Byzantium as it exists in common usage is then a retro/exonym – a maladaptation of the name of the Hellenistic city on the Bosphorus that Emperor Constantine I (r. 306–37) chose to make his new imperial capital – New Rome at first but then Constantinople shortly thereafter (324–30). The retrospective application of the Greek place name *Byzantion* to the entirety of the eastern portions of the Roman Empire as it existed in the medieval period began sporadically in the early modern period following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, with reference to the old name of the city. This was symptomatic only of the ascendancy of the city of Constantinople and such uses of “Byzantium” in this regard were few. The self-understanding and self-definition of the people who inhabited these regions as “Rhōmaïoi” (Ῥωμαῖοι) or Romans has been eclipsed because of the race-based and ethnolinguistic ideologies that dominated intellectual thought in the nineteenth century when Byzantine Studies began under the pretence of scientific distance and disinterest.

A homogenisation of response is of course impossible because of the nature of reception itself, which is necessarily plural and subjective, but it becomes fundamentally problematic and most often contradictory in relation to “Byzantium” because of the inherent breadth and diversity of the medieval Roman Empire to which it always loosely or partially pertains.<sup>2</sup> Covering over 1000 years of human history, “Byzantium” pertains to a geographically fluid and culturally diverse political entity. In simple terms, the Byzantine Empire was the continuation of the Roman Empire from 330 to 1453, centred in Constantinople (modern Istanbul) that survived the fall of western Rome and lasted over a thousand years until conquered by the Ottoman Turks. It preserved Roman law and administration, spoke mostly Greek and developed a distinctive Orthodox Christian culture. However, the only thing that most inhabitants of “Byzantium” shared was that they considered themselves to be Romans.<sup>3</sup> The medieval Roman Empire for the duration of its existence experienced dramatic territorial fluctuations that defy simple categorisation. At its zenith under Justinian I (r. 527–65), it stretched from southern Spain to the Euphrates and from the Danube to North Africa, only to contract drastically following the Arab conquests in the seventh century when Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and North Africa were irrevocably lost.

It expanded again into the Balkans and Anatolia during the tenth to eleventh centuries, before fragmenting after 1204 and ultimately shrinking to little more than Constantinople and its immediate surroundings by the fifteenth century. Although it cannot be defined geographically, response has been affected to a large extent by proximity to the regions that once formed part of the empire, and moreover it has been profoundly informed at times by a vague sense of direction: it has been indelibly “Eastern” for many western Europeans – for better or for worse – or irrevocably “Western” for Armenian scholars, for example.<sup>4</sup>

Territorial volatility was matched by remarkable linguistic diversity. While Greek predominated in administration and high culture after a certain date, Latin persisted and the empire encompassed speakers of Armenian, Slavonic languages, Arabic and numerous other tongues.<sup>5</sup> The religious landscape was no less diverse, defined by an “official” Orthodox Christianity that was iterative, evolving and at times contested – not least due to the Christological upheavals of Iconoclasm that dominated substantial swathes of the empire’s history. The empire also included at various points substantial populations of Monophysites, Catholics, Muslims and Jews. The application of any singular ethnic or cultural label to this millennium-long entity is fundamentally untenable. This religious, linguistic and geographical diversity, combined with the absence of any single nation claiming comprehensive “ownership” of Byzantium’s multifaceted legacy, has made diverse interpretations of Byzantine identity inevitable. Modern nations have selectively embraced different aspects of this heritage – language, religion, territory or imperial tradition – creating a myriad of competing “Byzantiums”.

### *The Romanitas of the Empire*

The evolution of this easily moulded “floating signifier”<sup>6</sup> has not been neutral and much attention has been spent recently on the “purposes” that this term fulfilled. Chief amongst them was that this apparently disinterested term successfully facilitated the distancing of the eastern half of the Roman Empire from its western half, rupturing a historical continuum deemed inconvenient for western European identity. The now accepted but still awkward fact that the Romans continued in the East points to one of the first apparent paradoxes of Byzantine reception that there was, and largely still is, no place in the narrative of European history for that eastern part of the Roman Empire that outlived the western part for more than 500 years. Tellingly, modern scholarship has invented for the continuation of both halves almost equally ambivalent names: the Western “Middle Ages”, an entirely relative chronological term which acquires meaning only as a bridge between two eras worthy of a name – the classical world and its reinvention in the Renaissance; and “Byzantium”, used to obscure and marginalise the identity of a civilisation that might conceivably constitute a bridge of sorts between Greco-Roman antiquity and the early modern European world. This seeming anomia became a way of fudging lineages in a way most convenient to modernity in western Europe, which is always the end point of these teleological histories.

Its “Romanness” has been the most persistently contested/disregarded strand in relation to modern receptions of Byzantium, regardless of strong scholarly arguments regarding its centrality to Byzantine identity.<sup>7</sup> Prominent Irish historian J.B. Bury (1861–1927) asserted that Byzantium was a fundamentally Roman civilisation, contesting the idea of separation. His approach was progressive but did not gain the traction it deserved. His *History of the Later Roman Empire* (1923) argued for the continuation of the Roman Empire – legally, institutionally and politically – by means of its eastern provinces without rupture,

maintaining that the traditional historiographical division between the “Roman” and “Byzantine” periods was artificial and reflected modern prejudices rather than historical reality. Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) challenged western European historical dominance in his influential work *Byzance après Byzance: Continuation de l’Histoire de la vie Byzantine* (1935), now a classic for Byzantine reception studies.<sup>8</sup> Having first presented his core thesis at the 1934 Congress for Byzantine Studies in Sofia before publishing the full study in French the following year, Iorga contended that Byzantine political influence persisted long after 1453, continuing to shape the political, cultural and social development of the Wallachian and Moldavian principalities and, through them, broader European civilisation.

Most recently, Anthony Kaldellis has charted in depth the denial of the Romanness of Byzantium from 800 CE onwards as necessary for the *translatio imperii* with regard to the Roman legacy to western Europe, locating this form of response as starting in the medieval period. Indeed, the Byzantines themselves had to defend their Romanness at least twice in their history. The coronation of Charlemagne as the “Emperor of the Romans” by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day 800 CE created a fundamental challenge to Byzantine claims of Roman legitimacy and sparked centuries of diplomatic and ideological conflict. The eastern Romans initially refused to recognise the Carolingian imperial title, considering it barbarian pretence. However, after military conflicts and complex negotiations, the 812 Treaty of Aachen represented a compromise: the Byzantines agreed to recognise Charlemagne as “Emperor” (imperator) but not as “Emperor of the Romans”. The Carolingian Empire and its successors (particularly the Holy Roman Empire, 962–1806) were a self-understood revival of the Roman Empire, while Byzantium maintained its self-understood position as the continued Roman Empire. These entrenched standpoints contributed to deep cultural and religious divisions between Greek Orthodox Byzantium and Latin Catholic western Europe, contributing to the eventual Great Schism of 1054.

While the Holy Roman Empire claimed succession from the *Imperium Romanum* by means of papal coronation for the most part, to the east the Seljuk Turks who defeated the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, established themselves as the Sultanate of Rum (1077–1308). Their claim to be the successors of “Rum” (Rome in Arabic and Turkish) was not based on language, culture or religion but on the virtue of territorial conquest of the Roman heartland of Anatolia and to a lesser extent administrative succession by means of continuing Byzantine practices, including taxation systems. Their rule was largely pragmatic related to successfully establishing themselves as leaders over a new region and it was not until the later Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 that Mehmed II (1432–81) declared himself “Roman Emperor” (Kayser-i Rum).<sup>9</sup> The reception of the medieval Roman Empire started long before its fall: other cultures responded to it for the duration of its existence and thereafter.<sup>10</sup>

### *Hellenic Byzantium*

The Romanness of the Byzantine Empire has been identified as only one of the pillars that defined the medieval Roman Empire throughout its existence and in the continuing response since then as an entity that was largely “hellenophone in its intellectual production, Roman in administration and Christian in its birth”.<sup>11</sup> From these perceived characteristics there emerged other names for this empire and its people.<sup>12</sup> The imprecise ethnolinguistic



appellation “the Empire of the Greeks” had been used in the medieval West and early modernity precisely because it allowed western Europe to situate itself as the heir of Rome from the time of Charlemagne, but this title became increasingly problematic in the wake of Greek irredentism following the Greek War of Independence from the Ottomans (1821–32) and increasing tensions around the Crimean War (1853–56).<sup>13</sup>

This poses the question of how the Byzantines, who identified as Romans for the duration of the empire, considered themselves in relation to the Greek language and legacy since it is arguable that they consciously revived Hellenic elements within their culture at times.<sup>14</sup> Greek language and literature formed a crucial component of eastern Roman cultural identity. Greek had been the *lingua franca* of the eastern portions of the Roman Empire, but it gradually replaced Latin as the “official” language of the empire, a shift that was unavoidably reinforced by territorial contraction. A fundamental shift occurred in relation to Byzantine *Romanitas* with the traumatic sack of Constantinople in 1204: in elite circles a reactive emphasis on Hellenic ethnocultural identity emerged that gained momentum during the Palaiologan Renaissance. By the late thirteenth century, the empire consisted almost exclusively of territories inhabited by Greek speakers since antiquity which contributed to this reorientation. Theodore Laskaris (c. 1174–1221/22), emperor of Nicaea, was the most prominent supporter of a Hellenic revival in the thirteenth century, but the most well-known advocate is possibly George Gemistos Plethon (c. 1355–1452), who proposed a reborn Byzantine Empire following a utopian Hellenic system of government centred in Mystras.<sup>15</sup> Rhetorical expressions of Hellenic identity were largely confined to a very small circle without much wider impact so that it remained an intellectual phenomenon rather than a popular movement.

The empire of the Byzantines thus exhibited cultural processes that modern scholarship would define as “response”, especially as regard to their Greco-Roman, later Hellenic, past. During perhaps the most important of these, the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, the Byzantines creatively used artistic iconographies and styles from classical art to a greater extent and reproduced, classified and categorised key works of Greco-Roman literature. As Robin Cormack has argued, the reference to “rebirth” (*palingenesis*) in texts of the time implies a certain degree of self-awareness in relation to this use of models from classical antiquity.<sup>16</sup> Despite the ambiguity of the mechanisms that generated this reception, and the fact that there is no comparison between it and the intensity and scale of the European sixteenth-century Renaissance, there is certainly grounds for talking about reception and revival rather than continuity/survival. The reappropriation of the Greco-Roman past was consciously practised as an indispensable part of Byzantium’s cultural identity.

The Byzantine Empire served as the principal preserver of classical Greek texts throughout the medieval period, ultimately transmitting this literary heritage to western Europe both directly – particularly after 1453, when refugee scholars fled Constantinople carrying manuscripts westward – and indirectly through the Arab-Islamic intellectual tradition. The focus, however, has been almost exclusively on Byzantium as a surrogate of Greek texts to western Europe with the implication being that they preserved what rightfully belonged to the West, rather than the commentaries that the Byzantines produced having shaped the classical corpus and tradition. Regardless, the relative “Greekness” of Byzantine identity has indelibly informed many modern responses, a theme threaded throughout this Handbook.<sup>17</sup>

### *Orthodox Byzantium*

Byzantine religious identity is another major pillar that has fundamentally informed modern responses. Byzantine religious life was far more complex and heterogeneous than often perceived. It was dominated and defined by geographies and periods of significant religious controversy and theological debate over issues such as Arianism, the Monophysite and Monothelite disputes, Iconoclasm and later Hesychasm, as well as significant variations in practice and monastic diversity. Religion and politics were also inextricably intertwined in Byzantium, representing a fundamental evolution of Roman inheritance beginning with Constantine. Emperors were expected to defend the faith, convene church councils and ensure doctrinal purity, while religious disputes like Iconoclasm or the *filioque* controversy and disagreement over monastic practices, such as seeking divine quietness (*hesychia*) through prayer, became matters of imperial policy and dynastic survival. This intricate intertwining of religion and politics has informed later Byzantine responses too: religious identity has profoundly shaped modern receptions of Byzantium and its image, many of which have been intricately connected to political expedience and the vicissitudes of national consciousness.

### *Byzantium and Its Image*

Frequently omitted from the major “pillars” perceived as defining the original Byzantine identity, or subsumed and obscured within its Orthodoxy, is perhaps one of the most important elements for understanding eastern Roman society and its response: its visual and built culture, which in fact dominates most modern receptions of Byzantium.<sup>18</sup> As Glenn Peers notes in this volume, the image is “the primary means by which Byzantine paradigms have arrived for us”. Its immediately identifiable visual and architectural culture has in fact come to determine most understandings and awareness of Byzantine identity across the globe. Though evolving out of the visual and built culture of Greco-Roman antiquity (though the extent to which they continued this legacy vs. ruptured/revived it has been a point of scholarly debate), this aspect of “Byzantine” identity has been seminal for most engagements, responses and reproductions of Byzantine culture from long before the fall of Constantinople but especially in the modern period.<sup>19</sup> Correspondingly, a large part of the Handbook focuses on responses in this area. Robert Nelson charts the almost global nature of Byzantine architectural revival, as opposed to survival, from Liverpool, Kingston, Jamaica, Tbilisi, Sofia, London, Athens and Paris and beyond, from the nineteenth century to the present, which employed Byzantine architecture for a variety of religious, political and social reasons to make statements about the present by means of the past.

### *Forgotten “Pillars” of Byzantium*

The Handbook explores responses to these “pillars” of Byzantine identity and others that have been disregarded, such as the Byzantine influence in European legal systems, especially those of France, Germany and Greece. Caroula Argyriadis-Kervegan in her essay explores the engagement with Byzantine legal sources which proved particularly complex and varied in the nineteenth century. Byzantine law was analysed from a philosophical and historical perspective in France; in Germany it was subject to in-depth analyses and notable publications/re-editions of key Byzantine legal texts, while in the independent

Greek state the *Hexabiblos* of Armenopoulos was originally established as the official legal system. Beyond texts, art and architecture, we highlight areas of cultural contribution that Byzantium has made to Europe which have been overlooked. Nikolaos Maliaras argues for Byzantium's role in the continuation, evolution and transfer of Roman musical instruments, which were developed both technically and in terms of evolving uses in new Christian contexts. These instruments were ultimately transmitted to the West and to Islamic cultures. This Byzantine inheritance developed into some of the most significant instruments still central to European culture today, such as the organ and violin.

Over the long period between 330 and 1453, what it meant to be a part of the Roman Empire naturally evolved as faith, language, geographical borders, institutions and administrative processes as well as material and visual culture evolved and intersected in complex ways. It is precisely the rich diversity of this “orphaned” empire that has opened up the possibility of the most remarkable and creative adaptations of its perceived pillars and the emergence of various “heirs” who claim Byzantium as their own in very different ways. The invention of “Byzantium” in the modern period, whether envisaged as survival or loosely revived for present purposes, remains a phenomenon for study in its own right. The studies of this Handbook demonstrate more than anything that Byzantium is still available, its uses and misuses reflecting our present.

### **“In My End Is My Beginning”: The Birth of Countless *Byzantinisms***

Birthing from Byzantium, the abstract noun “Byzantinism” now exists in the English language to refer to both the characteristics, practices or systems of the historical empire and their continuation. It was coined in the nineteenth century to describe the empire and its spiritual successors, but also defective political processes and cultures more generally.<sup>20</sup> It is also used as a vague technical term to refer to artistic and even literary styles in modern cultures, but even that legacy has grown from a place of derision since its early use by figures like H.H. Milman in 1855, who was deeply indebted to the work of Edward Gibbon (1737–94) and his characterisation of Roman history. Milman used it to describe Giotto di Bondone's (c. 1267–1337) artistic liberation, which heralded the beginning of the “Renaissance” – the glorious resurrection of Greco-Roman classicism after the dark ages, epitomised by Milman as “the last trammels of Byzantinism”.<sup>21</sup> A derivative of the adjective Byzantine, the -ism, implies a level of essentialising interpretation at play.<sup>22</sup> We lack a cohesive definition of its correlative “Neo-Byzantinism”. Although “Neo-Medievalism” was coined as a technical term in 1977 by Hedley Dull largely to describe the invocation of a simulacrum of the Medieval, “Neo-Byzantinism” seems to have been a derivative of the term “Neo-Byzantine”, which was initially used to describe the active and creative engagement with Byzantine culture after the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> This is discussed further below.

### ***The Periodisation of Byzantine Response***

Dimitar Angelov investigated the term “Byzantinism”, which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. He charted its inherent connection to Byzantium as a complex intersectional entity comprising political system, Orthodoxy, intellectual Hellenic inheritance and Roman law, arguing that the complex strands of Byzantinism necessarily transcended Byzantium itself.<sup>24</sup> Byzantium became a perfect “historiographical myth, an ideal canvas for all kinds of projections and narratives”,<sup>25</sup> giving birth to myriad Byzantinisms from

Neo-Orthodoxy, Byzantine revival architecture, sparkly jewellery or abstract art. The historiography that has attempted to chart this response has posited a cohesive chronological trajectory which in many ways belies its nebulous, fluctuating and ambiguous nature. In the introduction to his seminal work *Die Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates* (*History of the Byzantine State*, originally published in 1940), George Ostrogorsky (1902–76) presented a sweeping overview of how Byzantine Studies were perceived to have developed from approximately 1450 to 1900. This broad historical sketch would become the standard framework for periodising Byzantine reception studies over the subsequent half-century.<sup>26</sup> Ostrogorsky traced the evolution from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century humanist attitudes that valued Byzantium primarily as a repository of classical knowledge, through seventeenth-century Baroque fascination with Byzantine imperial structures as models for contemporary European monarchies. This political interest coincided with comprehensive scholarly endeavours, culminating in the monumental lexicographical contributions of French philologist and historian Charles du Fresne, sieur du Cange (1610–88).<sup>27</sup> The Enlightenment period brought contempt for Byzantium, driven by scholars who used the Byzantine Empire as a proxy to critique contemporary European rulers. They attacked the same political structures that had previously attracted Baroque interest, employing Byzantium as a thinly veiled means to condemn caesaropapism.

The use of “Byzantinism” as a noun achieved broad currency in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as shorthand for systems perceived as excessively bureaucratic or ceremonially obsessed, or for subtle political manoeuvring – all with connotations of institutional decay, corruption and inefficiency. This pejorative meaning was particularly crafted during the Enlightenment by Gibbon’s influential *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (six volumes, 1776–88).<sup>28</sup> This seminal publication for the invention of Byzantium has itself been responded to and reappropriated in various ways since its inception, from generating a byword and model for describing the rise and collapse of civilisations to Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Decline and Fall* (1928), which borrows not only the title but also Gibbon’s satirical approach. Although Steven Runciman credited Gibbon with killing Byzantine Studies for almost a century through “the splendour of his style and the majesty of his wit”,<sup>29</sup> it was ironically Gibbon who contributed more than most to the subsequent creation of “Byzantium”. It was Gibbon who created an intellectual rationale and model for the separation of the eastern half of the empire from the west and characterised it as a long slow period of demise. Gibbon in his way re-introduced Byzantium, as Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) had its artistic and cultural activity, as a static and retrograde world of “barbarians” with decaying morals, blind religious belief and a lack of creativity. It was hostile to reform and certainly fell short of its Graeco-Roman ancestors.<sup>30</sup>

The derogatory Enlightenment discourse transformed Byzantinism into a symbol of everything the “West” sought to reject. Byzantine critiques often served as a safe substitute for attacking contemporary western rulers. The condemnation focused primarily on problematic church-state relationships and what were perceived as outdated authoritarian systems marked by corruption, superstition and reactionary conservatism. A pathetically servile Byzantine populace was implied with special derision for villainous powerful Byzantine women who threw into relief the perversion of the culture and reinforced the idea that strong masculine authority was necessary to good governance. Following this thread of moulding Byzantium according to political expediency as a lauded or decried political precedent, the Byzantine political paradigm has variously functioned as a pattern

for communism (its supposed free peasant constitution), its symphonia for Orthodox dominion/autocracy and expansionism, or even as a utopian model for the New Far Right.<sup>31</sup>

According to Ostrogorsky's model, the Enlightenment concept was subsequently replaced by nineteenth-century historicism and the attendant institutionalisation of Byzantine Studies, which corrected the biased and unhistorical approach of Enlightenment writers.<sup>32</sup> More recently Ostrogorsky's model has been challenged in publications such as *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe* (2021), edited by Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff, which charts the longer invention of Byzantium in Europe between the fifteenth and mid-nineteenth century when the term was consolidated. They challenge the idea of "absence" in Western scholarship prior to the nineteenth century<sup>33</sup> and the claim that Byzantium was only of interest to those of eastern and southeastern Europe. Defining the chronological parameters of Byzantine response is one way to impose structure on the field, but a determinative factor for the reception of Byzantium has always been the extent of proximity and distance, both physical and conceptual, which has to a certain extent determined the nature of the response.

### **Proximity and Distance: The Geographies of Byzantine Response**

Response to Byzantium has been seen as more pertinent, with a greater stress on ontological contiguity – approached more or less critically – in regions that once formed part of the medieval Roman Empire or that developed dialectically with it in relation to Orthodoxy. This applies particularly to eastern and southeastern Europe, sometimes called the "political, cultural and religious bridge between Orient and Occident".<sup>34</sup> Scholars have typically perceived Russia and other Slavic Orthodox countries as deriving "their religion and a great deal of their culture from it", but the divide between survival and revival is nebulous.<sup>35</sup> Ivan Foletti discusses in this volume the development of Byzantine Studies in Russia, a nation that in modernity has framed itself overtly as the heir of Constantinople. During the nineteenth century, their development was underpinned by the political post-Napoleonic reorientation of Russia away from Europe and its reframing as the Third Rome, with a "dynastic right" to aspire to control the Orthodox world and potentially even the former territories of the Roman Empire in the East, a claim inseparable from art and architectural responses. Indeed, Yuri Saveliev charts in this volume the development of the Neo-Byzantine as a national style of church architecture that has proliferated from the mid-nineteenth century to the present in Russia. Connected to the European development of Neo-Byzantine architecture, this was deeply rooted in the study of Russia's Byzantine inheritance and the political construction of Russia as the "New Byzantium" or "Third Rome".

Studies have often been implicitly divided by geography. Regions where the history of Byzantium has been overtly leveraged in the development of the modern nation state or through connections to Orthodoxy have often been treated separately from western Europe and North America, where the Byzantine legacy is treated as a flexible aesthetic and/or ideological trope, manipulated both positively and negatively for aesthetic, religious, cultural and socio-political ends. Byzantium has been used from an early date as the foil against which western Europe constructed its identity as the rightful heir of Roman civilisation, Greek literature and true Christianity; yet it was also used to critique those same western societies. Contemporary scholarship has adopted a more comprehensive approach to Byzantine reception that transcends traditional divisions.<sup>36</sup> These studies question

Byzantium's relationship with western Europe specifically, while also examining the assumption that the *Slavia Orthodoxa* maintained a more straightforward connection to Byzantium, focusing on regions like Bulgaria, where Byzantine reception has proven both complex and contested.<sup>37</sup> Diana Mishkova explores in this volume how Balkan national historiographies appropriated the Byzantine legacy in diverse ways: Bulgarians portrayed Byzantium as their main adversary in forming national identity, Serbians emphasised Stefan Dušan's empire as Byzantium's true heir and Romanians viewed Byzantium as a cultural legacy preserved through Romanian survival, while Turkey vacillated according to expediency but on the whole rejected the inheritance.<sup>38</sup> In each case, the place given to Byzantium in these national historiographies was a response also to Greece.

Proximity does not imply an untroubled inheritance, and indeed greater proximity has led to some of the most nuanced and ambiguous engagements with Byzantium. The Ottoman claim to succession from the Byzantine Empire took on different shades in the modern period as the empire modernised and engaged with the West with regard to its cultural patrimony. Şule Kılıç Yıldız charts in this Handbook how modern Turkey has navigated a complex relationship with its Byzantine heritage and thus the shifting terrain of the display of Byzantine material culture. Turkey has at times drawn on its Byzantine material culture, as a connection between antiquity and modernity, to support the emergent national narrative, yet it has engaged in limited archaeological investment and treated the Byzantine legacy as a historical rather than living tradition. Turkey has been influenced in part by the challenges posed by Greece's claims to Byzantium in this regard. Ufuk Serin in her essay dives into the complex issue of modern Turkey's approach to preserving its Byzantine material. Despite inheriting the longest-lived political entity in Anatolia before Ottoman rule, Turkey's approach remains constrained by ideological and religious sensitivities as well as cultural agendas that influence both scholarly interpretation and practical conservation decisions. From the Ottoman and early Republican eras to the present, attitudes have ranged from exclusion to a selective, fluctuating appropriation based on ethnic, political and economic motivations. Serin explores the relationship of Byzantine heritage to time and history and concludes that Turkey's inheritance cannot be conceived as a set of relics frozen between the past and present, but rather part of a continuing and active "cultural and social process" that is creative and inherently transformative, yet open to political distortion.

Equally complex and ambiguous is the reception of Byzantium in Armenian scholarship, as Nazénié Garibian argues in her essay. Still navigating between the Byzantine and the Iranian (Muslim) worlds, strong nationalistic approaches to the past are combined in modern Armenian scholarship with newer positions informed by academic collaboration and increased openness within Byzantine Studies themselves to a focus on the diversity of the empire and its complex relationships with neighbouring groups. Garibian argues that Byzantine Studies in Armenia should be understood as essentially studies of Armenian-Byzantine relations informed by modern nation building, which are now increasingly explored in newly established research initiatives.

In the history of Byzantine response, Greece has come to occupy a seminal position. At times the unwilling inheritor of imprecise ethnolinguistic understandings of Byzantium, Greece was an important and more or less continuous part of the empire. The Greeks have had the painful privilege of being the direct inheritors of both Greco-Roman culture and its synthesis with Christianity. This integration of classical philosophy and aesthetics with Christian theology has had a major impact on the formation of the modern identity of Greece, but the nation has had a complex relationship with its Byzantine heritage, "where



it has been fitted (rather awkwardly) into the national story”.<sup>39</sup> In 1965, Cyril Mango addressed some of the thorny issues entailed in the position he occupied as the Koraes Professor of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature situated in the Department of Classics, King’s College London. The Chair, established in 1918 to serve as a focal point for the study of Greek history and culture from antiquity to the present (including Byzantium), raises a complex and retrospective teleology.<sup>40</sup> The easy assumption and implication of continuity belies the history of Byzantine response in Greece itself.

Greece had been liberated from the Ottomans by 1830. The ‘Great Powers’ of Europe were apprehensive about the inevitable demise of the Ottoman Empire on account of the ‘Eastern Question’ – who would get what in the subsequent fall-out – and so they sustained the empire. However, under the influence of Romanticism, they supported Greece in breaking free. Romantic European Philhellenism and the policies of the newly established Greek state typically favoured classical Greece, causing subsequent tensions in the adoption of the now apparently neutral signifier of Byzantium. Its intellectual and spiritual life, as well as its multifarious legacies, were appropriated as a “pittoresque” incident in Greek history, and it took decades until Byzantium became a substantial and dynamic part of modern Greek life and culture in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Ultimately, the painstaking union of classical Greece, Byzantium and the modern nation-state was “a shotgun marriage” that took place under the threat of Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer’s race theory.<sup>41</sup> According to his hypothesis, the Slavic invasions – the so-called age of migrations, mainly in the seventh and eighth centuries – had severed the Greeks’ blood/racial connection to the ancient Hellenes. They had become merely Greek-speaking Slavs, and even this was not true in all cases. Continuity from antiquity became important.

Byzantium was incorporated eventually into a continuum that provided a framework for the emergent national narrative in Greece. However, the process was not a smooth one. Marios Hatzopoulos and Francesco Lovino both address the issue in this volume, highlighting its complexity, and the role of intellectuals and historians such as Constantine Paparrygopoulos (1815–91) and Spyridon Zambelios (1815–81), along with key figures from political, economic and social life, as well as the institutions and bodies formed in the newly born Greek state. Publications, such as the multi-volume history of Greece by British historian George Finlay (1799–1875), which triumphally celebrated the continuation of the Greeks from antiquity to modern times, also provided a firm basis for the Greek reappropriation of Byzantium.<sup>42</sup> The book and the opinions expressed in it had fervent supporters among the most “progressive” groups of travellers and scholars, such as the group of the British Arts and Crafts architects who consistently turned their interest to Byzantine and post-Byzantine surviving remains in Greece.<sup>43</sup> Greek “alternative” intellectuals like Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851–1911) were perceived to embody the spirit of Byzantium. Papadiamantis, a key figure in modern Greek intellectual history, was a recluse novelist, poet and short-story writer, who never completed his studies, often referred to as “a secular monk”. In his more than 170 works, he preserved a mystical feeling that connected his heroes, authentic common people and “saints or sinners” to the spirituality of Byzantium and the “pure” Orthodox faith. In the then largely neo-classical Athens, where spirituality was haunted by the academic, neoclassicist influences of the Nazarenes, Papadiamantis embodied what was later interpreted as the true spirit of the Christianised “Romans” – the *Rhōmaíoi*, the Byzantines.

The relative interplay between Romanness and Hellenism has continued as a defining factor in the crafting of modern Greek identity to the present, which has palpably played

out across the pages of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Greece in one of the more sensitive and influential spheres of public life, that of education. Panagiotis Theodoropoulos in his essay for this volume explores the textbooks of secondary education in this light, concluding the term “Byzantium” was used in these to undermine the Romanness of the empire.

Greek liberation and the construction of a national identity for the newly established Greek state of 1831 also led to the so-called Great Idea (*Μεγάλη Ιδέα*): the nationalist aspiration for the reunification of all Greek-speaking peoples and historically Greek territories under one state as a political whole. “Greater Greece” would embrace all territories in the Balkans, Cyprus, Crete, Asia Minor and the north shore of the Black Sea. Greek ideals of expansionism did not sit well with western European leaders, who suspected Russia of using Orthodox proxies to acquire Constantinople. This ultimately led to the Crimean War (1853–56), with England and France protecting the Ottoman Empire. The desire was to establish the Aegean as the “Greek Sea” of the Byzantines, after the humiliating defeat of the 1897 Greco-Turkish war. This ambition ended with the equally humiliating Asia Minor disaster of 1922 which stabilised the geographical borders of modern Greece and secured the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). The vision of Greece restored to its Byzantine glory continues to permeate Greek collective consciousness, however, through patterns drawn from Byzantine apocalyptic literature and historical myths, particularly those from the empire’s final centuries. While not explicitly articulated in mainstream discourse, these narratives remain influential and are often exploited by Greek far-right political parties. On 29 May 2025 – the anniversary of Constantinople’s fall in 1453, a date of profound mourning for some Greeks – Kyriakos Velopoulos, leader of the far-right party “Hellenic Solution”, posted a triumphant message on X. He declared to his followers there: “We will liberate Constantinople!”. Velopoulos elaborated on these irredentist ideas the previous day during an interview aired on the Mega Channel’s Evening News, one of Greece’s most prominent private television networks.

Fallmerayer’s racial theory was particularly tempting to Slavs, including the Bulgarians, Albanians and other developing Balkan nation-states. It was most fully exploited by nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals who based their visions for a “natural” Slavic communism on it, in keeping with what they perceived to be the inherent communistic tendencies of the Slavic people. Thus, Byzantium was painted red. Marxism in Russia and the Slavic world utilised Byzantinism in the construction and justification of present realities – though within strictly controlled parameters that omitted its religious dimensions.<sup>44</sup> Historical memory and myths prevailed, however, and everyday liturgical worship (music, architecture, painting), the presence of authentic Byzantine monuments in the local landscape in modern Slavonic countries and nation states of southeastern Europe influenced, and still decisively influences, the nature and dynamics of their “Byzantinisms”. Certainly, the exposure to various other cultural spheres (mainly the Roman Catholic), as well as the change of territorial and political status, influenced the character of these receptions.

Andrii Domanovsky and Maryna Domanovska chart the complex Ukrainian response to Byzantium along two trajectories: a religious strand marked by profound ambivalence, informed by the survival of an Orthodoxy inherited from Byzantium, but also the unification of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Condemnation of Byzantine “apostasy” has gradually shifted towards increased acceptance of Byzantine inheritance, as Ukrainian Orthodoxy has sought independence from the Moscow Patriarchate. The authors also explore the secular tradition, informed by European Enlightenment thought that has



consistently viewed Byzantinism as synonymous with backwardness and Russian imperialism since the nineteenth century. Both trajectories have more recently converged on a tentative interest in reclaiming Ukraine's Byzantine inheritance from Russian appropriation.

The use of Byzantine Orthodoxy in political future crafting continues in earnest today, not only in those regions that perceive a certain continuity from the empire. Sarah Riccardi-Swartz discusses in this volume the crucial role that the "floating signifier" of Byzantium still plays not only in the theo-politics of Putin, but also for far-right groups in the United States. Byzantium is appropriated in support of antidemocratic visions for a corporatised form of caesaropapism by ascendant technocrats, for example, who use it to critique American society and to support their vision for an American Caesar who will overturn 40 years of destructive neoliberal "wokism". These groups find easy conversation partners in reactive Orthodox converts in the United States who embrace not only the trappings of Byzantium but also the Russian Orthodox Church's positioning of themselves as the Third Rome. The latter becomes for these American converts a spiritual harbinger of their symphonic worldbuilding wherein governmental structures should expand a religio-political agenda. The pillars of Byzantine Orthodoxy and imperialism have continued to be deeply intertwined in many modern responses.

### **Spiritual Revival and Its Image**

The distancing of the eastern half of the empire from its western half was deeply informed by the Orthodoxy of the former. Especially from the time of the Bollandists in the seventeenth century, the Orthodox "Greeks" were framed as schismatic heretics who could not be called Romans because that was the name of the one true church. Indeed, it was the papacy that facilitated the transfer of the imperial title by means of the coronation of Western leaders, and this contributed to the eventual schism. The lack of communion with the Catholic Church continued to be a complaint, as it was for many Ukrainian Christians. The aversion of European Protestants, in particular, to the inherently material and visual religious practices of the Byzantines was predictable. For both Catholics and Protestants alike, Orthodox religiosity was excessive, indulgent and thus feminine in essence.

In the same way that the multi-ethnic state of Byzantium was identified with "the Greek Empire", bypassing its cosmopolitanism, Byzantium has also functioned as an Orthodox forbear and precedent for Orthodox dominion despite the pluralistic mosaic of religious beliefs and spiritualities practised within its borders and the composite nature of Orthodoxy thereafter. Orthodoxy has been, and still is, one of the most enduring pillars of Byzantium and constituent of Byzantinisms. In Orthodox diaspora communities since the fall of the empire, Byzantium has most often been understood as synonymous with Orthodoxy. However, the denial of continuity between the eastern and western halves of the empire with regard to Christianity has not impeded, and has perhaps even facilitated, various later rehabilitations and uncontested claims to the ancient and pure religiosity and legacy of Byzantium.

The installation of Byzantine-style icons by Russian artists Sergey Fyodorov in 1994 and Archimandrite Zinon in 2019 in Westminster Abbey represents a fascinating ecclesiastical irony that highlights the enduring appeal of eastern Christian visual culture across denominational boundaries. In commissioning the icons, the Anglican communion embraced the same artistic tradition that Westminster Cathedral (1895–1903) nearby had employed a century earlier to assert Catholic legitimacy and ancient authenticity through

its Neo-Byzantine architecture. In the case of the cathedral, the Byzantine style was chosen to contrast with the Gothic style of the medieval abbey. While the 1994 icons of the Virgin Hodegetria and Christ that prominently flank the view towards the nave are traditional in theme, the more recent icon of St Edward the Confessor by Fr Zinon merges the ancient spirituality of the Byzantine style with the local Christian legacy in a mutually reinforcing synthesis that transforms England's founding saint into one of eternal significance. This juxtaposition creates a compelling ecclesiastical dialogue where Edward's Anglo-Saxon sanctity is reinterpreted through the theological language of Byzantium, effectively bridging the temporal gap between medieval England and the eternal principles of eastern iconographic tradition. The icon's placement within the shrine itself – the sacred heart of Westminster Abbey – elevates this convergence to a profound statement about the universal nature of Christian sanctity that transcends denominational boundaries and historical epochs. It speaks also to the sacramentalism of high Anglicanism.

The presence of these Byzantine icons in Anglican Westminster Abbey and the architecture and mosaics of Catholic Westminster Cathedral belong to a long legacy of eastern Christian artistic forms transcending confessional boundaries. Both traditions claimed the spiritual authority and ancient aesthetic legitimacy that Byzantine culture represents – a remarkable case of competing churches finding common ground in their shared appreciation for the visual currency of Byzantium. Indeed, the perceived spiritual value of Byzantium and its icons in modernity after a lapse of time, the encroachment of secularism and the alienation of postmodernity within faith traditions, was literally embodied by Rowan Williams, who served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012. Williams was not only a passionate advocate for icon veneration – delivering lectures on “Icons and the Practice of Prayer” at the Royal Academy of Arts and writing extensively on praying with Eastern Orthodox icons – he also wore a huge medallion emblazoned with the Pantocrator mosaic (c.1100) from the dome of the monastery church at Daphni, Attica on occasion.

Byzantium's image was used positively and quite widely outside of Orthodoxy in calls for revival that could be spiritual, moral or social. It was connected in more secular revival movements, such as the Arts and Crafts, to the desire for social and moral regeneration in the face of modern alienation.<sup>45</sup> In non-religious contexts, the spiritual authority and visceral power of the icon continue to escape its historical specificity to critique present injustices; Peers discusses in this volume the work of contemporary African American artists in the United States, who mobilise the Byzantine economy of the gaze as well as formal trappings of the icon in social and political critiques. Such images belie the original nature of Byzantine art and yet continue its powerful language of presence, authority and dignity.

Conversely, Byzantium's Orthodoxy and its image have also brought two of its “heirs” remarkably close: Greece and Russia. The image of Orthodox Byzantium has undergone significant transformations in both Russian and Greek cultural history. In Russia, this evolution, based on inheriting the Second Rome (Byzantium) through the medieval principality of the “Princes of Vladimir”, extended from the mid-nineteenth century. Thinkers like Konstantin Leontiev (1831–91) sought to construct an “Eidetic” Byzantium – an ideal synthesis of beauty, hierarchy and Orthodox spirituality – as a model for Russian statehood, church and culture. Yuri Pyatnitsky explores the earliest exhibitions of Byzantine art which were held in Saint Petersburg in 1859 and 1861. These exhibitions received imperial support in keeping with Russia's self-understood status as the heir of Orthodox Byzantium. They were fuelled by the desire to connect to authentic Byzantine icons, primarily from Mount Athos, and driven forward by the scholarly endeavours of Pyotr Sevastyanov

(1811–67). This trajectory continued up until 1917 and into the modern era with Putin's revamped imperialist conception of Russia as the Third Rome, which has been expressed at times through his perceived authority to protect the country's sacred icons.<sup>46</sup>

"Neo-Orthodoxy" has existed as a specific intellectual and cultural phenomenon aside from imperialistic motivations in modern Greece. The term was coined in the 1980s primarily to describe the reappropriation of Byzantine Orthodoxy, which was considered more authentic and pure by theologians and within the religious endeavours of intellectuals, primarily, on the left. This was an unsystematic phenomenon that was not fully respected as a concept by those involved, many of whom rejected the idea of separation and newness over a deeply rooted connection to an authentic Orthodox tradition. Nonetheless, it can be seen as belonging to a wider reappropriation of Orthodoxy which began in the mid-1950s and 1960s.<sup>47</sup> From the 1960s onwards, various Greek intellectuals, mainly theologians, explored how Byzantine Orthodoxy could revitalise Greek spirituality and culture through the "modernisation" of this ancient pillar of Greek identity. In this, they assimilated in their writings the teachings, work and aesthetic principles of Russian émigrés in Paris primarily. They drew particularly on theologians and authors such as Fr George Florovsky (1893–1979), Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958) and Leonid Ouspensky (1902–87), who had, in their turn, reappropriated the spirit of Orthodoxy.<sup>48</sup>

The roots of Neo-Orthodox ideas can be traced back to the so-called Generation of the 1930s – a group of Greek writers, poets, artists, intellectuals, critics and scholars that emerged in the 1930s. The group introduced modernism to Greek art and literature, while maintaining dialogue with both the Greek past and contemporary European cultural developments. Key figures hailed from all areas of Greek intellectual and cultural life and their quests permeated various manifestations of both: for example, the rehabilitation of Christian theology of the icon and aesthetics influenced later Neo-Byzantinism in the arts, particularly in icon-production. Artist and intellectual Photis Kontoglou (1895–1965) constitutes, perhaps, the most illuminating example of these attempted Neo-Byzantinisms. Breaking from both Westernising academic approaches – exemplified by the artistic idiom of the Nazarenes – and radical experimentations that incorporated European avant-garde elements like expressionism and fauvism into icon-painting, Kontoglou, in his theoretical writings and art, and with the fervour of a priest or preacher, sought to redefine Byzantine spirituality, mentality and creative ethos within contemporary Greek reality.<sup>49</sup> The contribution of the reappropriation of Byzantine spirituality, through "Neo-Orthodoxy", permeated all spheres of modern Greek cultural life – philosophy and theology, music, the applied arts, literature and poetry – in often outstanding manifestations that remain to be properly revisited.

The icon has loomed large in modern reimaginings of Orthodoxy but so too has its absence. Byzantine Iconoclasm has had an enduring, if poorly understood, influence on popular understandings of Byzantium and on the centrality of the image aside from Orthodoxy. It is persistently but largely superficially connected as a concept to contemporary artistic practices around image destruction and generation as well as to modern critiques of established systems. Tracy Boldrick demonstrates how twenty-first-century exhibitions on Iconoclasm invoke Byzantine precedent broadly, without engaging the specific religious and political complexities of its historical moment. Alternatively, they do not engage with it at all, despite it forming one of the most sustained and generative instances of Iconoclasm which embedded the icon so profoundly in Byzantine culture. Peers discusses Danish artist Per Kirkeby's generative interaction with the Byzantine icon's visual economy

of the gaze and his identification with Iconoclasm, which produces something with visual strategies clearly different from Byzantine art but which effected something of its transformational aura of effect and presence ... “captured in abstraction”. The pillars of Byzantinisms have continuously reinforced each other in complex ways and from the nineteenth century onwards, Byzantium’s influence as a creative, spiritual and intellectual force has transcended far beyond Orthodox contexts, inspiring diverse contemporary engagements across different cultural and secular spheres, very often embodied within the idea of the Neo-Byzantine or Byzantine revival.

**“Playing Tricks with History”: The “Neo-Byzantine”  
as a Creative, Generative and Disruptive Force**

The Russian painters are those who, being abroad, seem to have better understood the lessons of the French painters. It would be useful to group some of these here... Ms Szeret and the last one the Neo-Byzantine Boichuk (Boitchouk) who filled last year’s *Independants* with his paintings and the paintings of his students, thus, perhaps teaching the French a useful lesson by reminding them that painters, no less than poets, can play tricks with history.<sup>50</sup>

This is how Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) – the critic who defined many modern art movements, such as Cubism and Orphism – described his reaction to the exhibition of a group of Russian painters based in Paris at the *Salon des Independants* where they exhibited their work in 1910 and 1911. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, alternative terms had been used to describe historical monuments that demonstrated strong affinities with Byzantine architecture and thus revivalist responses. Mykhailo Boychuk (1882–1937), the Ukrainian painter referred to by Apollinaire as “Neo-Byzantine”, had actually devised the term for himself well before moving to Paris. Boychuk, a monumental artist, restorer and founder of the eponymous style known as “Boychukism”, was profoundly inspired by Byzantine art. He combined the Byzantine style with leading European modernistic trends and native Ukrainian folk art to develop a style of simplified monumental forms, bright colours and rhythmically integrated lines. In 1907, Boychuk moved to Paris and soon a group of artists who “were working taking Byzantine art as an example” was formed around him, the so-called Neo-Byzantine school.<sup>51</sup> His style was intended, as many iterations of the Neo-Byzantine were, to engage the local/national with a view to creating a truly global and inherently modern expression. The “Neo-Byzantines” exhibited in the Parisian Salons of 1910 and 1911 with little success despite Apollinaire’s enthusiastic reaction.

The nineteenth century’s construction of the concept of “Byzantium” came in many ways through the visual, supported by its academic framing. Giovanni Gaspari examines in this volume the reception of Byzantine mosaic cycles in Italy, which were so pivotal to the image of Byzantium in the West and in modern art. He charts how their reception was fragmented and contested until the end of the nineteenth century, when their systematic treatment within Byzantine Studies mitigated the partial/misleading impression of Byzantium and its art that they generated. The mosaics were thus made available for burgeoning Byzantinisms informed by the image. The creative, generative potentialities of Byzantium have more than anywhere else been effected through art and architecture, because, as Peers notes, Byzantine works still exist as “objects in the world” in this way with

ontological qualities exceeding their original contexts: thus, “Byzantine art continues into the present as a durational, experiential, generative set of paradigms”. As such, there is not one narrative to tell about the role and “gravitational pull” of Byzantine art in modernity. Rather, it continues to generate new lives and paradigms for present purposes, scaffolding our own worldbuilding.

The experimental visual recreation of key parameters of what Byzantium was – its spirit and culture – was necessarily and indelibly influenced, above all other factors, by modernity. Modernistic utopias and realities fuelled nineteenth-century reimaginings of the Byzantine with one of the most outstanding examples being that of the French avant-gardes, especially Henri Matisse (1869–1954).<sup>52</sup> Charles Barber, in this volume, discusses the complex intertwining of Byzantine art and modernism which has largely conditioned our reception of Byzantine art today and the attribution to it of qualities, such as abstraction, that would have seemed strange to Byzantine audiences. Conversely, the icon has been the “conversation partner” of modernism, providing a hallowed precedent for abstraction and resistance to staid naturalism, a dialogue that was essentially formalist, but one which had the potential to ascribe a powerful transcendence to modern work, strengthening socio-political visual arguments in places.

### *Subversive Byzantium and Visual Culture*

The visual power of the Byzantine has become most generative in recent years in relation to the subaltern, as a voice that is powerfully visceral, eternalising and sits apart from the mainstream. Aside from providing a celebrated imperial model and tool supporting a colonialist worldview,<sup>53</sup> Byzantium has simultaneously been in more recent times a proxy used in the service of decolonisation; subaltern Byzantium continues to be used to critique the hegemonic “West”.<sup>54</sup> A recent book edited by Benjamin Anderson and Mirela Ivanova deals with this complex inheritance, conceptualising Byzantium within a dual framework of coloniality, wherein the Byzantine Empire functioned simultaneously as a colonising force in relation to its eastern territories and as a colonised subject within western Orientalist discourse.<sup>55</sup> What was once attractive as a proxy for criticising hegemonic structures in Enlightenment Europe has now also become exposed as the victim of Eurocentric colonisation itself, an Orientalist foil in Western thought. More recently this distorting mirror has become a model, particularly in the United States, “for the expression of social alterity – what in academic discourse has been termed ‘the subaltern’”.<sup>56</sup> Maria Mavroudi has examined how Byzantine culture has been adopted and transformed by marginalised communities and resistance movements, illustrating how Byzantine traditions can serve as a resource for “subaltern Byzantinism” – a way for oppressed or colonised groups to reclaim and repurpose Byzantine cultural elements for their own empowerment and identity formation. Alice Walker, in her essay for this volume, explores a case of such cultural patrimony. Focusing on the artist Romare Bearden (1911–88), whose work focuses on African American experience, she examines the use of visual symbols drawn from the repertoire of Byzantine art, such as the “Mother and Child” iconography. The artist attempts to explore his personal and collective experience through the use of one of the most representative iconographic types from the artistic production of the Byzantines with universal appeal.

This subversive utopian and socially critical use of Byzantium had emerged earlier, however, with John Ruskin (1819–1900) and the Arts and Crafts movement.<sup>57</sup> The first to link revival and modern art directly were the intellectuals of the British Arts and Crafts

movement, who brought Byzantium to the heart of their broader ideological, political socialist and artistic concerns. Byzantium became for them a utopian societal model in the face of modern alienation and this was expressed through visual culture that drew on Byzantine craftsmanship. William Lethaby (1857–1931), leading architect and theorist of the movement, argued that “modern examples of Gothic and Classical architecture are erected on enormous foundations of nonsense”<sup>58</sup>, and that “modernism conceived as a style is only invented archaeology”, emphasising at the same time that “it will not be real until it is unconscious”.<sup>59</sup> Radical approaches like this opened the path for the Arts and Crafts followers to critically rehabilitate in their projects the teachings and ethos of the Byzantines, or at least their interpretations of them, offering one of the most consistent modern manifestations of “Neo-Byzantinism”.

At the heart of the modern (and post-modern) receptions of Byzantium is an enduring paradox between the ongoing negation of Byzantium in European history and its persistent magnetism for the European imagination. This has fuelled and continues to fuel the arts in particular,<sup>60</sup> especially when an unconventional “voice” is needed that sits apart from the mainstream. Thus, running alongside responses premised on ideas of inheritance and continuity which have tended towards a perceived fidelity to Byzantine outputs, to a certain extent, have been those further removed that have been more ostensibly hybrid and at ease with taking liberties with Byzantium in engaging with its visual, literary and architectural culture. Byzantium’s inherent “elasticity” has meant that the shape it can take can differ widely depending on context and the purposes at play. Its elasticity often increases with “distance”.<sup>61</sup>

### *Byzantine Revival in Architecture*

Context was everything: architectural Byzantinisms used as a colonial tool in one context could be used by minorities in another to reassert their identity and aspirations in response to the dominant majority.<sup>62</sup> Byzantine Revival offered an alternative to both classical and Gothic revival styles, allowing religious minorities to assert distinct identities from Dublin to the United States of America, where in both cases it was mixed with other styles to create something inherently local and useful.<sup>63</sup> The irony is that while Byzantine Revival architecture often represented resistance to one form of power (Protestant hegemony, Western secularisation or cultural homogenisation), it could simultaneously serve as a tool of imperial expansion and cultural domination in other contexts.<sup>64</sup> The same architectural vocabulary that empowered Catholics in Britain was used to suppress local traditions in the Russian Empire’s borderlands. Herein lies the fundamental paradoxical nature of the modern response to Byzantium: diverse, conflicting, nebulous and above all a response to the present more so than the past.

Challenging often simplistic reductions of Neo-Byzantine architecture to Hagia Sophia, Kostis Kourelis explores how, in a distant, fragmented and pluralist new setting, Greek diaspora communities in the United States played with Byzantine heritage in far more creative ways, exploiting Byzantium’s inherent pluralism to tell different stories at different times. Michael Muhlbauer explores the diaspora experience of the Greek Orthodox population who built the Cathedral of Hagios Frumentius c. 1929 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A far cry from any submissive emulation of Hagia Sophia, the church’s architecture cited early Byzantine architectures. It drew particularly on the limestone churches of pre-Islamic Syria-Palestine, as well as incorporating subtler evocations of Ethiopia’s historic past, to reference

the role of Byzantium in the conversion of ancient Ethiopia (Aksum) to Christianity in the fourth century by St Frumentius of Tyre, to whom the church is dedicated. The Greek immigrant community thus integrated themselves into Ethiopia's national history, vis-à-vis Byzantium. The church forms a reminder of the diversity of Byzantine architecture itself and of Byzantine response. Robert Nelson charts the wider confessional picture beyond Orthodoxy, whereby Byzantine architecture was used by diverse religious groups for their own purposes. In particular, after World War I, American and English Jewish congregations adopted this style for reasons unrelated to the motivations of Christian churches, pertaining instead to Palestine and the eastern origins of Judaism.

The Neo-Byzantine was inherently dynamic and available across regions and religions from Russia, where it referenced Byzantium more directly to create a sense of ontological continuity, to Ireland, where it cast a new utopian vision for subjugated Catholics, as discussed by Niamh Bhalla in this volume. Aleksandar Kadijević and Dragan Damjanović explore its manifestations in Serbian and Croatian architecture where varied historical inheritances intersected with confessional considerations and eventually the tenets of modernism. Thomas Kaffenberger also presents dynamic new research on the personal rather than community-based use of late antique and Byzantine architectural references in German mausolea. Such references were often connected to the individual ideals of the building's patron or architect. These personal monuments, though influenced by the wider development of Neo-Byzantine architecture in Europe, demonstrate the availability of the style across various strata of society as an inherently versatile aesthetic and ideological choice for individuals.

### *Literary Byzantium*

The concept of Byzantium has proved generative, even when loosely attached to any sense of debt to the historical past, or when access to the past has been limited, or when it becomes more overtly revival than survival. It has fuelled both the popular and the poetic imagination from King Ludwig II of Bavaria's fascination with Byzantine architectural forms which he incorporated in his hybrid architectural fantasies shaped to meet contemporary needs, to the use of Byzantine imagery to evoke mysterious, spiritual beauty by Symbolist poets like Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine, to Irish poet W.B. Yeats' famous and oft-quoted engagement with Byzantium to express, process and transcend current realities.<sup>65</sup> Mark Byron, in this volume, demonstrates how major poets of modernity have drawn on the cultural patrimony of Byzantium in contrasting ways wedded to varying extents to the historical entity – from Yeats' visionary sensuality and idealism to Ezra Pound's materialist documentation, Constantine Cavafy's personal cultural reclamation, and Osip Mandelstam's synthesis of temporal and spiritual divisions. Within their poems Byzantium provides both a symbolic foundation and historical material for addressing contemporary spiritual, political and artistic concerns.

At the same time that Byzantium was being leveraged as a religious, political and linguistic inheritance, and crafted as a neutral specimen for scholarly endeavour in western Europe and further afield,<sup>66</sup> it became and continues to be an exotic Orientalising element of performative culture, and/or a powerful aesthetic used for religious and socio-political critique. While Byzantine Studies were being developed as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, through the efforts of figures like Bury, Finlay, Charles Diehl (1829–1944) and Karl Krumbacher (1856–1909), Byzantium was simultaneously crafted



as a concept through performative culture. “Byzantinomania” flourished in France aligned to the Decadent movement as a sensual critique of Western rationalism – a lauded paradigm of sumptuous artifice over naturalism. Its visual identity was prized for its inherent characteristics and symbolic potential. Joris-Karl Huysmans, in *À rebours*, included *Byzantine art objects among Des Esseintes’ aesthetic treasures*, and Oscar Wilde (influenced by French Decadents) used *Byzantine imagery in works like Salomé*. Byzantium particularly inspired modern playwrights, who used its trappings to engage with issues of contemporary politics.<sup>67</sup> Andrew Walker-White explores in this Handbook the play *Emperor and Galilean* by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) which is inspired by the life and career of Julian the Apostate (331–63). He discusses it as a deeply erudite and historically informed “psychological reflection on the personalities and controversies” that determined the transitional early Byzantine period. References and influences in it stem from Julian’s own work to Byzantine patristics, as well as the thought of major philosophers, such as Hegel, Kant, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, in a breathtaking intertextuality that takes aim at the intellectual and spiritual decay in his own context.

Some of the most inventive twentieth-century “Neo-Byzantinisms” have thus come through textual receptions of Byzantium. These are reviewed by Przemyslaw Marciniak in his longer main essay in this volume which surveys the diverse panorama of reimaginings across narratives, poetry, fiction, novels and graphic narratives. Marciniak highlights both stereotypical and more innovative reappropriations of Byzantium across these texts which also illustrate the shift from modernism to post-modernity and contemporary aesthetics. The ways in which Byzantium has been portrayed in English-language fiction from 1832, the year when the first novel with Byzantine interest was published, until 2021 is explored by Liz James. The examination reveals a predictable variety of approaches to the history, spirituality and culture of the Byzantines that reflect the diversified nature, scope and intentions of (Neo-) Byzantinisms. James ultimately concludes that English-language fiction has moved at a “glacial pace” and continues to portray Byzantium through an essentially nineteenth-century lens. For the most part, these texts perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes of decadence, corruption and exotic otherness, with contemporary novels merely adding graphic sexuality to the familiar tropes of priestly intrigue and imperial degeneracy.

Julien Benda (1867–1956) with his book *La France byzantine ou le triomphe de la littérature pure: Mallarmé, Gide, Valéry, Alain, Giraudoux, Suarès, les Surréalistes* brought an “inventive” use of Byzantinism as interpretive category/lens to the field of literature studies.<sup>68</sup> Benda employs the term to signify a universal literature not of ideas but of the image, that, both in prose and poetry, sets itself against any kind of intellectualism, promoting beauty over rationality as the main path that leads to the truth. Benda’s “Byzantinism” involves a series of distinctive characteristics that link the term to twentieth-century modernism and define the work of major literary figures. Predominant among these are an ecstatic treatment of language that favours a certain subjective mysticism, fragmentation and hermeticism as opposed to logical coherence, and the clear and objective articulation of ideas – the prioritisation of reason in the Kantian tradition.<sup>69</sup> Latent political purposes have been traced within Benda’s “Byzantinism”; however, he was soon accused of coining the term to justify France’s defeat in WWII, scapegoating French intellectual and literary culture for France’s military and political failures. By arguing that modern French literature’s focus on “pure” aestheticism, ambiguity and withdrawal from practical concerns had somehow weakened France’s moral and intellectual fibre (a quintessentially Gibbonian argument), critics saw him as deflecting blame from the more concrete political and military



causes of the defeat onto cultural and literary figures who had little direct responsibility for France's collapse in 1940. Benda's Byzantinism constitutes yet another subjective use (or mis-use) of the perceived "spirit" of Byzantium for political purposes.

Benda's Byzantinism has, however, since been applied to other major authors of modernity, such as Argentinian writer and poet Jorge Louis Borges (1899–1986). Borges' Byzantinism consisted, according to his critics, of creating a "universal" literature with very little connection to Argentinian or Latin American literature, alluding to Byzantine universality. Within literature too, the Byzantine has thus been utilised as an interpretative shorthand to comment upon art, artifice and transformative aesthetic experience, both positively and negatively. "The Byzantines" who attend the biblical Susanna, arriving and fleeing again in the face of complex sensuality "with a noise like tambourines", serve as complex foils within Wallace Stevens' poem *Peter Quince at the Clavier* with its exploration of art, beauty and sensuality. Their courtly refinement and ceremony are superficial and performative, unable to engage with profound artistic and spiritual experience; their flight represents an aesthetic response that remains trapped in social convention rather than achieving the transformative fusion of sensuality, consciousness and artistic creation that the poem celebrates.

### *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*

Such creative assimilations of Byzantium in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been informed and underpinned by postmodernism as well as modernism.<sup>70</sup> Postmodernism, based by definition on realities constituted by discourse, opened the field to an array of experiences, perceptions and, ultimately, manifestations of Byzantium in almost all domains of intellectual and cultural life. The relevance and value of the latter are predominantly subjective since they are determined by the individual, social, political and cultural context of the creator and/or viewer. The lack of an objective framework allows Byzantium – or fundamental elements crystallised through historical perceptions as "Byzantine" – to be used (or misused), perhaps more than any other historical era, for "playing tricks with history".

It is often said, however, that "popular culture" has done more for Byzantine Studies than anything else.<sup>71</sup> The last section in this volume discusses some of the most versatile manifestations and performative uses of Byzantine culture in modernity. Jenny Albani explores the embrace of Byzantium in twentieth- and early twenty-first-century jewellery fashions in Greece and abroad. Pioneer designers and luxury fashion houses assimilated Byzantine patterns, symbols and techniques in their creations, celebrating the forms and spirit of Byzantium. Jennifer Ball examines haute couture. Focusing on designs by Karl Lagerfeld (1933–2019), Gianni Versace (1947–97), Domenico Dolce (b. 1958) and Stefano Gabbana (b. 1962), Ball explores the parameters of their attraction to Byzantine visual idioms with particular emphasis, besides the use of luxury materials and elaborate techniques, on the inherently performative qualities of their creations. Marco Fasolio, on the other hand, deals with video games. His examination of a wide range of video gaming products leads to the conclusion that the majority of these display a highly fictionalised and often Orientalising version of Byzantium and its people that nonetheless engage with basic tropes pertaining to the historical empire; its Greek language, the reclamation of its lost Roman territories and its Orthodoxy. While some contemporary uses project forward creatively based on loose inspiration from one or more aspects of Byzantium, many demonstrate a deep and profoundly

creative engagement with Byzantine culture. For example, Alexios Mainas analyses Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966) as a cinematic manifesto that draws on Plotinian and Byzantine aesthetics to explore artistic creation as a means of imbuing life with meaning through the parallel stories of bell-casting, icon painting and filmmaking itself.

### *Displaying Byzantium*

The display of its visual and architectural culture has perhaps determined its shape in general knowledge more than any other aspect of Byzantium, with such exhibitions occupying a liminal zone that bridges academia and popular culture. Antony Eastmond charts with alacrity in this Handbook the discrepancy between Byzantium's lamented, compounded marginalisation in academia with its illustrious and indelibly political history of exhibition through which "Byzantium has punched way above its weight", attracting millions of visitors in at least 50 major loan exhibitions since 1945. The varied curatorial framings of Byzantium since 1945 share only that they are inescapably political and that Byzantium has continued relevance as a powerful political and cultural symbol. In some cases, Byzantium has been used to convey the Western mega museum's own ability "to bedazzle", with the Byzantine exhibition becoming a "proxy for neo-imperial clout". We are fortunate in this volume to have a retrospective personal account of the curator's personal journey of leading on such international loan exhibitions. Maria Vassilaki charts the politics of such endeavours and consequently the diplomacy and agility required, the balance between academic research and a compelling performance, and most of all the rewards of the impact realised in shifting cultural narratives.

Prior to such international loan exhibitions, pavilions at the international world fairs first deployed Byzantine design as statements of emergent national identity, reaching significant public audiences with ideas about Byzantium. Panayotis Tournikiotis examines in this volume the Greek pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1900, which bridged ancient heritage with modernity. He compares it to the definitive 1931 Paris loan exhibition of Byzantine art at the *Musée des arts décoratifs* to reveal tensions between France's embrace of a historical, but inherently modernist, Byzantium and the flat reception of both in Greece, where Byzantine art and architecture already served as a historical link in the narrative of modern Greek identity.

More recent exhibitions challenging these models have been decentred expressions of everyday material culture going beyond the empire's borders, influenced to varying degrees by decolonialism. Complex decisions about participation reflect both ancient legacies and contemporary tensions. Eastmond explores the politics of inheritance in exhibitions that have become stages for competing claims of Byzantine inheritance in countries with historical connection to the empire. Russia, Greece and Turkey have all used Byzantine art at various points to assert historical succession rights tied to contemporary politics (reflected equally in their choosing at times not to engage in this politics of inheritance), with the latter two leveraging these connections to support European integration arguments. Non-participation proves equally revealing. For some, such as Georgia, Orthodoxy – its enduring connection to Byzantium – in fact limits willingness to transport living icons. Georgian spirituality and its image were also inherently connected to national identity, and Irene Giviashvili and Anna Mgaloblishvili discuss nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Georgian altar screens as a crucial architectural medium through which national identity and spiritual continuity were constructed and displayed by strategically reviving

and reinterpreting medieval forms. Byzantium, it seems, still matters to the construction of modern nations, seen more than anywhere in the politics of display.

### **Global Byzantium – World Culture and Byzantine Studies**

In the year 2000 the Oxford History of Art Series, by Oxford University Press, devoted a monograph to Byzantine Art authored by Robin Cormack. The book was part of the World Art Series along with studies dedicated to African American Art, the Art of China, Native North American Art and Aegean Art and Architecture. In 1964, however, the grand historic exhibition “Byzantine Art – A European Art” had been organised in Athens, at the much-celebrated Zappeion Hall, under the auspices of the then Prime Minister of the Greek Government. This exhibition, which set forth the era of grand Byzantine shows in Europe and the United States, promoted Byzantium as the decisive European facet of Greek culture and was timed around the Greek bid to enter the European Economic Community.<sup>72</sup> However, as it seems, it didn’t meet its purposes: 36 years later Byzantium did not “tick the appropriate boxes” to be listed, at least by Oxford University Press, under the umbrella of European Art.

The place of Byzantium and Byzantine Studies in academia, at the university or in the museum, and in educational and research agendas remains obscure. The birth of the academic discipline of “Byzantine Studies” in the nineteenth century has been argued to have allowed for distance from the concept of both a Greek or Roman Empire and for the creation of a sanitised ideological space.<sup>73</sup> However, interest in Byzantine Studies is demonstrably greater in cases where the presence (and support) of a strong and active Greek community are predominant, implicitly emphasising the “Greekness” and Orthodox character of Byzantium.<sup>74</sup> It is clear that we should not ask for semantic clarity when dealing with Byzantium and its culture, however, since, one thing, at least, is certain about it: the lack of a firm, consistently applied corresponding signified.

Academic studies have since the nineteenth century provided the foundations and scaffolding for much of the revival and reinterpretation of Byzantium across art and architecture, politics, literature and more. They have provided improved historical accuracy and access to rich sources of inspiration that have influenced nation building and various artistic movements, contributing to the development of modern aesthetics. All of the studies in this volume that deal with the development of Byzantine Studies across the world, both past and present, focus on the contribution of significant individuals, the building of critical mass and eventual securing of institutional support. But for each scholar and institution, the work has been related to the needs of their contexts. Ivan Foletti focuses particularly on Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925), one of the first professional Byzantinists, a figure that largely shaped the development of Byzantine Studies globally yet was indelibly connected to the political making of Byzantium in Russia. Byzantine Studies have also been clearly affected by the vicissitudes of modern nation building in Russia. Lora Gerd traces how Russian Byzantine Studies flourished from the 1840s onwards, aligned with the perception of Russia as the heir of Byzantium, becoming a leading European school by the 1910s. The school collapsed under Communist persecution in the 1930s before reviving in the late 1940s under strict ideological constraints that excluded religious topics, while nurturing a new generation of scholars who would flourish after 1991.

Christine Amadou explores the formal institutionalisation of Byzantine Studies in Scandinavia during the 1980s, which thrives to this day. This development emerged from over a

century of informal engagement in both popular culture and adjacent scholarly disciplines, centred particularly on medieval Scandinavian-Byzantine contact, most notably through the Varangian Guard – the elite Byzantine military unit composed largely of Norse warriors who served the emperors in Constantinople from the tenth to fourteenth centuries. Amadou demonstrates how these historical connections were implicated in Scandinavian nation-building projects, as emerging Nordic states sought to construct distinctive historical and thus national identities. Markéta Kulhánková examines the pioneering work of the Czech classicist and Byzantinist Karel Müller (1875–1955) who translated and promoted Byzantine vernacular literature in early-nineteenth-century Czechia – efforts barely recognised in his lifetime or since, but which have provided part of the bedrock needed for the foundations of the discipline.

University collections have undoubtedly played a huge role, and continue to do so, in Byzantine reception. Jolivet Lévy explores the contribution of Gabriel Millet (1867–1953) to the reception of Byzantine art through his photographic collection assembled at the *École pratique des hautes études* (EPHE) along with his publications. Although the renewed response to Byzantine art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely driven by admiration for its stylistic properties that spoke to modernist sensibilities, Millet rejected an aesthetic approach in favour of a rigorous archaeological and iconographic method, grounded in texts and history. Through his meticulous and methodical documentation and innovative teaching methods, Millet significantly contributed to the study and appreciation of Byzantine art and architecture, influencing scholars and students worldwide in ways that continue to resonate.

The influx of émigré European scholars during World War II saw a significant transfer of Byzantine Studies across the Atlantic. Elizabeth Dospel Williams charts the wartime formation of Dumbarton Oaks to demonstrate how contemporary events and concern with a shifting world order shaped the field's institutional foundations. This contextual influence continues: the Byzantine Studies Association of North America has progressed the diversification of subject matter, methodologies and subspecialisations for a field now spanning Europe to Central Asia, while supporting an increasingly diverse body of researchers in defiance of older imperialist models of Byzantium and Byzantine Studies.

While the historiography of Byzantine Studies has predominantly focused on their nineteenth-century European and North American origins and developments, two compelling case studies in this Handbook illuminate the field's ongoing global expansion in modern academia. Chen Zhiqian examines their development in China from the 1980s, while Pablo Cavallero traces the flourishing of Byzantine historical, theological and philological studies and initiatives in Argentina, particularly from the mid-twentieth century onwards, culminating in the admission of the Argentine Centre of Byzantine Studies (CAEBiz) into the International Association of Byzantine Studies (AIEB) in 2016. Established in 1948, shortly after World War II as an outgrowth of various international Byzantine Studies congresses, the Association has grown to encompass approximately 28 national committees spanning continents from Europe and North America to Asia, Oceania and Latin America. The AIEB has actively shaped the field's development through its International Congresses – 24 of which have been convened to date, driving forward research priorities and methodological approaches. Alongside this welcome diversification, a complex dynamic and tension continues between organisational expansion and intellectual decolonisation. The geographical rotation of congresses continues to determine how Byzantine civilisation is interpreted and received, speaking to complex geopolitical legacies and national narratives.

Despite the disputed place of Byzantium in current academia and research agendas, generous institutional protection is now provided for the surviving Byzantine heritage as a valuable world culture. Vasiliki Dimitropoulou discusses the evolution of Byzantium's presence in the UNESCO World Heritage List that has been considerably enriched over time and now includes major, as well as lesser known, Byzantine monuments. In addition, traditions and living experiences, such as the Byzantine chant, have been included in the UNESCO catalogues of Intangible Cultural Heritage that constitute a priority for the institution. Byzantium's value, although contradictory and nebulous, is now international and seems not to be going anywhere.

## Notes

- 1 The term was originally coined by American literary critic and cultural historian Van Wyck Brooks, an American literary critic and, in his 1918 essay "On Creating a Usable Past".
- 2 See [Bolman et al. 2024](#) for an effective challenge to limited definitions of "Byzantium" which argues that "that linguistic and cultural frontiers do not always coincide with political ones"; their expanded scope includes the history of Christian populations in the Muslim-ruled Middle East and neighbouring states like Ethiopia and Armenia. They model greater interdisciplinary and methodological flexibility in integrating more closely with Judaic and Islamic studies and by including diverse people groups within the history of "Byzantium".
- 3 See Lovino's essay in this volume for the late self-identification as Greek.
- 4 See Garibian's essay in this volume.
- 5 On the prioritisation of the Greek language and the purposes this served, see [Papaconstantinou 2023](#).
- 6 [Bodin 2014](#): 13.
- 7 Exceptions have been John Bagnell Bury, Steven Runciman and Hans-Georg Beck. [Bury 1923](#). See also [Stouraitis 2014](#).  
Recent work by Anthony Kaldellis has focused on reasserting the suppressed identity of the New Roman Empire. [Kaldellis 2019b, 2024](#).
- 8 On Iorga's concept, see [Maner 2018](#). [Iorga 1935](#).
- 9 See [Anderson and Ivanova 2023](#). On the sultan taking the role of the emperor and the transformation of the conquered lands into a centralised empire, see [Yerasimos 2003](#).
- 10 Byzantium had long been responded to within Arab culture through its visual culture. See, for example, the Dome of the Rock. On the Arabic-Islamic view of Byzantium until 1453, see [El Cheikh 2004](#).
- 11 [Ahrweiler 2003](#): 6.
- 12 See [Aschenbrenner and Ransohoff 2022](#): 2 for the terms from early modern scholarship: the "Eastern Empire", the "Low Empire", the "Late Empire", the "Empire of the Greeks", the "Empire of Constantinople" and the "Roman Empire".
- 13 [Kaldellis 2021](#).
- 14 See Lovino's chapter in this volume for a more comprehensive discussion.
- 15 On Laskaris, see [Angelov 2019](#). On the efforts of Plethon and Bessarion, another prominent fifteenth-century Byzantine intellectual, to identify as Greeks and as the first to proffer a paradigm of decline, see [Pagani 2021](#). On the contested characterisation of Plethon as a closet Platonist/humanist, see [Siniosoglou 2011](#).
- 16 [Cormack 2000](#): 130–1.
- 17 See Panagiotis Theodoropoulos' entry in this Handbook on Greek school books which shows the attempt to portray the empire as Greek as part of national consciousness. On Greek history manuals in schools, see also [Kolias 2003](#).
- 18 There are exceptions of course, [Cameron 2014](#) includes "The Realms of Gold" as a marker of Byzantine identity and engagement alongside its Greekness and Orthodoxy etc. in arguing for the importance of Byzantium to ongoing debates about the relationships between West and East, Christianity and Islam, and the ancient and medieval periods.
- 19 On late and postmodern desire for icons going beyond their original religious usage, see [Bodin 2014](#). On fifteenth century Italian artists used Byzantine materiality to evoke the Roman Empire, see [Boeck 2021](#).

- 20 On Byzantinism as applying to Byzantium itself, see [Mango 1965](#).
- 21 [Milman 1855](#): xiv. x. 612.
- 22 For a critical deconstruction of the concept of “Byzantinism” as an essentialist understanding of the medieval civilisation that has been imposed through Western and modern analytical categories, examining imaginary stereotypes and the actual historical heritage of Byzantium in the cultural and political development of southeastern European nations, see [Angelov 2003](#).
- 23 Marketa and Marciniak: 3.
- 24 [Angelov 2003](#): 8.
- 25 [Foletti and Palladino 2023](#): 45.
- 26 [Ostrogorsky 1940](#): 1–21. The history of Byzantine Studies was also outlined in [Vasiliev 1952](#).
- 27 [Spieser 2000](#); [Shawcross 2021](#).
- 28 Gibbon 1776–88.
- 29 [Runciman 1976](#): 103.
- 30 [Vilimonović and Repajić 2016](#): 6.
- 31 See Sarah Riccardi-Swartz’s entry in this volume.
- 32 [Ostrogorsky 1940](#): 6.
- 33 In response to Avril Cameron’s chapter “Absence” in *Byzantine Matters* 2014 and her journal article [Cameron 2008](#).
- 34 [Alshanskaya et al. 2018](#): 9.
- 35 [Iorga 1935](#); [Obolensky 1982](#); [Clucas 1988](#); [Yiannias 1991](#); [Angelov 2003](#); [Alshanskaya et al. 2018](#).  
See, for example, [Nilsson and Stephenson 2014](#).
- 36 See, for example, [Nilsson and Stephenson 2014](#).
- 37 See Mishkova’s entry on Bulgaria in this volume and Andrii Domanovsky and Maryna Domanovska’s entry on Ukraine.
- 38 See also [Mishkova 2015](#).
- 39 On the complex/ambiguous relationship between Byzantine heritage and the formation of modern Greek national identity and collective memory, see [Ricks and Magdalino 1998](#); [Christodoulou 2010](#).
- 40 [Mango 1965](#). On the special relationship of Byzantine Studies to the history of the Greek state and to what has been called “romantic Hellenism” in the context of a discussion of the historiography of Byzantine Studies and new methodologies, see [Haldon 1984](#), 127–9.
- 41 Fallmerayer 1830–6.
- 42 [Finlay 1877](#).
- 43 See Kotoula’s essay in this book.
- 44 Byzantium and Communism had a complex relationship, see [Ivanov 2003](#) for how Byzantine Studies functioned in the Soviet Union from 1928 to 1948. Ivanov analyses the relationship between Communist ideology and Byzantine Studies and explores how Byzantium served as “a kind of barometer of internationalism” in the USSR and Byzantine scholarship. Lora Gerd’s essay in this volume outlines their resurgence particularly from the 1940s under altered conditions, following the difficulties of the 1920s and 1930s.
- 45 See Bhalla’s essay in this volume.
- 46 [Ivanov 2009](#).
- 47 [Makrides 1998](#): 141–4.
- 48 [Kamenskikh 2020](#): 188–9.
- 49 [Kotoula 2023](#): 126–7.
- 50 Apollinaire, Review at the Paris Newspaper *L’Intransigeant*, 22/04/1911.
- 51 For Boychuk and the School of Byzantine revival in Paris see, [Susak 2010](#): 36–47.
- 52 Brilliantly argued in [Peers 2010](#): 89–93.
- 53 Anderson and Ivanova; [Foletti and Palladino 2023](#): 55–7.
- 54 See Peers’ essay within this volume.
- 55 The edited collection presents a critical examination of Byzantine Studies as an academic discipline, questioning whether its methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, and scholarly practices reflect colonialist perspectives and biases.
- 56 [Mavroudi 2023](#).
- 57 For Ruskin and the British Arts and Crafts movement, see Kotoula’s essay in this volume.

- 58 Lethaby no. 100.  
59 Lethaby no. 101.  
60 Explored influentially in the collection of essays from the 20th International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Paris, 2001) in [Auzépy 2003](#). See also [Kolovou 2012](#) which positions the 1000-year history as transmitting Greek, Roman, and Christian cultures to Europe and, despite eliciting mixed receptions, remaining stable as an object of attraction for European intellectual and cultural elites since the sixteenth century.  
61 [Kulhánková and Marciniak 2023b](#): 3.  
62 See both Kourelis' essay on diaspora architectures in this volume and Nelson's essay.  
63 See the entries by Bhalla, Nelson and Kourelis in this Handbook.  
64 See Saveliev's essay in this volume.  
65 See [Kulhánková and Marciniak 2023a](#). On Ludwig II, see [Berger 2003](#). On Yeats, see [Sjösvärd 2014](#); [Bullen 2003](#): 10; [Nelson 2004](#): 129 and Byron in this volume.  
66 For a comprehensive historiographical survey of the origins and early development of Byzantine Studies as an academic discipline with substantial bibliographic resources, see [Savvides 2018](#). For contemporary developments, see Cavallero's and Zhiqiang's essays in this volume.  
67 See [Marciniak 2022](#). Early modern stage shows demonstrate how playwrights of all political and confessional backgrounds used Byzantine characters disassociated from context as exemplars of virtue and vice – Byzantium became a powerful backdrop to spur anxiety of royal absolutism, heterodoxy or the Ottomans etc. Averil Cameron in her inaugural lecture delivered at King's College London in 1990 examined how Byzantium has been perceived, interpreted, and misrepresented in modern scholarship and popular culture, exploring the various ways in which the Byzantine Empire has been both appropriated and distorted for different historiographical and ideological purposes. [Cameron 1992](#). See Peers essay in this volume.  
68 [Benda 1945](#).  
69 [Arabatzi 2017](#): 423–30.  
70 [Haldon 2001](#): 1–2.  
71 [Marciniak and Smythe 2016](#): 6; [Kulhánková and Marciniak 2023b](#).  
72 See also Eastmond's essay in the present volume.  
73 On the emergence of Byzantine Studies as a discipline, see [Cormack and Haldon 2008](#).  
74 [Haldon 2001](#): 3.

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## PART II

# Histories



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## 2

# RE-WRITING BYZANTIUM

*Francesco Lovino*

In April 1969, the Italian weekly comic book *Topolino* published the story *Zio Paperone e la vite della ricchezza* (*Uncle Scrooge and the Vine of Wealth*).<sup>1</sup> Following a well-established narrative pattern, Uncle Scrooge embarks on an adventure accompanied by Donald Duck and his nephews Huey, Dewey and Louie to the distant land of Trumpetland, where a miraculous vineyard bestows wealth upon those who cultivate it. At one point, hesitating before entering a peculiar horn-shaped tunnel, Uncle Scrooge exclaims, “Decidiamoci dunque! Bizantineggiando non verremo mai a capo di nulla” (So let’s make up our minds, then! By splitting hairs we’ll never get anywhere, [Figure 2.1](#)).

The presence of the verb *bizantineggiare* (Byzantinising) in a children’s comic strip is, at first glance, surprising. However, considering *Topolino*’s long-standing reputation for employing sophisticated language with an implicit pedagogical intent, this choice becomes less unexpected. Since its inception in 1949, the magazine has consistently maintained a high linguistic register, and Rodolfo Cimino, the author of this story, was among its most refined scriptwriters.<sup>2</sup> Language shapes perception, and the pejorative connotations attached to Byzantium in Italian reflect the complex and often ambivalent historical relationship between the Byzantine Empire and its European neighbours. Each European language has developed its own particular perception of Byzantium, yet these interpretations are overwhelmingly negative. This is evident in the German translation of Uncle Scrooge’s exclamation, rendered as “Das ewige Zaudern muss ja mal ein Ende haben” (This endless hesitation must come to an end at some point),<sup>3</sup> with the German adjective *byzantinisch* (Byzantine) continuing to signify excessive servility or intrigue.<sup>4</sup>

How did a millennial empire, “A fundamental cultural component in the formation of western civilization”,<sup>5</sup> come to be reduced to a mere joke in a Walt Disney comic?

### Western Europe vs the Eastern Roman Empire

The history of the relationship between western Europe and Byzantium, and subsequently between western Europe and the Byzantine legacy, can be broadly divided into at least



Figure 2.1 Luciano Capitanio (1934–69), cartoon, 1969. Published in *Zio Paperone e la vite della ricchezza*, Topolino 698, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, p. 16. Reproduced for academic criticism only.

three phases. The first phase is characterised by antagonism, epitomised by rivalry over the inheritance of the Roman emperor's title. The second phase, spanning from 1204 to the fall of Constantinople, is marked by the West's condescending attitude towards the Byzantine emperor, who had become largely peripheral in the international political arena. The third phase specifically concerns the reception of Byzantium, or rather its construction by modern historiography, and this constitutes the central focus of this introduction.

I will briefly address the first two phases, as they serve in some ways as a prelude to the developments of the following centuries. Throughout the entire duration of the eastern Roman Empire, its people and rulers maintained a vigorous assertion of their Roman-ness, claiming unbroken continuity from Augustus to the emperors of Constantinople. On the other side of the Mediterranean, Westerners referred to the "Greek Empire", where the adjective "Greek" often implied a disparaging meaning – connoting love of luxury, intrigue and treachery – which significantly the Romance languages would later attribute to the adjective "Byzantine".<sup>6</sup>

Long before the fateful year of 1054,<sup>7</sup> the break between Rome, understood as the papal see, and Constantinople had already occurred by the late eighth century, marking a decisive turning point in the relationship between the western and eastern Mediterranean worlds. This rupture is particularly evident in the dating system employed by the papal chancellery: whereas until 772, papal documents were dated according to the regnal years of the

emperor in Constantinople, by the late 790s, a new system had been adopted, marking time according to the reigns of the pope and the Frankish king, thereby omitting any reference to Byzantium. This shift foreshadowed the coronation of Charlemagne as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 800. From the Byzantine perspective, this “duplication” of the imperial title constituted a serious affront. In 968, Emperor Nicephorus Phocas (r. 963–69) went so far as to imprison Bishop Liutprand of Cremona (920–72), the ambassador of Otto the Great (912–73), after the former dared to exalt his own ruler’s imperial status, proclaiming Otto the sole true “Emperor of the Romans” while referring to Nicephorus by the diminished title of “Imperator Graecorum”, a clear challenge to Byzantine political and ideological primacy. At the end of the empire, however, a more explicit sense of Greekness emerged over the traditional self-identification with Rome. This marked a radical shift: for most of their millennium-long history, the Byzantines had in fact regarded the ancient Greeks as foreigners, and the term “Hellenes” was commonly used to denote pagans, regardless of language or origin, though this sense of Hellenic identity remained largely limited to the educated elite.<sup>8</sup>

It is from this starting point that the modern reception of Byzantium should be analysed. After the Fourth Crusade, the empire had been reduced to a small regional state, like the Rhine thinned into a stream before it reaches the ocean: threatened in the East by Muslims and unable to reunite with the Despotate of Epirus or the Empire of Trebizond. It was in this context, highly homogeneous from a social and linguistic perspective, that George Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452) suggested a direct connection between the eastern Romans and the ancient Greeks, envisioning an ethnographic background theory to support his political agenda. His enquiry began with the very origins of *Βυζάντιον* (Byzantion), discussed extensively in his *Ἐκ τῶν Διοδώρου παρασημειώσεως* (Experts from Diodorus’ notes) wherein Plethon emphasised its ancient foundation as a Doric colony,<sup>9</sup> and that the Romans who settled there under Constantine were, at least in part, of Greek origin. Plethon traced a genealogical link between the Peloponnese and Constantinople, drawing selectively on ancient sources to support his argument, specifically Diodorus Siculus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus: Byzantion was founded by the Dorians, who were Peloponnesian<sup>10</sup>; the foundation of Troy, according to Dionysius’s account, was carried out by a group of Greeks led by Dardanus, originating from Arcadia, the central and mountainous region of the Peloponnese; even the Sabines, ancestors of the Romans, were believed to have Peloponnesian origins. This historical examination was partly instrumental to Plethon’s analysis of the political situation of the empire at the beginning of the fifteenth century. In the 1410s he wrote three memoranda addressing the political and social conditions of the Peloponnese. In the *Συμβουλευτικός πρὸς τὸν δεσπότην Θεόδωρον περὶ τῆς Πελοποννήσου* (Counsel to the Despotate of Morea on Peloponnese), delivered to Theodore II Palaiologos (r. 1407–43), Plethon emphasised the necessity of restructuring the political organisation of the Peloponnese and underscored the significance of well-crafted legislation in regulating both public and private life. In his view, the survival of the Peloponnese in the face of the Ottoman threat required its transformation into a self-sufficient political entity, both economically and militarily, defined by clear territorial boundaries and a homogeneous ethnic composition.<sup>11</sup> The Ottoman adversary was also framed through a historical lens: in the text, Plethon refers to them as the “Παραπαμισάδαι” (Parapamisadai), an ancient people defeated by Alexander the Great who are now portrayed as seeking vengeance against the Hellenes.<sup>12</sup> The notion of Greekness is most clearly articulated in a well-known passage

from Plethon's letter to Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391–1425), in which he asserts that the Greek nation is rooted in a common language and shared education among the Greek people. Notably, for Plethon, this conception of Greek identity and, by extension, the confrontation with the Ottomans, are formulated independently of Christianity, thereby advancing a secular vision of Hellenism in opposition to a religiously defined worldview.<sup>13</sup>

Since the nineteenth century, Plethon has been recognised as a forerunner of Greek nationalism, with scholarship acknowledging his pivotal role in shaping a Hellenic identity.<sup>14</sup> In his three *memoranda*, he anticipates the concept of the nation-state, grounding it in shared cultural elements, particularly language and education, alongside the necessity of an independent military and monetary system.<sup>15</sup> However, Plethon's notion of Greekness not only foreshadowed the modern nation-state but also profoundly influenced the identity consciousness of an entire generation of Byzantine intellectuals, many of whom studied under him in Mystras. These scholars would later witness firsthand the catastrophe Plethon had foreseen: the fall of Constantinople and the disintegration of the Byzantine or "Greek" world.

Prominent fifteenth-century Byzantine intellectuals such as Theodoros Gazes, George of Trebizond, John Argyropoulos and Cardinal Bessarion relocated to the Latin West, which they had already visited during the ecclesiastical Councils of Constance (1416–18) and Ferrara-Florence (1438–39). Others, including George Amiroutzes, Kritovoulos of Imbros and Laonikos Chalkokondyles, remained within the newly established Ottoman Empire, while figures such as the historian Doukas settled in the Latin-ruled eastern Mediterranean. This fragmentation (social, geographical and personal) is reflected in the diverse interpretations of Greekness that eastern Roman intellectuals developed throughout the fifteenth century, and even in its outright rejection, as seen in the historiographical works of George Sphrantzes, Kritovoulos of Imbros and Doukas.<sup>16</sup>

For Byzantines who settled in western Europe, particularly in Italy, the assertion of a Hellenic identity was inextricably linked to their status as émigrés. Their Greekness became an essential marker of identity, defined in opposition to the *latinitas* of European humanists: a defensive strategy crucial for social repositioning. Within this framework, Bessarion's conception of Hellenism emphasised themes of cosmopolitanism and migration, showcasing its adaptability to diverse cultural contexts while remaining firmly rooted in a Christian, specifically Catholic, framework.<sup>17</sup> Kaldellis characterises this transformation as an "extension of Western colonization from economies and lands to minds and hearts",<sup>18</sup> a process that, as Leonora Neville has observed, also reinforced the Western narrative that denied Byzantium's Roman identity.<sup>19</sup> By redefining the eastern Romans as "Greeks", Western humanism effectively facilitated the historical erasure of their self-perceived *romanitas* and helped construct a historiography of Western superiority, one that justified the cultural and intellectual eradication of the eastern Roman Empire from the historical consciousness of Europe.

### **The Humanist Invention of Byzantium**

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, western perceptions of Byzantium continued to reflect this ideological shift. Greek émigrés themselves often embraced an image of cultural descent from classical Greece rather than from imperial Rome, and European humanists readily adopted this framework. Yet this shared Hellenic orientation intersected



with new historical and political concerns that shaped the reception of Byzantine history.<sup>20</sup> The most urgent of these was undoubtedly the Ottoman military advance into central Europe. The Battle of Mohács in 1526 had secured Turkish control over southern Hungary and by 1529, the forces of Süleyman the Magnificent had laid siege to Vienna. Against this backdrop, the German scholar Johann Lange (1485–1565) published a Latin translation of Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία (Ecclesiastical History) by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos in 1553, printed in Basel by Oporinus. In the dedicatory letter to Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria (1529–95), Lange voiced his concerns about the Ottomans, who, he wrote, had conquered both Asia and Europe.<sup>21</sup> A similar sentiment was echoed by Conrad Clauser (1515–1611) in his Latin edition of Ἀποδείξεις Ἱστοριῶν (Demonstrations of Histories) by Laonikos Chalkokondyles,<sup>22</sup> in which he explicitly argued that Byzantine historiographical accounts of Turkish warfare provided valuable strategic insights for defeating the Ottomans.<sup>23</sup> The *Corpus Historiae Byzantinae* was conceived with similar intentions. In the preface to the thirteenth-century Χρονικὴς Διηγήσεως (Historia/Chronicle) of Niketas Choniates, published by Oporinus in 1557, Hieronymus Wolf (1516–80) underscored the exemplary role of Byzantine history and called for unity in liberating Hungary.<sup>24</sup> A distinguished editor of classical Greek orators, Wolf was employed by the banker Johann Jacob Fugger in Augsburg, where he was responsible for drafting Fugger's Latin correspondence and managing his extensive library. While this collection lacked classical authors, it was particularly rich in theological, patristic and Byzantine historiographical texts. Somewhat reluctantly, Wolf dedicated himself to preparing a series of printed editions of Byzantine historical chronicles, beginning with Niketas Choniates and the Ἐπιτομὴ Ἱστοριῶν (History) by Johannes Zonaras (†1130).<sup>25</sup> Only with the publication of the second volume did the series adopt the title *Corpus Historiae Byzantinae*. This marked the first recorded use of the adjective “Byzantine” in its modern sense. Although Wolf is traditionally credited with coining the term, it is more likely that it was introduced by the publisher Oporinus, who appended to Wolf's critical edition of Nicephorus Gregoras the 1556 Latin translation of Chalkokondyles, one of the earliest sources to refer to the emperor as “βασιλεὺς” (king) of Byzantium, in reference to the entire empire rather than merely Constantinople.<sup>26</sup> For Wolf, Byzantine texts served not only to *delectare* (to delight) but, more importantly, to *docere* (to instruct), including in matters of religion.<sup>27</sup>

### From Counter-Reformation Scholarship to Royal Propaganda

German religious reformers were particularly interested in the history of the Orthodox Church, which Martin Luther (1483–1546) had identified as the only true repository of Christian faith.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, interest in Byzantium was not exclusive to the Protestant world; the Catholic Church also made occasional attempts at unionist proposals, though these were largely isolated initiatives. However, after the Council of Trent (1545–63), the urgency of countering Protestant arguments led Catholic scholars to engage with the same sources. This tendency is exemplified by the *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1588–1607, Ecclesiastical Annals) by Caesar Baronius (1538–1607), a monumental 12-volume history of the Church up to 1198 that became foundational to Counter-Reformation historiography.<sup>29</sup> Baronius aimed to demonstrate that the early Eastern Church acknowledged the authority of Rome until the Schism of 1054, selectively using sources and minimising or disregarding those that contradicted this narrative. Despite his limited knowledge

of Greek and his reliance on translations of varying accuracy, Baronius's work had a significant impact, shaping a stereotyped image of Byzantium that would endure for centuries.<sup>30</sup> The *Annales Ecclesiastici*, for instance, contain one of the earliest and most vehement attacks on the empress Theodora, steeped in the usual clichés of Byzantine decadence, luxury and corruption at the imperial court. Such depictions left a lasting impression. It is no coincidence that, over the course of the seventeenth century, Byzantium became the setting for a series of moralising historical tragedies, from *Leo Armenus seu Impietas Punita* (Leo the Armenian, or Impiety Punished) by the English Jesuit Joseph Simons (1624) to *Héraclius, Empereur d'Orient* (Heraclius, Emperor of the East) by Pierre Corneille (1647).<sup>31</sup>

Both Simons and Corneille were educated in Jesuit institutions, a fact that is hardly incidental. The Jesuits regarded Byzantium as an exemplary model of Church-State relations, and Byzantine history was an integral part of their curriculum. Within Jesuit circles, Héribert Rosweyde (1569–1629) conceived an ambitious project to compile a comprehensive corpus of hagiographical texts dedicated to saints “*omnis aetatis, sexus, nationis*”.<sup>32</sup> His *Fasti Sanctorum* were to include approximately 1300 saints and martyrs, including 180 eastern saints, across 18 volumes. The project remained unfinished due to Rosweyde's sudden death in 1629, though he left behind a vast archive of manuscripts, translations and correspondence with European scholars involved in the endeavour. Recognising the significance of his work, the Jesuit order entrusted its continuation to Father Jean Bolland (1596–1665), who expanded its scope even further. No longer limited to saints for whom *Vitae* or *Passiones* were preserved, the project now sought to encompass all saints. Furthermore, rather than publishing a separate volume of commentary, Bolland integrated introductions and commentaries alongside each text.<sup>33</sup> Though the project remained incomplete, the Bollandists were the first to systematically collect and publish hagiographical literature in Greek, broadening the study of eastern religious traditions from the early Christian period through the Byzantine era.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Europe being torn apart by the Thirty Years' War, in which religious conflicts played a central role, Jesuit editorial work distinguished itself for its scholarly rigour and meticulous verification of sources, avoiding overtly partisan polemics. The *positive theological* method, which even Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) had recognised as necessary, also facilitated the publication of controversial texts. The sole objective was the pursuit and investigation of useful and necessary knowledge concerning historical events and antiquity, as Johannes Isacius Pontanus himself wrote in the preface to his 1603 edition of the *Ἱστορία* (History) of John VI Kantakouzenos (r. 1347–54), which the former emperor completed around 1369.<sup>35</sup> Historiography thus regained prominence, fuelled by the imperial ambitions of the Bourbon dynasty in France.<sup>36</sup> The goal was no longer merely to study the past, or the Ottomans, but to incorporate Byzantine history into a broader ideological project. The *Corpus Parisinum*, also known as the *Byzantine du Louvre*, a collection of 32 volumes published by the Imprimerie royale between 1645 and 1711 under the direction of Charles Annibal Fabrot (1580–1659) and the Jesuit Philippe Labbe (1607–67) and later expanded in the 1680s by Charles De Fresne, sire Du Cange (1610–88), played a crucial role in this endeavour.

Du Cange could be considered the apex of Byzantine studies in the seventeenth century. Although Pertusi suggested distinguishing between Du Cange's intellectual work and the political use made of it by the royal court, as early as 2000 Spieser had already

observed that his scholarship was rooted in a desire to link the history of France to the period of French domination over Constantinople.<sup>37</sup> After studying law in Paris, Du Cange returned to his hometown of Amiens, where in the 1640s he began his research on French involvement in the Crusades. This interest would culminate in his 1657 expanded edition of Geoffroi de Villehardouin's *Histoire de la conquête de Constantinople* (1207–13, History of the Conquest of Constantinople), published under the title *Histoire de l'empire de Constantinople sous les empereurs français* (History of the Empire of Constantinople under the French emperors).<sup>38</sup> In the *Épître au roi* (Epistle to the King), and even more explicitly in the preface, Du Cange emphasises that the events of the Fourth Crusade belong as much to Byzantine history as to the history of France. He further claims that the descendants of the French emperors (i.e. King Louis XIV (1638–1715) himself) retain their rights to the throne of Constantinople, even urging the monarch to launch a new Crusade to reclaim the territories d' *outremer*.<sup>39</sup> Du Cange's words operate on two levels: on one hand, they contribute to a broader ideological project aimed at establishing continuity between the Roman Empire and the French monarchy; on the other, they allude to France's supposed right to claim the imperial title over the Habsburgs. I have intentionally referred to the "Roman Empire" rather than the "eastern Roman Empire", since Louis XIV's propaganda identified him with figures such as Alexander the Great, Apollo, and his illustrious namesake Saint Louis IX, or even as *Imperator Romanorum*, but never as a Byzantine emperor. In this context, Byzantium functioned as a tool for the glorification of the French monarchy, which appropriated its symbols and emblems. The royal insignia of the fleur-de-lis and the white cross were traditionally linked to the *labarum* and Constantine's cross, and in his edition of Jean de Joinville's *Vie de Saint Louis* (1305, Life of St Louis), Du Cange claimed that the circular crowns worn by the Dauphins of France were modelled on those of Byzantine princes and dignitaries.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the symbolic connection between the French Kingdom and the Empire of Constantinople, Du Cange did not spare the "Greeks" from accusations of "excès, (...), perfidie et (...) cruauté" (excess, perfidy and cruelty),<sup>41</sup> reflecting a critical view that in some ways anticipated Enlightenment judgements. For Du Cange, however, the ineptitude of the Byzantine emperors was compounded by the Orthodox Schism, which he viewed as having fractured the unity of Christendom.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Du Cange eventually moved beyond the framework of the Crusades to focus more directly on the study of Byzantium, albeit somewhat reluctantly, as had been the case with Hieronymus Wolf a century earlier. In 1670 Du Cange had edited an edition of the twelfth-century historian John Kinnamos, the final volume of the *Corpus Parisinus* commissioned by the Jesuit writer Philippe Labbe (1607–67).<sup>43</sup> Yet in the following years, his efforts were largely directed towards securing the commission to edit the *Historiae Francorum Scriptores*, a project initially planned by the geographer and historian André du Chesne (1584–1640) in 1633.<sup>44</sup> When this initiative ultimately proved unsuccessful, he turned his attention once more to the *Corpus Parisinus*: in the dedicatory letter of his *Historia Byzantina*, a two-volume work retracing the history of the eastern Roman Empire and enriched with numerous illustrations and inscriptions, Du Cange appealed directly to Jean Baptiste Colbert to intercede with the king for the resumption of the project, which did in fact result in the publication of five additional volumes between 1685 and 1702.<sup>45</sup>



*Figure 2.2* Diptych of Magnus, 518. Ivory, 37.5 × 12.5 cm. Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo © User: Marsyas, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.5.

In France, other editorial projects developed, aimed at a broader, non-specialist audience. These included the *livres pour les femmes*<sup>46</sup> by the Jesuit Louis Maimbourg (1610–86), the French anthology of Byzantine historians by Louis Cousin (1627–1707), and the monumental *Histoire ecclésiastique* (Ecclesiastical History) by Abbé Claude Fleury (1640–1723), a 20-volume history of the Church from its origins to the Council of Constance in 1414, left incomplete at the time of his death.<sup>47</sup> The scholarly engagement with Byzantium was accompanied by a wider cultural revival of Byzantine heritage, in keeping with a tradition already well rooted in the French monarchy.<sup>48</sup> Louis XIV and his minister Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–83) sponsored scientific expeditions to the eastern Mediterranean, such as those undertaken by Gravier d’Ortières and the De Combes brothers between 1685 and 1687, while many travellers sought reliquaries, vases, coins and, as always, manuscripts.<sup>49</sup> Among the objects brought to Paris were, for instance, the *valva* from the consular diptych of Magnus (Figure 2.2), who was consul in Constantinople in 518, and the tenth-century cameo of St John the Evangelist, both today at the Cabinet des Médailles of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. More broadly, the increasing availability of Byzantine material culture opened new directions for research, from numismatics and palaeography to topography. The publication of *Voyage d’Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grèce et du Levant* (Travel to Italy, Dalmatia, Greece and the Levant) by Jacob Spon in 1678 further expanded these horizons, allowing even scholars who had never travelled beyond western Europe to study and visually apprehend the monuments of Christian Byzantium, from Constantinople to the churches of the Peloponnese and the Monastery of Hosios Loukas.<sup>50</sup>

### Crystallising Decline: Enlightenment Visions of the Byzantine Empire

As Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff have observed, the accumulation of scientific resources during the seventeenth century reached a critical mass, allowing researchers to explore various aspects of Byzantine civilisation in greater depth.<sup>51</sup> However, Byzantium had not yet achieved intellectual autonomy as a distinct historical entity, let alone become a legitimate subject of study. The failed siege of Vienna in 1683 and the defeat at Zenta (1697) marked the end of the Turkish threat to western Europe, thus removing one of the primary motivations for studying Byzantine civilisation. More generally, as Louis Bréhier (1868–1951) wrote in 1901, in the eighteenth century, Byzantine studies suffered the fate common to all historical sciences: “It was no longer a disinterested work of scholarship, but rather an arsenal of philosophical arguments”.<sup>52</sup> Bréhier’s reference to disinterested scholarship sounds a little naïve in light of what we have already seen. The Enlightenment did not simply distort the image of Byzantium: it crystallised it. The eighteenth century marked the moment in which a negative and polemical vision of the Byzantine world, long present in western thought, took on a stable, codified form, reinforced by philosophical agendas and ideological concerns. Byzantium thus became a rhetorical foil: a symbol of despotism, clerical corruption and theological excess, the very epitome of decadence.

Unlike earlier writings, where Byzantium was still assessed through a moralising comparison with the medieval Latin West, condemned, for instance, for its supposed corruption, superstition and moral decay, eighteenth-century philosophers shifted the focus. For thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Charles Le Beau and Edward Gibbon, the key concept was no longer religious difference or political intrigue, but *decadence*. Their

interest moved away from a synchronic opposition between East and West and turned instead to a broader, diachronic question: what caused the fall of the Roman Empire? The answer, increasingly, was sought in the very foundation of Constantinople. The transfer of the imperial capital to the East was interpreted as a fatal misstep, one that effectively immolated the West to the invasions of Germanic populations. As Montesquieu puts it, Rome was entirely relocated to Constantinople: elites took with them their slaves and their assets, leaving behind in Italy nothing but abandoned gardens.<sup>53</sup> Across the *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734, Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline) by Montesquieu and the *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (An Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations), on which Voltaire worked for over 30 years, revising and expanding it (from 1743 until his death in 1778, with the first edition published under a slightly different title in Geneva in 1756), certain motifs recur, rooted in a broadly shared anticlerical outlook. Byzantium had abandoned the religious tolerance that had characterised ancient Rome and the Church, increasingly entangled in continual and often violent doctrinal disputes, was seen as a force that undermined the administrative structure of the empire from within. It is no surprise, then, that both Montesquieu and Voltaire reserved rare praise for the brief reign of Julian the Apostate (361–63), whom they regarded as the only emperor who made a serious effort to reverse the empire's decline by attempting to restore the old pagan cult.<sup>54</sup> Even Iconoclasm was somewhat re-evaluated: while condemning the violent methods adopted by the Isaurian emperors, the struggle was necessary to eradicate a cult that had now turned into superstition and above all to limit the economic and political power of the monasteries, a vain struggle because, as Voltaire writes, “these monks, already very wealthy, proved more adept at defending their possessions than the images of their saints”.<sup>55</sup>

Voltaire's *Essai* is a far more expansive and articulated work compared to Montesquieu's concise treatment, which devotes only the final four chapters of the *Considérations* to the eastern Roman Empire and concludes not with the fall of Constantinople, but with the failed siege of the city by Bayezid I in 1402. Voltaire's broader discussion explains why he identifies a greater number of emperors who, in his view, “had not proved unworthy of ruling”,<sup>56</sup> such as the rulers of the Macedonian dynasty, Nikephoros Phokas, John Tzimiskes and again Alexios I Komnenos, a wise and moderate sovereign whom Voltaire would later depict favourably in his final theatrical tragedy, *Irène*, staged at the *Comédie Française* in Paris in March 1778.<sup>57</sup> Alexios's moderation stands in stark contrast to the actions of the Crusaders, for whom Voltaire harboured an openly negative judgement. He defends the alliance between Isaac II Angelos and Saladin within an anti-Latin perspective and not only condemns the violence of the Fourth Crusade but also extends his critique to western crusading efforts more generally, including the Albigensian Crusade (1209–29). This anti-Crusader stance might suggest a corresponding re-evaluation of Byzantium following the reconquest of Constantinople in 1261 yet in reality, the Palaiologan dynasty is depicted in the same harsh terms previously reserved for Justinian and most of his successors. The Greeks, Voltaire claims, “brought their own customs into the empire”,<sup>58</sup> turning it into a nest of religious fanaticism and moral decadence. Thus, in his account of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Voltaire appears to side with Mehmed II, portrayed as a tolerant ruler who allows the Orthodox to maintain their faith and refrains from destroying their places of worship.<sup>59</sup>



It is worth noting how the two philosophers interpreted the concept of decadence in radically different terms. For Voltaire, decadence is a moral category: Byzantium (like much of medieval history) is irredeemably marked by religious fanaticism and the absence of moderation, making its decline both inevitable and deserved. Montesquieu, by contrast, treats decadence as a historical law, governed by structural and contingent causes. This fundamental difference explains why only Montesquieu attempts to answer a question that had already preoccupied Du Cange: how did the Byzantine Empire manage to survive until 1453? For Montesquieu, the answer lies in a series of “particular causes” that temporarily delayed the otherwise inevitable decline of the eastern Roman Empire: the strategic use of Greek fire, the vitality of eastern Mediterranean commerce and crucially, external geopolitical factors such as the Crusades and the Mongol Empire of Tamerlane. These latter forces diverted Ottoman expansion, as in the case of Bayezid I, who was forced to lift the siege of Constantinople in 1402 to confront Tamerlane’s advance in Asia Minor.

The other major Enlightenment work dedicated to Byzantium is undoubtedly *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon (1737–94), published since 1776.<sup>60</sup> Its appearance largely eclipsed the reception of *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (History of the Late Roman Empire) by Charles Le Beau (1757–1811), a monumental work intended to cover the entire history of Byzantium from Constantine to the fall of Constantinople.<sup>61</sup> The series progressed up to the Byzantine reconquest of Constantinople following the Fourth Crusade, reaching its twentieth volume in 1778, shortly before Le Beau’s death. Owing to its sheer scale, the work circulated mainly through abridged versions and was later widely criticised for its verbosity and lack of critical insight.<sup>62</sup> *The Decline and Fall*, by contrast, appeared concise, well-composed and free from the defects often associated with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquarian scholarship. More than the specific content of the narrative, it was Gibbon’s historical method that marked a turning point in Enlightenment historiography. He effectively transcended the opposition between the antiquarian and the philosophical historian. As Arnaldo Momigliano observed, whereas Voltaire made bold and unrestrained use of sources, often without citing them, Gibbon anchored his account in explicit, verifiable references. This scholarly rigour, however, did not come at the expense of literary elegance or interpretive depth: Gibbon was and still is revered as the supreme model of the narrative historian.<sup>63</sup>

At the same time, amid the desolation of the decline of the eastern Roman Empire, which, as in Montesquieu, is portrayed as an inexorable and irreversible process, Gibbon adopts a tone that is less caustic than his illustrious predecessors. While critical, his treatment of Christianity and the Crusades is not entirely dismissive. The English historian recognises in the Crusades not only fanaticism and violence but also a catalyst for the dissolution of the feudal system and the rise of a flourishing commercial order in the Mediterranean.<sup>64</sup> In a striking departure from the usual Enlightenment scepticism, Gibbon even expresses a degree of sympathy for the western crusaders during the Fourth Crusade, suggesting that the Greeks despised them largely out of a misplaced sense of cultural superiority over the barbarous Latins. Similarly, in recounting the fall of Constantinople, Gibbon offers a rare moment of admiration: he praises Constantine XI Palaiologos (1405–53, [Figure 2.3](#)), declaring that he “deserves the name of a hero” and highlights his leadership of a “noble band of volunteers (...) inspired with Roman virtues”.<sup>65</sup>



*Figure 2.3* Constantine XI Palaiologos, 15th century. Painting. Old Monastery of Taxiarches, Aigialeia, Greece. Photo © User: ILoveHirasawaYui, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

### **Byzantium in the Long Nineteenth Century**

Gibbon published *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in three instalments: the first volume appeared in 1776, the second and third in 1781 and the final three between 1788 and 1789, on the eve of the French Revolution and at the threshold of what would later be called the “Long Nineteenth Century”. In an elegant rhetorical exercise, Momigliano, writing in 1978, speculated on what might have happened had Gibbon



chosen to publish the entire work at once upon its completion. He suggested, in particular, that readers would likely have been more inclined to connect it with the French Revolution of 1789 and thus with a universal reading of the decline of the “ancien régime”, rather than with the American Revolution of 1776 and the decline of the British Empire.<sup>66</sup> What has remained constant, however, is the enduring fortune of Gibbon’s text, nearly 250 years after its first appearance. As George Ostrogorsky remarked, its magisterial clarity discouraged most nineteenth-century scholars from engaging seriously with Byzantine historiography, assuring that Gibbon (and Le Beau) still deserve to be read.<sup>67</sup> Remarkably, Gibbon’s influence has extended beyond the academic sphere: in 1995, punk rock musician Iggy Pop published a brief reflection in *Classics Ireland* in which he explored the parallels between *The Decline and Fall* and contemporary political conditions.<sup>68</sup>

Despite its dominance, *The Decline and Fall* did not hinder the resurgence of Byzantine studies in the nineteenth century. A new interest in specialised research emerged, and the field began its transition from Enlightenment-era polemic to a more systematic and professionalised form of scholarship. This shift is reflected in the emergence of major editorial initiatives aimed at producing critical editions of primary sources, including the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (commonly known as the *Bonn Corpus*, launched in 1828), the *Patrologia Graeca*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne (1800–75), and the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana*, which included many Byzantine authors alongside classical texts. At the same time, it is difficult to identify a single dominant intellectual trend in nineteenth-century Byzantine studies. On the whole, the impulse to produce universal, synthetic accounts of the empire’s entire history began to wane, giving way to more specialised, source-based investigations. Even more significantly, the institutionalisation of Byzantine studies in this period was closely tied to the development of nationalist historiographies. As European states sought to define and legitimise their cultural and historical identities, Byzantium was reinterpreted in ways that reflected national aspirations and political agendas.

Nowhere was this more evident than in Greece and Russia, where the Byzantine past was reappropriated as part of a continuous national narrative. This was not a painless process: in the early nineteenth century, Greek intellectuals, such as Iakovos Rizos Neroulos (1778–1849) and Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), despite holding diametrically opposed positions, continued to perpetuate the image of Byzantium as oppressive, corrupt and decadent, in stark contrast to the glorious era of classical antiquity.<sup>69</sup> This classicist tendency is also evident in the choice of Athens as the capital following the War of Independence of 1821: Neroulos, president of the Athens Archaeological Society, praised this decision as the rebirth of the Hellenes after 2000 years of slavery. Others, however, such as the politician Ioannis Kolettis (1773/74–1847), argued that only a temporary capital should be chosen, under the (mistaken) belief that Divine Providence and the current state of the Ottoman Empire would soon make Constantinople available.<sup>70</sup> Questions of Greek identity were of urgent and central significance, inflamed by Jakob Fallmerayer’s (1790–1861) provocative pamphlet, which claimed that Slavic populations had entirely replaced the ancient Greeks during the Middle Ages, thereby severing any ethnic continuity with the classical past.<sup>71</sup> In opposition to this thesis, key figures such as Constantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–91) and Spyridon Zambelios (1815–81) played a decisive role in reshaping the historical understanding of Byzantium and its place in Greek national identity.<sup>72</sup> Already in 1843, Paparrigopoulos responded to Fallmerayer by publishing a short text entitled *Περὶ τῆς ἐποικίσεως σλαβικῶν τιῶν φυλῶν εἰς τὴν Πελοπόννησον* (On the Settlement of Certain Slavic Tribes in the Peloponnese), in which he argued that it was the Byzantine emperors themselves who

had invited certain Slavic populations, then residing in northern Greece, to settle in the Peloponnese as a means of repopulating the region after a devastating plague.<sup>73</sup> More than the content of the argument itself, what is particularly significant is the early emergence of themes that Paparrigopoulos would further develop in his later work, notably, the distinction between the Greek *genos* and the Byzantine administration, conceived as two separate entities. This distinction was not entirely novel: already at the beginning of the century, Korais and other representatives of the so-called *Neohellenic Enlightenment* had drawn a similar line, dissociating the virtuous Greeks from the corrupt Byzantine Empire.<sup>74</sup> However, in Paparrigopoulos's treatment, the negative judgement of the empire is softened, if not altogether neutralised, laying the groundwork for its eventual integration into a continuous national narrative, albeit in a distinctive manner. In his seminal *Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἔθνους* (History of the Hellenic Nation), published in six volumes between 1860 and 1877, for the first time Paparrigopoulos articulated a tripartite narrative of Greek history (ancient, Byzantine and modern).<sup>75</sup> It is noteworthy that Greece is portrayed as being under foreign Roman rule from 145 BCE to 476 that is until the fall of the western Roman Empire; from 476 to 1453, by contrast, the Hellenic nation was once again independent, with its own sovereigns and its own capital, Constantinople.<sup>76</sup>

Zambelios likewise contributed significantly to this historiographical shift through two lengthy volumes: *Ἀσματα Δημοτικά τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (Folk Songs of Greece), published in Corfu in 1852, and, more importantly, *Βυζαντιναὶ Μελέται* (Byzantine Studies), which appeared in Athens in 1857.<sup>77</sup> Despite the brief span of five years between the two works, the evolution of Zambelios's thought is striking. In the *Ἀσματα*, the distinction between the Byzantine Empire and its people, between *basileus* and *demos*, remains prominent, suggesting two distinct political histories. The Hellenes, subject to a seemingly foreign ruler, become the true object of historical enquiry. In this view, the Greek Middle Ages are no longer a period of cultural and moral decline but rather a narrative of resistance by the oppressed Hellenes under Roman rule.<sup>78</sup> Remarkably, the fall of Constantinople is interpreted as a conscious choice by the Greek people, who *ἀπεφάσισε* (decided) to preserve the integrity of the Orthodox Church and of their *ethnos* by sacrificing the imperial structure.<sup>79</sup> This sense of estrangement from the imperial institution is absent in the *Βυζαντιναὶ Μελέται*, which marks a rearrangement of Zambelios's position. In this later work, the empire is no longer portrayed as alien or oppressive, but rather as an integral component of a unified tripartite schema: religion, language and empire; all of these now constituted Byzantium.<sup>80</sup>

The "Eastern Question", that is the concern over the political and economic instability of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent competition among European powers to claim its remnants, created a persistent impasse.<sup>81</sup> Many observers, not only Kolettis, were convinced that the Sublime Porte would collapse in the near future. Within this context, the role of Russia gained particular relevance during the 1830s and 1840s. In Russia, the revitalisation of Byzantine legacy dated back to the late eighteenth century, when Catherine II the Great (1729–96) envisioned a union of Orthodox peoples rising against Ottoman rule and reclaiming Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> The deep connection established by the *translatio imperii* from Constantinople to Moscow, rooted in the fifteenth-century idea of the "Third Rome", provided the Russian state with a potent narrative of legitimacy, historical continuity and divine imperial destiny.<sup>83</sup>

While Ivan Foletti's essay in this volume traces the development of Byzantine studies in Russia,<sup>84</sup> from Ivan Petrovich Sakharov (1807–63) to Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov (1844–1925), it is important here to highlight the political dimensions that fuelled Russia's interest in Byzantium, with lasting consequences for European history. Russia had long regarded itself

as the heir to Byzantium, with Moscow envisioned as the Third Rome. Under Catherine the Great, this imperial self-conception took concrete form in the so-called Greek Project, which envisioned a renewed Christian empire centred in Constantinople. In 1821, Russia provided military support to the Greek revolutionaries, ultimately compelling the Ottoman Empire to recognise Greek independence. Significantly, the first governor of the independent Greek state, Ioannis Kapodistrias (1776–1831), had built his career in the Russian foreign service, further underscoring the deep ties between the two nations.<sup>85</sup> These interventions contributed to the emergence of a growing Russophobia in western Europe, with significant repercussions for the development of Byzantine studies, some of them unexpectedly beneficial. In France it prompted the government to sponsor a series of scientific missions along the coasts of Greece, including those led by Charles Texier (1802–71) and Albert Lenoir (1801–91), who conducted pioneering research on Byzantine architecture and contributed to its visual documentation.<sup>86</sup> These initiatives coincided with the establishment of a consulate in Jerusalem in 1843 and with the foundation of the *École française d'Athènes* (EFA) in 1846.<sup>87</sup> In response, Russia launched its own institutional efforts to assert scholarly and ecclesiastical presence in the region: in 1847, it founded the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, led by Archimandrite Porphyrius Uspensky (1804–85), who had previously studied the manuscripts of Mount Athos and documented Christian monuments across Syria and Palestine.<sup>88</sup>

### Empire, Identity and Terminology: Byzantium and the Politics of Historical Narrative

The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem became the principal site of open contention. France asserted its right to possess the keys to the Church and to undertake repairs to its roof, while Russia invoked the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji (1774), through which the Sublime Porte had recognised Russia's claim to a form of protectorate over the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire. When, shortly before Christmas in 1852, Sultan Abdul Mejid I (1823–61) granted new concessions to the Catholics, the Russian army mobilised along the Danube.<sup>89</sup> This escalation eventually led to the Crimean War (1853–56), with France, Great Britain and the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia siding with the Ottoman Empire against Tsarist Russia.

Even without formalising an alliance, Greece, on the fourth centenary of the fall of Constantinople, aligned itself with Russia, in which it placed its hopes of annexing Epirus and Thessaly, where approximately 40,000 men were prepared to rise up against Ottoman authorities with the backing of the government in Athens.<sup>90</sup> While Tsar Nicholas I envisioned a crusade to liberate Orthodox Christians from Ottoman rule, the major European powers sided with the Sultan: the Russophobia of France and, above all, Great Britain drove a broader demonisation of Orthodox Christianity, cast in stark contrast with an Ottoman Islam now strategically rehabilitated in the eyes of public opinion.<sup>91</sup> Greek revolutionaries cried out *Ἑλληνικὴ αὐτοκρατορία ἢ θάνατος* (Greek Empire or death), while the philhellenes who had supported them in 1821 now looked on with suspicion, accusing them of “Russianism”. As Kaldellis argues, it is at this moment that the notion of “empire of the Greeks”, which had been used for centuries in western Europe to refer to the eastern Roman Empire, became politically toxic.<sup>92</sup> We have seen repeatedly how terminological questions are central to the modern reception of Byzantium, and it is at this point that the final shift takes place: the empire becomes, irrevocably, Byzantine. This lexical shift was accelerated by the gradual institutionalisation of the scholarly field, which took shape precisely around the new label. On the one hand, the abandonment of the adjective *Greek* by western scholars served to

clarify the boundaries within which the new discipline would develop and to eliminate any confusion with ancient Greece; however, “the imperial politics of the Great Powers in the nineteenth century and their anxieties formed the ideological matrix for these decisions”.<sup>93</sup>

This shift can be observed in detail within the French tradition. In 1870, Alfred Rambaud (1842–1905) published *L'Empire grec au Xe siècle: Constantin Porphyrogénète*, (The Greek Empire in the tenth century: Constantine Porphyrogenitus), yet from the very opening lines of the introduction he refers to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>94</sup> Two decades later, however, Gustave Schlumberger (1844–1929), who described Rambaud's work as an epiphany for the scholars of the younger generation, would fully embrace the newer terminology in his own *Un empereur byzantin au Xe siècle: Nicéphore Phocas* (A Byzantine emperor in the tenth century: Nikephoros Phokas).<sup>95</sup>

The 1890s mark the moment when “Byzantine” became the unanimously accepted term. In 1891, Karl Krumbacher (1856–1909) published the first edition of *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* (History of Byzantine Literature) in the prestigious *Handbuch der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Handbook of Classical Antiquity).<sup>96</sup> A year later, he founded the first scholarly journal specifically dedicated to the field, the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*. A comprehensive study on Krumbacher's intellectual legacy has yet to be published, but his own words in the foreword to the first issue of *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* are telling. There, Krumbacher acknowledges that the subjects of the eastern Roman Empire called themselves Romans yet concedes, “Yet the conventional terms Byzantine and Byzantines have become so firmly rooted in all modern languages that it would be questionable to alter them, especially since no sufficient replacement exists”.<sup>97</sup> This supposed lack of alternatives is patently false yet symptomatic of a firmly Orientalist political stance. Despite a lengthy journey through Greece between 1885 and 1886,<sup>98</sup> Krumbacher, just a few pages earlier, describes the Orthodox East as a peculiarity of its own – half-educated, half-savage – situated between civilised Europe and barbarian Asia. He goes on to assert that modern Greece was the least suitable place to host a journal of Byzantine studies in comparison with Europe.<sup>99</sup> Such remarks reveal the ideological underpinnings of his insistence on the term *Byzantine*, especially considering that the chair to which he was appointed at the University of Munich was officially designated for medieval and modern Greek literature.<sup>100</sup>

The idea of a Greek empire with Constantinople as its capital continued to persist in Greece until the disaster of 1922. Russia, too, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, shared the vision of an Orthodox empire centred on Constantinople and, in parallel, sought to develop new political strategies to strengthen its influence over the Ottoman Empire.<sup>101</sup> By that time, however, the process of the “Byzantinisation” of the eastern Roman Empire had become firmly entrenched within Russian intellectual circles as well. Russian scholars, much like their western counterparts, came to adopt the adjective *Byzantine* in place of *Greek* as clear in the title of their journal, *Vizantijskij Vremennik* (Byzantine Chronicle), founded in 1894.

In this same context of cultural and political penetration, Russia sponsored the establishment of the *Russkij archeologičeskij institut v Konstantinopole* (Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople, RAIK) in 1894, headed by Fyodor Ivanovich Uspensky (1845–1928) for the next 20 years.<sup>102</sup> The foundation of these research institutes in the Mediterranean by the Great Powers and by Russia not only functioned as political tools of colonialism and imperial ambition but also significantly advanced the study of monuments and fostered scholarship in the fields of art history and archaeology.<sup>103</sup> The RAIK was no exception: it became the centre of a vibrant intellectual network of Byzantine scholars, leading major research

campaigns in and outside Constantinople, such as the study of the mosaics in the Chora Monastery conducted by Fyodor Ivanovich Schmidt (1877–1937) in the early twentieth century and the investigations carried out by Boris Amfianovich Panchenko (1872–1920) on the Monastery of Stoudios and the remains of the Great Palace, or the comprehensive photographic campaign of the Church of the Koimesis in Nicaea, which was destroyed by fire during the Greco-Turkish War in 1922 and published a few years later by Schmidt.<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that its members obtained permission from the Russian authorities to collaborate closely with foreign scholars. In 1896, a joint expedition to Mount Athos was planned with Gabriel Millet (1867–1953) and Uspensky, although the latter ultimately withdrew and the project was abandoned.<sup>105</sup> Another ambitious initiative, a systematic study of all materials related to St Nicholas, bishop of Myra, conceived as a tribute to Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) and planned in collaboration with Louis Petit (1868–1927), could not be realised due to the outbreak of WWI, which brought all activity at the Institute to a halt.<sup>106</sup>

As in Istanbul, the establishment of international institutes in Athens profoundly transformed the study of Greek antiquity, extending its chronological and cultural scope to include Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments. While initially devoted to classical archaeology, institutions such as the *École française d'Athènes* (French School at Athens, founded in 1846), the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* (German Archaeological Institute, 1872) and the British School at Athens (1886) gradually expanded their focus to encompass the Byzantine and medieval heritage of Greece. The engagement of the *École française d'Athènes* with Byzantine monuments helped bridge the gap between classical archaeology and art history: French scholars conducted pioneering research on monuments such as the Monastery of Hosios Loukas, the Byzantine walls and churches of Thessaloniki and the painted decorations of Mount Athos.<sup>107</sup> These studies were not limited to stylistic analysis but included the systematic documentation of architecture, mosaics and inscriptions, integrating methods from archaeology, art history and philology. Excavations and studies at sites such as Delphi, Delos and Thasos thus coexisted with surveys of Byzantine churches and fortifications, contributing decisively to the emergence of Byzantine archaeology as a legitimate and autonomous field of research.

### The Making and Unmaking of Byzantine Studies in the Twentieth Century

The institutionalisation of Byzantine studies had little effect on the broader cultural perception of Byzantium. If anything, it may have further contributed to its marginalisation. As Averil Cameron has shown, Byzantinists themselves were often among the most critical of their own field.<sup>108</sup> A striking example of this dynamic is Massimo Bernabò's scathing portrait of Sergio Bettini (1905–86), whom he accused of embracing the Romanist rhetoric favoured by the Fascist regime, and of dismissing Byzantine art as unoriginal and merely derivative of classical Roman models.<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, the image of Byzantium continued to be shaped by self-proclaimed experts such as novelists, playwrights and filmmakers, who perpetuated long-standing stereotypes and misrepresentations. Perhaps the most emblematic case is that of Victorien Sardou (1831–1908) and his most famous theatrical work, *Théodora*. First staged at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in 1884 with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role, the play was an extraordinary success, enjoying numerous encores, translations and even cinematic adaptations. Yet, when Alfred Darcel (1818–93) and Charles Diehl (1859–1944) raised concerns about the historical accuracy of the production,

Sardou defended the legitimacy of his portrayal by citing both the literary sources he had consulted and the historical and scholarly works on Byzantium that had informed his reconstruction, ranging from Baronius and Gibbon to Charles Bayet's *L'Art byzantine* (1900).<sup>110</sup> Sardou contested the scholars' claim to offer a *true* Byzantium against his own supposedly *false* one, and yet a few years later Diehl acknowledged that "the curiosity of an ingenious writer and the talent of a great actress have done more than many learned books to rehabilitate, among us, the Greek Empire of the East".<sup>111</sup>

Diehl was a remarkably versatile scholar whose intellectual trajectory encompassed a wide array of disciplines, including history, epigraphy, archaeology and, most notably, the history of art. Although his early academic formation and initial research, such as his studies on the exarchate of Ravenna and Byzantine Africa,<sup>112</sup> positioned him firmly within the realm of historical enquiry, his engagement with archaeology introduced him to the material culture of the Byzantine world. Over time, Diehl's interest shifted decisively towards the study of Byzantine art, culminating in the publication in 1910 of his *Manuel d'art byzantin* (Handbook of Byzantine Art), a foundational work that remained a reference point for decades.<sup>113</sup> The *Manuel* represents the most comprehensive articulation of his vision of Byzantine art and must be understood within the broader context of the *byzantinische Frage* (Byzantine Question), that is the scholarly debate that, from the second half of the nineteenth century, animated art historical discussions on the origins and development of Byzantine artistic forms.<sup>114</sup> Yet this debate was never limited to questions of formal derivation or stylistic lineage: at its core lay a much deeper issue, namely the cultural identity of Byzantium itself. What was at stake was whether Byzantium should be regarded as the rightful heir of Rome and classical antiquity or as an essentially eastern civilisation shaped by Asiatic traditions.

In this framework, Diehl adopted a more nuanced and less extreme position than that of Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941), whose work will be discussed shortly: while Strzygowski sought to identify Asia Minor as the exclusive cradle of early Christian art, Diehl explicitly rejected the idea of a single geographical source. In his 1904 article *Les Origines asiatiques de l'art byzantine* (The Asian Origins of Byzantine Art), he emphasised the pivotal role of Constantinople as the locus where diverse artistic traditions, from the Hellenistic world to the Oriental East, converged to form what would become Byzantine art.<sup>115</sup> His interpretation, however, notably omits any significant engagement with the Roman artistic legacy: Diehl ignored the contributions of Alois Riegl's *Die spätrömische Kunst-Industrie* (1901, The Late Roman Art Industry)<sup>116</sup> and excluded any direct continuity between Roman imperial models and Byzantine art, which he understood instead as the result of an interplay between Eastern cultures and the classical Greek tradition.<sup>117</sup>

The *byzantinische Frage* was without doubt the most pressing historiographical issue to emerge in the field of Byzantine art history between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Riegl famously described it as "the most important and most trenchant one in the entire history of mankind".<sup>118</sup> As early as 1879, Bayet had already articulated a geographic and cultural polarity when he wrote, "l'Orient crée les types et les symboles; l'Occident les accepte", evoking the East as the generative locus of Christian artistic forms.<sup>119</sup> In the 1880s, Kondakov travelled extensively through former Byzantine territories, raising questions about the origins of the Christian visual vocabulary.<sup>120</sup> By the 1890s, scholars of the Vienna School were asserting Rome as the birthplace of Christian art, while in 1900, Dmitry V. Aynalov (1862–1939), in his doctoral dissertation, argued that the earliest Christian art developed in the Hellenistic cities of Antioch and Alexandria.<sup>121</sup>

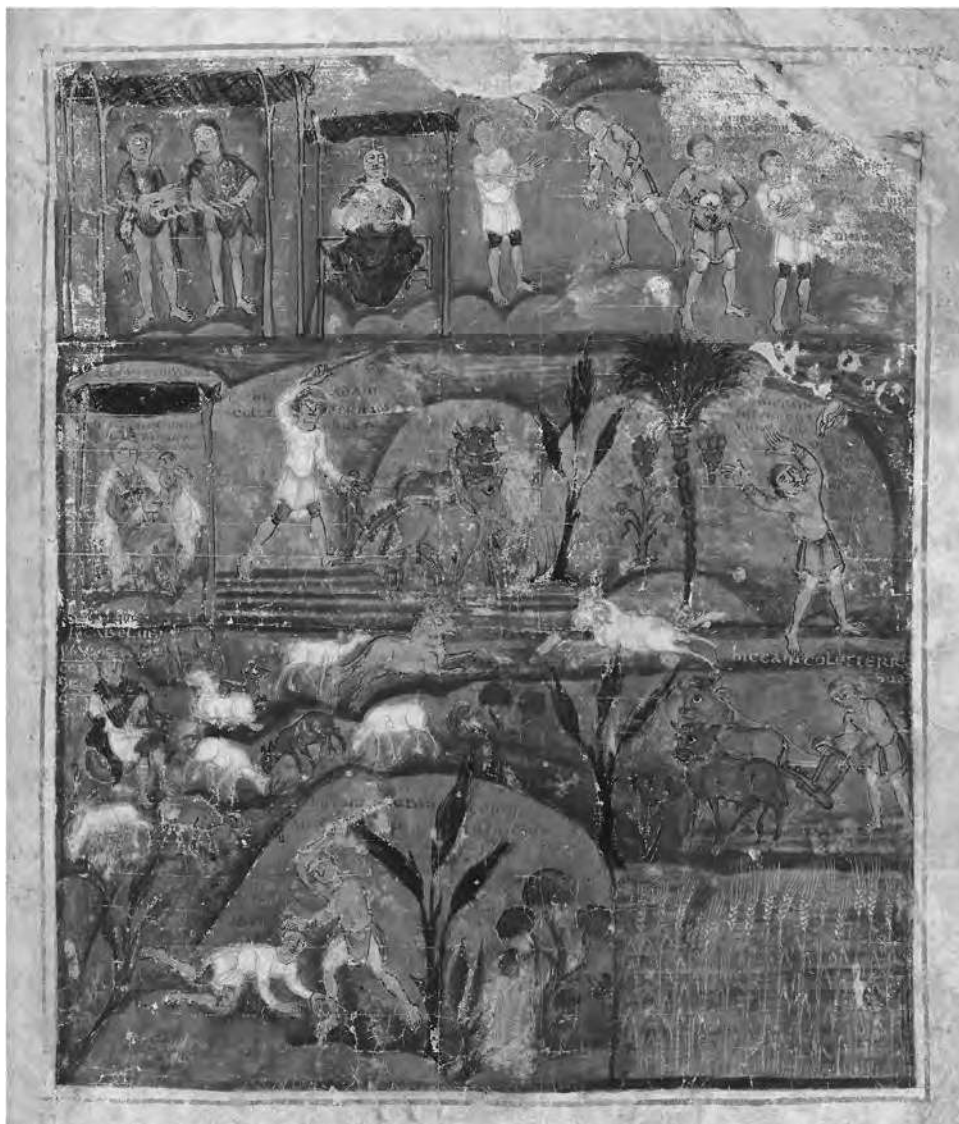


Among the many contributions to the *byzantinische Frage*, the work that first gave the debate systematic form and enduring visibility was Strzygowski's *Orient oder Rom* (Orient or Rome), published in 1901.<sup>122</sup> This provocative volume effectively crystallised the divergent positions surrounding the origins of Christian and Byzantine art: Strzygowski advanced the radical thesis that early Christian art owed far more to the cultural and formal traditions of the Near East than to those of imperial Rome. His bold approach made *Orient oder Rom* a touchstone for both supporters and critics, transforming a loosely defined scholarly problem into a full-blown methodological and ideological battleground. A polarising figure, whom Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) described as the *Attila of art history*, Strzygowski was nonetheless one of the most cited and visible art historians of his time. Born in Austrian Silesia in 1862, he held posts in Graz and later Vienna, where he succeeded Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909) in 1909 after a contentious selection process. Strzygowski's scholarship ranged widely across Byzantine, Armenian and Islamic art, often championing non-Western traditions long marginalised by the academic establishment.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, his legacy remains profoundly ambivalent: in the final years of his life, he embraced a racialised and nationalist ideology that aligned with the intellectual climate of Nazism, leading to a posthumous *damnatio memoriae* that severely curtailed his legacy.<sup>124</sup>

In *Orient oder Rom*, Strzygowski praises greater scholarly attention to previously neglected objects, underexplored geographic areas and sources difficult to access. This call for empirical expansion quickly gives way to a sharply polemical framing of the scholarly debate. Strzygowski contrasts two prevailing positions: the idea of a Roman *Reichskunst* (imperial art) propagated from the imperial centre, as advocated by Wickhoff, and the notion of a more modest Roman Church art (*römische Kirchenkunst*), associated with Franz Xaver Kraus (1840–1901).<sup>125</sup> An exemplary application of Strzygowski's method can be found in his analysis of the *Ashburnham Pentateuch* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Nouv. Acq. Lat. 2334, [Figure 2.4](#)).

Observing with meticulous care the details of jewellery, drapery, architectural forms, animal types and even techniques such as brick-making, Strzygowski emphasises the remarkable accuracy with which Jewish customs and traditions are depicted. Since artists tend to represent what they know intimately, according to Strzygowski the manuscript reflects a cultural environment deeply rooted in the Near East, and more specifically, in the Jewish communities embedded within the Hellenistic world.<sup>126</sup> Strzygowski's broader intellectual project aimed at redefining the geography of early Christian art by challenging the prevailing Eurocentric and Mediterranean-centred narratives. In a 1902 article published in the *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung*, he provocatively wrote that Byzantine "it is the ancient Orient, the triumph of the aged Ahasuerus over the beauty of Greece and the majestic greatness of Rome".<sup>127</sup> This striking image encapsulates Strzygowski's conviction that the roots of Christian art lie not in classical antiquity but in the ancient Semitic and eastern worlds. His scholarly legacy rests precisely in this radical decentring of traditional art historical paradigms. In the years that followed, he continued to develop this perspective in a series of influential works, all of which placed the artistic production of the East at the centre of the historical narrative.<sup>128</sup>

This reorientation of art historical geography proposed by Strzygowski was widely debated within European academic circles. We have already seen the critical stance taken by Diehl in France; even more receptive was Bréhier, who actively engaged with and adopted many of Strzygowski's hypotheses. Bréhier explored the penetration of Near Eastern culture into western Europe, tracing it through the establishment of eastern colonies from



*Figure 2.4* Adam and Eve and the Story of Cain and Abel from the Ashburnham Pentateuch, late 6th century. Illuminated manuscript, Ms. Nouv. Acq. Lat. 2334, fol. 6r. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo © User: Gennadii Saus i Segura, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Syria to Rome, and particularly in southern France.<sup>129</sup> According to Bréhier, this “eastern colonization” facilitated not only commercial exchange but, more importantly, deep cultural interactions across the Mediterranean.<sup>130</sup>

By contrast, Italian scholars of the early twentieth century largely opposed his Orientalist hypothesis regarding the origins of Christian and medieval art. A central yet understudied figure in this debate is Giovanni Teresio Rivoira (1849–1919), who aimed to construct a coherent



theory of architectural continuity from ancient Rome through the Middle Ages, directly opposing Strzygowski's emphasis on eastern influence. His position was grounded in extensive fieldwork and firsthand observation of monuments throughout the Mediterranean basin, from North Africa to the Middle East, Constantinople and the Balkans, resulting in a rich body of photographic and graphic documentation. In his major work, *Le origini dell'architettura lombarda* (The Origins of Lombard Architecture), Rivoira argued that the transmission of Roman building techniques followed a westward and northward trajectory, from Rome to Ravenna, and then into Lombardy and beyond, carried by the Comacine masters, while only secondarily influencing the East via Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire.<sup>131</sup> Giuseppe Galassi (1890–1957) also sharply rejected Strzygowski's binary model of Orient or Rome, arguing that it rested on the flawed assumption of a monolithic, universal Christian or Byzantine art. His analysis of Ravenna played a key role in this rejection, situating his work within a broader national debate that had developed since the Italian unification of 1861. The exceptional historical legacy of Ravenna, marked by its wealth of Late Antique and Byzantine monuments, long posed a challenge to the formation of a coherent national cultural narrative in post-unification Italy.<sup>132</sup> At the core of the debate lay the question of how to integrate Ravenna's Byzantine heritage into a continuum that was predominantly Roman and Italian in character.<sup>133</sup> Galassi responded to this dilemma by formulating a dual stylistic lineage, Roman and Byzantine, both rooted in classical antiquity, yet with Roman art ultimately occupying a position of cultural superiority.<sup>134</sup> This interpretive model enabled the assimilation of Ravenna into the Roman-Italian tradition, while still acknowledging the presence of eastern artistic elements. In the 1930s, Galassi's framework found renewed relevance within the ideological programme of the Fascist regime, culminating in the 1937 *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* (Augustan Exhibition of Romanitas), where Justinian was formally included among the Roman emperors, symbolically reintegrating Byzantine Ravenna into the narrative of imperial Roman continuity.<sup>135</sup>

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the field of Byzantine studies experienced a significant geographical broadening, as new centres of scholarship emerged beyond the traditional academic strongholds of the nineteenth century. In Turkey a growing interest in Byzantium arose from the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>136</sup> The emergence of modern historiography brought about a renewed engagement with the Byzantine past, especially within the context of a redefined national identity. A key figure in this development was Ahmet Refik Altınay (1881–1937), a prominent historian and intellectual, who between 1911 and 1913 published the six-volume *Büyük Tarih-i Umumi* (Great world history), which included a substantial section dedicated to Byzantine history.<sup>137</sup> His treatment of Byzantium is particularly notable for two reasons: first, the extensive use of illustrations that accompanied and visually reinforced the narrative; and second, the deliberate effort to integrate the Byzantine past into a broader national historiography, transcending traditional barriers of religion and ethnicity. For Refik, the decline of the Ottoman Empire stemmed in part from a lack of love and understanding for its own cultural heritage. It was therefore essential, he argued, to cultivate historical awareness not only of the Ottomans but also of Byzantium, whose legacy formed an integral part of the region's civilisational fabric.<sup>138</sup>

In Czechoslovakia, Byzantine studies were initially shaped by the historian Jaroslav Bidlo (1868–1937), who had been offering courses on Byzantine civilisation at Charles University since as early as 1902.<sup>139</sup> A significant transformation occurred in the aftermath of WWI, when Prague became a key centre for Russian émigré intellectuals fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution. A group of young scholars soon coalesced around the distinguished figure of

Nikodim Kondakov, who arrived in the Czechoslovak capital in the spring of 1923 and remained there until his death three years later. In April 1925, in homage to their mentor, these émigré scholars established the *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, which began publishing in 1927.<sup>140</sup> The journal rapidly gained international visibility, attracting contributions from leading scholars such as Kurt Weitzmann, Nicolae Iorga, Georges Millet and Thomas Whittemore. Paradoxically, however, the global prestige of *Seminarium Kondakovianum* found relatively limited resonance within its host country. In 1929, under the patronage of President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the *Byzantologická komise* (Commission of Byzantinology) was founded within the Institute of Slavonic Studies in Prague. Motivated by a desire to foreground the historical ties between Byzantium and Slavic culture, Masaryk supported the establishment of a second journal, *Byzantinoslavica*, whose first issue appeared in the autumn of that same year.<sup>141</sup>

In stark contrast to the international recognition enjoyed by Russian scholars affiliated with the *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, the situation of those Byzantinists who remained within the Soviet Union under the new regime in the 1920s and 1930s was far more precarious, and for some ultimately catastrophic. The relationship between the Prague-based émigré scholarly community and their colleagues in the USSR played a significant, if tragic, role in the eventual dismantling of Byzantine studies within Soviet academia. Following the reorganisation of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1928, the regime targeted the archaeologist Sergei Zhebelev (1867–1941) for an introductory article published in *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, written in memory of Jakov Smirnov, who had died of starvation during the winter of 1918: Zhebelev was accused of political unreliability and expelled from the Academy.<sup>142</sup> Leonid Maculevič (1886–1959), who had also contributed to the same issue, was discreetly dismissed from his post as chief curator of the Byzantine Department at the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad.<sup>143</sup> These initial purges marked the beginning of a broader campaign: the Byzantine Commission was dismantled, and the scholarly journal *Vizantiyskiy Vremennik* was likewise discontinued. The repression deepened in the following years: Vladimir Val' denberg (1871–1940), a specialist in Byzantine political theory, was arrested in Leningrad in 1929, while during the Stalinist purges Vladimir Beneshevich (1874–1938), an eminent specialist of Byzantine law, was executed by firing squad.<sup>144</sup>

In Romania, Nicolae Iorga's (1871–1940) *Byzance après Byzance* sought to reclaim Byzantine inheritance as a distinctive feature of Romanian political and cultural development.<sup>145</sup> The continuity between the Byzantine and Ottoman worlds, that Iorga recognised in the preservation of imperial administrative systems and the co-optation of existing elites, was abruptly interrupted in Constantinople by the seventeenth century. However, this legacy persisted in the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, which would eventually form the core of modern Romania. The continuity of Byzantium was thus preserved not by the Slavs, but by the Romanians themselves, the true heirs of Byzantine civilisation.<sup>146</sup>

This plurality of narratives surrounding Byzantium increasingly found a space for international dialogue through the institutional framework of scholarly events. A first major moment of convergence occurred with the inaugural *International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, held in Bucharest in 1924, which brought together scholars from diverse national traditions to articulate and debate their respective visions of the Byzantine world. The first editions in the interwar years played a pivotal role in establishing the academic legitimacy of Byzantine studies, and fostering its international visibility. At the same time, they served as instruments of cultural diplomacy, allowing host nations, particularly in eastern and

southeastern Europe, to assert their historical connection to Byzantium and their place within the international scholarly community.<sup>147</sup>

A few years later, the first *Exposition internationale d'art byzantin* offered a visual counterpart to these academic exchanges. Organised by the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris from 28 May to 9 July 1931, the exhibition marked the first major international exhibition devoted exclusively to Byzantine art: it featured nearly 1000 objects, borrowed from 14 countries and over 150 lenders.<sup>148</sup> A notable feature of the exhibition was the deliberate inclusion of numerous non-Byzantine works which served to highlight Byzantium's artistic primacy in the Mediterranean world. By juxtaposing Merovingian and Gothic jewellery, Persian tapestries and copies of the Umayyad mosaics from Damascus with Byzantine masterpieces, the curators sought to demonstrate the pervasive influence of Byzantine art on its neighbours and to assert its superiority within this cultural dialogue. The exhibition catalogue further articulated these themes through the voices of leading scholars: Diehl famously described Byzantine art as "l'art régulateur de l'Europe" (the normative art of Europe), emphasising its formative role over western artistic traditions; Royall Tyler, less diplomatically, went so far as to suggest that certain stylistic flaws in Byzantine art were directly attributable to western art.<sup>149</sup> It is important to emphasise the remarkable success of the exhibition, which attracted a substantial number of visitors. For many attendees, who had grown up with stereotypical narratives of Byzantium this was their first opportunity to engage directly with a genuinely Byzantine heritage. Yet, this moment of interest proved somewhat ephemeral and indeed marked one of the final significant occasions of meaningful contact between Byzantine culture and popular imagination: after WWII, the Byzantine world has progressively vanished from popular culture, remaining largely absent in the contemporary debate.

### The Many Futures of Byzantium

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the full institutionalisation of Byzantine studies as an academic discipline. This process was marked by the multiplication of university chairs and research institutes dedicated to Byzantium, alongside a growing specialisation across subfields such as art history, philology, archaeology, theology and historical studies. In the Western academic world, long-established centres like Munich, Paris and Vienna were joined by new institutions that rose to prominence after WWII, like Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC, affiliated with Harvard University. Founded on the collection and intellectual vision of Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss, whose interest in Byzantine art had taken shape during their stay in Paris in the 1910s. Dumbarton Oaks became a major hub for scholarly exchange, hosting eminent figures such as František Dvorník (1893–1975) and Ernst Kitzinger (1912–2003), and publishing one of the field's most respected journals, the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.<sup>150</sup> A similar institutional milestone was the foundation of the Centre for Byzantine Studies in 1976 at the University of Birmingham, which marked the formal recognition of Byzantine studies as a distinct academic enterprise in the UK. Closely tied from the outset to the development of *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, a journal launched in 1975 to bridge the two fields, the Centre gradually expanded its scope, and in 1984 it incorporated Ottoman Studies, fostering a broader perspective on the Greek and Balkan worlds from the end of the medieval era through to the early modern period.

Yet in the western academic world, Byzantine studies remain a relatively marginal field, an intellectual enclave. While much recent scholarship has aimed to overturn the

long-standing Enlightenment narrative of imperial decadence and stagnation in favour of a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of Byzantium's cultural vitality, such efforts have rarely succeeded in reintegrating Byzantium into the broader historical consciousness of Europe. As Averil Cameron forcefully argued in a widely cited article published in 2008, Byzantium continues to be absent from public discourse in the West.<sup>151</sup> Her critique was prompted by a striking episode: the *lectio magistralis* delivered by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006. In that address, the pontiff cited a provocative statement by Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391–1425) from his *Διάλογος μετὰ τινος Πέρσου τὴν ἀξίαν Μουτερίζη ἐν Ἀγκύρᾳ τῆς Γαλατίας* (Dialogue with a Certain Persian of Rank, Named Muteriz, in Ancyra of Galatia), composed in the late fourteenth century, in which the Byzantine ruler strongly condemned the use of violence in religious conversion, with clear reference to the Islamic concept of *jihad*.<sup>152</sup> While the quotation triggered widespread protests across the Muslim world, Cameron observed that it also exposed the West's profound ignorance of Manuel II: who he was, what he believed and what he represented. This episode, emblematic in its own way, points to a larger structural issue: the role of Byzantium in the shaping of European cultural history remains a subject largely confined to academic debate, with little penetration into public consciousness or educational curricula. Efforts to mend this cultural disconnection have not been absent, including gestures with strong symbolic resonance. One notable example is the 1964 exhibition *L'art byzantin, art européen* (Byzantine Art, a European Art) held in Athens under the auspices of the Council of Europe, which aimed to reassert Byzantium's place within the shared artistic heritage of the continent.<sup>153</sup> A further initiative in this direction was the 1983 launch of the *Corpus of Byzantine Monumental Paintings*, undertaken on the initiative of a committee of European scholars led by Manolis Chatzidakis (1909–98), then president of the *Association Internationale des Études Byzantines* (AIEB), and placed under the patronage of the *Union Académique*. Conceived as a pan-European framework for the documentation and preservation of Byzantium's monumental artistic heritage, the project remains however only partially realised more than four decades later: to date the corpus comprises a series of volumes devoted primarily to Greece and Italy, with one additional volume focused on Sweden,<sup>154</sup> while several regions with rich Byzantine legacies have not yet been incorporated.<sup>155</sup>

A fundamental asymmetry endures: this is in fact not the case in countries where Byzantine heritage remains deeply embedded within national identity, collective memory and the narrative of historical continuity. In Greece, Turkey and across the Balkans, Byzantium continues to serve as a cornerstone of higher education curricula and an active force within national political discourse. Recent developments have illustrated this reality: during the inaugural address at the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Belgrade in 2016, Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić lamented the endangerment of Serbian-Byzantine heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, invoking scholars to defend it against the “infidel Muslims of a nation that does not exist”.<sup>156</sup> In 2020, following tensions with Greece sparked by a commemoration of the 1453 Ottoman conquest inside Hagia Sophia, the Turkish Council of State reclassified the site from museum back to mosque, reversing its 1935 status. In response, the *Association Internationale des Études Byzantines* postponed and relocated the 2021 International Congress of Byzantine Studies, initially planned for Istanbul. This decision provoked criticism from Turkish graduate students, who accused the AIEB of deepening divisions within the discipline and ostracising scholars based on their Turkish identity.<sup>157</sup> Other crises have been significantly more severe. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has often been interpreted as the culmination of Vladimir Putin's neo-imperial vision to reassert Moscow's role as the rightful heir of Byzantium. This

ideological project casts the war as aimed at reclaiming Kyiv, the city where Prince Vladimir the Great (958–1015), Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev received baptism and entered into a dynastic alliance with the Byzantine imperial family. Central to this vision is also the desire to reverse the 2019 establishment of an autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which severed its subordination to the Russian Church and symbolically challenged the Russian claim to spiritual succession.<sup>158</sup> The instrumentalisation of heritage in political conflicts extends beyond the traditional boundaries of Byzantine and Orthodox identity. In 2023 the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijani forces led to the forced displacement of over 100,000 Armenians from the region. What followed was widely described as a process of cultural genocide, characterised by the systematic destruction of Armenian cultural heritage and the deliberate erasure of its historical memory.<sup>159</sup>

Byzantium, then, is not, as Prince Charles remarked in the foreword to the *Byzantium 330–1453* exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, “a world that has in many ways been lost to us”, but rather a legacy that remains actively contested, reinterpreted and renegotiated in the present.<sup>160</sup> If in the mid-twentieth century, Ihor Ševčenko (1922–2009) suggested that the study of historiography properly belonged to modern historians rather than Byzantinists,<sup>161</sup> recent scholarship has thoroughly challenged that assumption. Indeed, the majority of the bibliography cited in this chapter dates from the past 15 years, reflecting a significant methodological shift. The adoption of new theoretical frameworks, ranging from readings of Byzantium through the lens of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* to the insights of postcolonial studies and the historiography of imperialism, has inaugurated a fertile and intellectually vibrant phase in Byzantine scholarship. This renewed critical lens has prompted scholars to interrogate the ideological structures that have historically shaped and continue to influence our understanding of an empire that fell in 1453 with the capture of Constantinople. The task of Byzantine historiography today is to decipher and critically examine the mechanisms through which this contested legacy continues to be constructed, appropriated and reframed, And, crucially, to ensure that the image of Byzantium emerging from contemporary scholarship regains its authority not only within academia but also in the broader sphere of popular culture and collective imagination, from historiographical debates to the comics of Uncle Scrooge.

## Notes

- 1 ‘Zio Paperone e la vite della ricchezza’, *Topolino* 698, 1969: 3–30.
- 2 On the language of Walt Disney comics in Italy, [Pietrini 2008](#).
- 3 The title as been translated as “Die Rebe des Reichtums”, *Lustiges Taschenbuch* 99, 1984: 180–204.
- 4 For a short summary of the different definitions of the adjective byzantine, [Marciniak 2018](#): 48.
- 5 [Pertusi 1967](#): 6.
- 6 [Kaldellis 2019b](#): 12.
- 7 Whose historical significance, in reality, occupies very little space in contemporary Byzantine sources. [Kaldellis 2019a](#): 12–5.
- 8 [Lamers 2015](#): 1.
- 9 [Maltese 1989](#): 38–9.
- 10 [Lambros 1926](#): 246, also discussed in [Lamers 2015](#): 36–42; [Pagani 2021](#): 31–2.
- 11 [Pagani 2021](#): 34–8.
- 12 It is a population living south of the Hindu Kush, in modern Afghanistan. The ethnic continuity between the *Παραπαισιῶν* and the Turks was already a subject of controversy in the fifteenth century, yet it served a functional role in Plethon’s political discourse. [Pagani 2021](#): 35–6. On the origins of the Turks according to the Byzantines, [Meserve 2008](#): 135–8.
- 13 [Kaldellis 2007](#); [Siniosoglou 2011](#); [Steiris 2016](#): 173–99.

- 14 In an anonymous article of 1850 attributed to Constantine Paparrigopoulos, Plethon was labelled as a Hellene socialist of the fifteenth century. On the modern reception of Plethon, see [Raszewski 2014](#): 433–56; [Arabatzis 2016](#): 229–54.
- 15 [Bargeliotes 2009](#): 44–6; [Siniosoglou 2014](#): 418–22. Although this formulation excludes the religious dimension, it should not be read as evidence of Plethon’s paganism. As Vojtěch Hladký has convincingly shown, Plethon was rather an unorthodox Christian with a strong inclination towards ancient thought. [Hladký 2014](#): 232–3.
- 16 In his *Historia Turcobyzantina* (ca. 1462) Doukas used *Ῥωμαῖοι* and *Ῥωμαῖνοι* to differentiate between eastern and western Romans. [Vryonis 1991](#): 5–14.
- 17 [Lamers 2015](#): 52.
- 18 [Kaldellis 2014](#): 226.
- 19 [Neville 2025](#): 5–6.
- 20 As early as 1385, the *Grant Crónica de los conquiridores* by the Aragonese writer Juan Fernández de Heredia extensively cited Zonaras, as well as the *Livre de la conquête de la princée de Morée*, to assert the Order of Saint John’s claim to the Principality of Morea, a title Fernández de Heredia sought to legitimise in his role as Grand Master. [Pertusi 1967](#): 14–5.
- 21 [Pertusi 1967](#): 46; [Bianco 2015](#): 41.
- 22 According to Anthony Kaldellis, Laonicus Chalcocondyles composed the *Histories* before 1464. [Kaldellis 2012](#): 112.
- 23 [Clauser 1556](#): 15.
- 24 [Wolf 1557a](#): 2–3. See [Reinsch 2016](#): 43–52.
- 25 [Wolf 1557a](#); [Wolf 1557b](#).
- 26 [Reinsch 2010](#): 438–9; [Kaldellis 2021](#): 252–3.
- 27 [Wolf 1562](#): 2.
- 28 [Ben-Tov 2009](#); [Ben-Tov 2013](#): 181–96; [Bianco 2015](#): 46–50.
- 29 Baronius 1588–1607.
- 30 [Pullapilly 1975](#): 156.
- 31 [McCabe 1983](#); [Pertusi 2004](#): 171–209; [Marciniak 2021](#): 205–21. We do not know with certainty who the intended audience of these dramas was; nonetheless, as Marciniak emphasises, their role in perpetuating derogatory stereotypes of Byzantium within the popular imagination should not be underestimated. [Marciniak 2021](#): 221.
- 32 [Rosweyde 1607](#): 7.
- 33 [Lequeux 2021](#): 309.
- 34 The last volume, published in 1940, includes saints up to 28 October.
- 35 [Pertusi 1967](#): 75.
- 36 [Grémois 2003](#): 31–41; [Faruk 2004](#); [Foletti and Palladino 2023](#): 49.
- 37 [Spieser 2000](#): 200–2.
- 38 Du Cange 1657.
- 39 On this, see [Spieser 2000](#): 200; [Shawcross 2021a](#): 146–7. In reality, unlike the Hasburgs in the previous century, the prospect of a French military mission against the Ottoman Empire was completely unfeasible, considering the good diplomatic relations that bound the court of Paris to the Sublime Porte.
- 40 Du Cange 1668: 302. On this topic, [Bianco 2015](#): 78; [Bianco 2023](#): 8–9.
- 41 Du Cange 1680: I, 3v–4r.
- 42 [Bianco 2015](#): 96.
- 43 Du Cange 1670.
- 44 [Shawcross 2021a](#): 162–6. The publication of the *Glossarium mediæ et infimæ latinitatis* in 1678 should be considered in this light.
- 45 Du Cange 1680: 3v.
- 46 The caustic remark appears in a letter from Pasquier Quesnel to Pasquale Magliabechi. The passage is quoted by Pertusi, who shares the judgement on the works of Maimbourg. [Pertusi 1967](#), p. 103, n.291.
- 47 [Maimbourg 1674](#); Maimbourg 1675–1676; [Maimbourg 1677](#); Cousin 1675–1676; Fleury 1691–1720.
- 48 As early as the sixteenth century, the coronation ceremony had undergone certain modifications, possibly inspired by the *De officiis* attributed to Pseudo-Kodinos. [Bianco 2015](#): 74–9.



- 49 Auzepy and Grélois 2001.
- 50 Spon 1678; Taddei 2024: 245–262.
- 51 Aschenbrenner and Ranshoff 2021: 11.
- 52 Bréhier 1901: 13–4.
- 53 Montesquieu 1734: 190.
- 54 Montesquieu 1734: 187; Voltaire 1756: 303. In *De l'esprit des lois* Montesquieu went so far as to write that “il n’y a point eu après lui de prince plus digne de gouverner les hommes”: Montesquieu 1748: 339.
- 55 Voltaire 1756: 321–2.
- 56 Voltaire 1756: 554.
- 57 Marciniak 2021: 205.
- 58 Voltaire 1756: 602.
- 59 Bianco 2015: 231–8.
- 60 Gibbon 1776–1788.
- 61 Le Beau 1757–1811.
- 62 Charles Diehl would later dismiss it as a “*lourde et médiocre compilation*”. Diehl 1900: 2. For an account on *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, see Bianco 2015: 239–65.
- 63 Momigliano 1978: 435–36.
- 64 Bianco 2015: 290–6.
- 65 Gibbon 1788: XVIII: 187.
- 66 Momigliano 1978: 435.
- 67 Ostrogorsky 1968: 6–7.
- 68 Iggy Pop 1995: 94–6. The formula *Decline and Fall* has since become almost proverbial in Western popular and intellectual culture. It has inspired countless adaptations and reappropriations, ranging from the Kinks’ 1966 album *Arthur or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire* to such works as, *Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire* by Hans Eysenck (1985), *Decline and Fall of the American Programmer* by Edward Yourdon (1992), *The Decline and Fall of Nokia* by David J. Cord (2014).
- 69 Christodoulou 2010: 445–8.
- 70 Christodoulou 2010: 450–1. In fact, the choice of Athens as the capital was primarily championed by Ludwig I of Bavaria, father of the newly appointed Greek monarch Otto I, who sought to establish a dynastic and symbolic link between the actual Athens and Munich, envisioned as the “Athens on the Isar”. Fuhrmeister and Jooss 2008.
- 71 Fallmerayer 1830–1836. On the reception of Fallmerayer in Greece, see Veloudis 1970: 43–90; Mishkova 2023: 35–70.
- 72 For a further discussion see Marios Hatzopoulos’ essay in the Handbook.
- 73 Paparrigopoulos 1843.
- 74 Christodoulou 2010: 446–7; Stamatopoulos 2018: 39–40.
- 75 Paparrigopoulos 1860–1877.
- 76 On the implications of Paparrigopoulos’ work with the *Μεγάλη Ἰδέα*, see Kitromilides 1998: 25–33.
- 77 Zambelios 1852, 1857.
- 78 Zambelios 1852: 25. In his criticism of Voltaire, Montesquieu and Le Beau, Zambelios explicitly states that by relying exclusively on Byzantine chronicles, they fail to take into account the history of the Greek people, focusing instead solely on the Roman emperors and their court, which was also Roman. Zambelios 1852: 17.
- 79 Koubourlis 2005: 287.
- 80 Zambelios 1857: 95. On this, see Christodoulou 2010: 454.
- 81 MacFie 1996.
- 82 In February 1770 Greek inhabitants of the Morea peninsula, assisted with Russian military support, arise against the Ottomans; in April the insurgency was already suppressed. Frary 2015: 24.
- 83 Ivanov 2016: 55–80; Poe 2001: 412–29.
- 84 See Ivan Foletti’s essay in the Handbook.
- 85 Frary 2015: 25–46. Frary himself dismisses the idea that Tsar Alexander I intended to annex Constantinople or reestablish a Byzantine Empire: Frary 2015: 60–1.
- 86 Lenoir 1840: 7–16, 66–76; Texier and Pullan 1864. On this topic, see Lovino 2024a: 109–21.
- 87 See below, p. 22.

- 88 [Stavrou 1963](#): 91–103; [Gerd 2018](#): 93–4. See also the essays by Lora Gerd and Yuri Pyatnitsky in this Handbook.
- 89 For a summary of the disputes between the Christian communities in the Church of the Nativity: [Bacci 2017](#): 249–56.
- 90 [Stamatopoulos 2022](#): 154.
- 91 [Figes 2010](#).
- 92 [Kaldellis 2021](#): 361.
- 93 [Kaldellis 2021](#): 364.
- 94 Rambaud begins the *Introduction* with “L’Empire byzantine a été chez nous sévèrement jugé”, before asking where Europe’s forgetfulness and ingratitude towards the Byzantine Empire comes from. [Rambaud 1870](#): xii.
- 95 [Schlumberger 1890](#). His praise of Rambaud’s *L’Empire grec au Xe siècle* in [Schlumberger 1934](#).
- 96 [Krumbacher 1891](#).
- 97 [Krumbacher 1892](#): 12.
- 98 [Krumbacher 1886](#). On this, see [Agapitos 2015](#): 5–8.
- 99 [Krumbacher 1892](#): 7.
- 100 A few years later, Krumbacher would also publish *Die griechische Litteratur des Mittelalters*, a popularising volume that surveyed both high and vernacular literature of the Greek Middle Ages. [Krumbacher 1905](#). On this, [Agapitos 2015](#): 39–52.
- 101 [Rakitin 2013](#): 98–109; [Kaldellis 2021](#): 362.
- 102 [Basargina 1999](#); [Gerd 2018](#): 96–7; [Üre 2020](#): 87–113. See also Gerd’s entry in this Handbook.
- 103 For a further discussion see Lora Gerd’s essay in the Handbook.
- 104 [Schmitt 1927](#). On this research, see [Gerd 2022](#): 171–84.
- 105 The expedition was later organised by Millet with Nikodim Kondakov. [Foletti 2011](#): 114–7. For Millet see Catherine Jolivet-Levi’s essay in the Handbook.
- 106 [Gerd 2022](#): 183–4.
- 107 [Spieser 1996](#): 443–6.
- 108 [Cameron 1992](#).
- 109 [Bernabò 2003](#): 133, 146–8. His criticism has been contested in [Agazzi and Romanelli 2011](#).
- 110 [Boeck 2015](#): 114–31.
- 111 [Diehl 1905](#): 18.
- 112 [Diehl 1888](#), 1896.
- 113 [Diehl 1910](#).
- 114 The origins of the issue can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century, when the term *byzantinische Frage* began to appear in German-language art-historical literature ([Förster 1859](#): 14; [Rahn 1866](#): 95), along with the broader expression *orientalische Frage* (“Oriental Question”; [Springer 1863](#): 362–94 ). By the end of the century, the phrase had become so widely used that Franz Xaver Kraus could remark that the it “has long hung over our art history like a dark cloud”; [Kraus 1896–1897](#): I: 538).
- 115 [Diehl 1904](#): 239–51.
- 116 [Riegl 1901](#).
- 117 [Vaisse 2004](#): 73–83; [Spieser 2018](#): 383–9.
- 118 [Riegl 1902](#): 152.
- 119 [Bayet 1879](#): 3.
- 120 [Kondakov 1892](#); [Kondakov 2014](#).
- 121 [Wickhoff and Hartel 1895](#); [Riegl 1901](#); [Ajnalov 1961](#).
- 122 [Strzygowski 1901](#).
- 123 [Strzygowski 1902a](#); [Strzygowski 1902b](#); [Strzygowski 1903b](#); [Strzygowski 1916](#); [Strzygowski 1920](#).
- 124 [Vasold 2008](#): 95–111; [Vasold 2011](#): 102–16; [Diebold 2018](#): 74–8. The episode recounted by Kurt Weitzmann remains well-known. In the 1920s, he was expelled from the auditorium where Strygowski was giving a lecture because he burst out laughing in protest against a racist remark Strygowski made about Dürer being ruined by Italy during his stay in 1506. [Weitzmann 1994](#): 39–40.
- 125 [Strzygowski 1901](#): 1. The two texts Strzygowski refers to are [Wickhoff and Hartel 1895](#); [Kraus 1896–1897](#).



- 126 Strzygowski 1901: 32–9. The topic of the Jewish origins of certain Christian iconography is addressed again in a short article two years later, Strzygowski 1903a: 105–7.
- 127 Strzygowski 1902a: 315.
- 128 Strzygowski 1920.
- 129 Bréhier 1903: 1–39.
- 130 Bréhier 1903: 12–9.
- 131 Rivoira 1901.
- 132 Campini and Moraschi 2023; Lovino 2024b: 147–57; Lovino 2025: 184–95.
- 133 See Gasbarri's essay in this volume.
- 134 Galassi 1914: 623–33; Galassi 1915: 29–57. See also Gasbarri 2015:119–21; Lovino 2025: 184–91.
- 135 Liberati 2023: 413–50.
- 136 Durak 2023.
- 137 Refik Altınay 1911–1913.
- 138 Refik Altınay 1911–1913: 14. See also Kılıç Yıldız2022: 47–52. See also essays by Yıldız in this volume.
- 139 For a further discussion see Ufuk Serin's essay in the Handbook.
- 140 Lovino 2017a: 38–46; Foletti and Palladino 2020.
- 141 Lovino 2017a: 46–54.
- 142 Lovino 2017b: 145–50.
- 143 Irmischer, Nagel, Zemke 1968: 54.
- 144 Ivanov 2003: 55–60. See also Lora Gerd's essay in this volume on their revival under altered conditions from the 1940s.
- 145 Iorga 1935.
- 146 Maner 2018: 31–7; Mishkova 2023: 117.
- 147 The first editions were held in Bucharest (1924), Belgrade (1927), Athens (1930) and Sofia (1934). Maufroy 2010: 229–40.
- 148 Labrusse 2018: 221–42; Lovino 2020: 509–21. For the first Byzantine exhibitions, see also Panayotis Tournikiotis' essay in the Handbook.
- 149 Diehl 1931: 20; Tyler 1931: 25–26.
- 150 For a fuller discussion, see Elizabeth Williams's entry in this Handbook.
- 151 Cameron 2008: 4–59.
- 152 Trapp 1966.
- 153 For this and other Byzantine exhibitions see Antony Eastmond's essay in the Handbook.
- 154 Piltz 1988.
- 155 Vocotopoulos 2006: 147–56.
- 156 Nikolic opens International Congress of Byzantine Studies, b92, 22 August 2016 (link: [https://www.b92.net/o/eng/news/politics?yyyy=2016&mm=08&dd=22&nav\\_id=98975](https://www.b92.net/o/eng/news/politics?yyyy=2016&mm=08&dd=22&nav_id=98975), last accessed 10.10.2025). See also Anderson and Ivanova 2023: 25.
- 157 Anderson and Ivanova 2023: xii.
- 158 Stephenson 2023.
- 159 Maranci 2023. On the political instrumentalisation of Armenia's cultural heritage from the nineteenth century to the present, see Foletti and Khakhanova 2024.
- 160 Cormack and Vassilaki 2008: 8. For a discussion of the exhibition from the point of view of the curator see Maria Vassilaki's essay in the Handbook.
- 161 Ševcenko 1962: 189.

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### 3

## BYZANTINE RECEPTIONS IN UKRAINE

*Andrii Domanovskyi and Maryna Domanovska*

The reception of Byzantine heritage in Ukraine and the Ukrainian reception of Byzantium and its civilisational influences represent two separate, albeit intertwined, objects of research. The history of the perception and interpretation of their Byzantine cultural heritage by the Orthodox Slavic peoples of eastern Europe goes all the way back to the time when the Byzantine state ceased to exist. We can speak of the properly Ukrainian reception of Byzantium, on the other hand, starting no earlier than around the turn of the nineteenth century, since which time the intellectual construction of a modern Ukrainian political nation included, among other things, making sense of the Byzantine element of Ukrainian history. One way to approach this subject is by considering the religious and secular dimensions of the reception of the Byzantine heritage. In Ukraine, it is primarily religious concerns that have shaped this reception, starting from the time immediately after the fall of the Byzantine Empire and up to the present day. The secular engagement with Byzantium and its cultural and political legacy, again, only became prominent (without displacing the religious dimension) in the nineteenth century, in the context of Ukrainian nation-building.

Early modern reception of Byzantine heritage in Ukraine (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) involved primarily the transmission of the Orthodox Byzantine (Greek) Church tradition to the Ukrainian lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (after the 1569 Union of Lublin, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).<sup>1</sup> Enduring canonical ties, the shared Greek-Byzantine liturgy, church terminology and law, Byzantine theology and Byzantine forms of sacral architecture and iconography all clearly marked the Ukrainian lands as part of the broad post-Byzantine cultural world. Translations of didactic, theological and cosmological works by Byzantine authors were disseminated both in stand-alone editions and in numerous collections and anthologies.

In the Ukrainian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, religious polemic intensified in the mid-sixteenth century, with the appearance of the idea of a union of the Orthodox and Catholic churches, which finally became reality in 1596 at the Council of Brest. This long and ardent debate was a direct and organic continuation of the polemical confrontation between the Eastern Orthodox (Byzantine or Greek) Church and the Western Catholic (Latin or Roman) Church, going back to the times of Patriarch Photius (ninth century), Patriarch Michael I Cerularius (eleventh century) and, especially, Metropolitan



Mark of Ephesus (fifteenth century) and the Florentine Union of 1439. This church union of the Byzantine era figured very prominently in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century confessional disputes in the Ukrainian lands, either as a model for imitation or as a reprehensible example of renunciation of the true Orthodox faith.

These considerations, supplemented by new concerns such as replacing the Julian calendar with the Gregorian one, are to one degree or another present in the vast majority of polemical works of that era. Herasym Smotrytsky (d. 1594); Vasyl of Surazh (d. between 1604 and 1608); the anonymous author of *A Warning* (1605–06); Zacharias Kopystensky (d. 1627); the team of authors behind the pseudonym “Eusebius Pamphilus” under the auspices of the metropolitan of Kyiv Petro Mohyla (1596–1647) – all of these writers and their supporters and opponents raised mostly the same issues that had been fought over by theologians of the Byzantine era. Thus, with regard to the religious controversy between the Orthodox and Catholic Christians in sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Ukraine, we may speak not so much of the reception of the Byzantine legacy as of the direct and uninterrupted continuation of the Byzantine tradition.

A new aspect of the inter-church polemic of the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, marking the watershed between the continuation and reception of Byzantium in Ukraine, was reckoning with the fact of the Byzantine Empire’s demise. The fall of the original Orthodox state was presented by supporters of the union as evidence of the apostate nature of Byzantine Christianity – according to the Brest Council’s declaration of union (1596), it was precisely for their *apostasy* (schism) that the patriarchs of Constantinople were punished with Turkish pagan slavery. The Catholic writers Benedict Herbest (d. 1598) and Piotr Skarga (1536–1612) pointed out that the Greeks, as apostates from the true Christian faith, preferred to be subject to the Turks rather than the pope. The thesis that the fall of Constantinople and the Ottoman abuse of the Christian faith was the result of the schism of the Orthodox Christians from the Roman Church became widespread and was perceived by Catholics as indisputable proof that the Orthodox empire had not just lost divine protection but that it had become the target of God’s wrath.<sup>2</sup>

The destruction of the Byzantine Empire was represented as both God’s punishment and gift to the Greeks. In the Ukrainian lands under the rule of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, such an interpretation of the fall of the secular Byzantine state, stressing its favourable implications for the revival of true faith and spirituality, would find not only understanding but also sincere sympathy among the local Orthodox Christians. Like the Greeks, they were deprived of an Orthodox state of their own but could focus instead on preserving the purity of their faith and achieving spiritual perfection.

Reception of Byzantium in early modern Ukraine continued to be shaped by the Orthodox-Catholic debate around church union and the preservation of the purity of the Orthodox faith until the end of the seventeenth century. It was not limited to an unconditional apologia for everything Byzantine. The Greek Orthodox faith of Byzantine origin and the theological and cultural legacy transplanted to the Ukrainian lands from Constantinople-Tsarhorod<sup>3</sup> were perceived as the core of the local identity and seen as unquestionably good. Conversely, the Byzantine Empire as a secular state was criticised, first and foremost, by the Orthodox Christians themselves for neglecting the purity of faith because of its drift towards church union and other sins that led to its downfall.

Byzantium, together with the territories of early Christianity, continued to be treated as the homeland of the Eastern Mother Church and even the “common homeland of faith” for all Christians, regardless of which of the churches – Catholic or Orthodox – they currently

belonged to. Such was the “sacred geography” of the most renowned Orthodox scholar of the second half of the seventeenth century, Ioannykiy Galiatovsky (1620–88). Notably, he always quotes Byzantine texts in Latin translation, exemplifying Kopystensky’s statement that the Orthodox Ruthenians (a Latin name for early modern Ukrainians) received “the Greek mind” from the West.

The eighteenth century witnessed the final split between Uniate and Orthodox Christians in the interpretation of the Byzantine heritage, reflecting the division of the Ukrainian lands between two states: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the tsardom of Muscovy,<sup>4</sup> later transformed into the Russian Empire. The Uniates followed the path of Latinisation and ever closer similarity with Catholics. The 1720 Zamość Council of the Ruthenian Uniate Church, the resolutions of which still remain fundamental for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, reaffirmed the status of the Uniate Church as the only church of the Eastern rite in the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and widened the ritual and organisational gap between the Greek Catholics and Orthodox Christians, driving the former as close as possible to the Catholics. Drifting away from Orthodoxy also meant a departure from the Byzantine legacy, perceived and interpreted mostly negatively.

Prominent Ukrainian theologians and cultural figures of the turn of the eighteenth century, such as Demetrius of Rostov (secular name Danylo Tuptalo, 1651–1709), Stefan Yavorsky (1658–1722), Feofan Prokopovych (1677–1736) and others, were actively involved in the assimilation of the Byzantine heritage within the borders of the Russian state. These natives of the Ukrainian lands, all graduates of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy or Kyiv-Mohyla Collegium, laid the groundwork for the ideas about the Byzantine heritage, the Orthodox Church and the relationship between church and state that became dominant in the Russian Empire of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They shaped the Russian reception of Byzantium through the absorption of the empire’s theological, cultural, educational and scholarly legacy received by way of Ukraine.

The eighteenth century became for Russia a time not so much of assimilating post-Byzantine influences in their Ukrainian reading as of turning decisively towards Western cultural models. Hence Ukraine, having passed on to Russia its own spiritual reception of the Byzantine legacy within the Orthodox tradition, did not in the end take the reins of Russian culture, which followed the path of accelerated Westernisation, sidelining its Byzantine heritage. The Ukrainian perception of Byzantium lost its national and cultural distinctiveness, being placed at the service of the Russian Empire and firmly embedded in the ideology of Russian imperialism. The latter would manifest itself most conspicuously, during the “long” nineteenth century, in the Russian designs on the straits of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and the idea of seizing Constantinople from the Ottomans and placing it under the rule of the Orthodox Russian monarchs.

In the Ukrainian territories of the Russian Empire, on the other hand, Western-style modernisation drawing on the principles of enlightened absolutism led in practice not only to the erasure of local Cossack autonomy<sup>5</sup> but also to the unification of religious and cultural life based on the single imperial model. This prompted the Ukrainian intellectual elite to finally abandon attempts at a political reading of the Byzantine legacy, which became a Russian prerogative, and to prioritise instead the spiritual assimilation of Byzantium within the framework of the post-Byzantine theological tradition. This trend found its most vivid expression in the work of the two leading Ukrainian thinkers and theologians of the era, Hryhorii Skovoroda (1722–94) and Paisius Velychkovsky (1722–94).

Notable in this context is the almost complete lack of reflection on Ukraine's Byzantine heritage in the historical-political treatise *History of the Rus' or Little Russia* (late eighteenth or early nineteenth century), which covers a span from ancient times to the beginning of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–74. Apart from the traditional assertion that God's punishment fell "on the Greeks and their church" because of apostasy from true Christianity caused by the insolence and vanity of the Constantinople hierarchs, the anonymous author almost never concerns himself with the Byzantine factor in the history of Ukraine. Disseminated in manuscript, the *History of the Rus'* became extremely popular in the first half of the nineteenth century and exerted a powerful influence on almost all Ukrainian intellectuals of that period, laying the foundation for the formation of a modern Ukrainian political nation through collective awareness of a shared past in which Byzantium did not play a significant role and figured mostly negatively, when at all.

The negative perception of Byzantium in the Ukrainian intellectual tradition of the nineteenth century was shaped by three factors. The first was well known from earlier times and more or less amounted to the formulaic accusation that the medieval Greeks abandoned the true Christian faith under the influence of worldly pride and corruption. It was most fully set forth in the philosophical and religious treatise *The Books of the Genesis of the Ukrainian People* (or *Divine Law*), written at the end of 1845/beginning of 1846 as the programme statement of the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius – a secret society with the mission to reawaken Ukraine and establish a just social order and cooperation between all Slavic peoples based on the principle of equality.

In what it has to say about Byzantium, this document, most often attributed to the historian Mykola Kostomarov (1817–85), is extremely close not only ideologically but even textually to the views of the anonymous author of *A Warning* and other early-modern Orthodox polemicists.

The second source of the negative attitude towards Byzantium prevalent among Ukrainian intellectuals was the Western view of the medieval eastern Roman Empire, primarily in its eighteenth-century Enlightenment incarnation. Even the words "the Greek kingdom kept withering, withering for a thousand years, withered entirely and fell under the Turks" bring to mind the title and message the era's most famous general work on the history of the Byzantine Empire – Edward Gibbon's multi-volume *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–89). We know for certain that it was read by the creator of the best-known "Byzantine" imagery in Ukrainian culture, the poet Taras Shevchenko (1814–61).<sup>6</sup> It was likely under the influence of Gibbon, among others, that the famous line about "Byzantinism" (*vizantiystvo*) as a favourite pastime of the ruling classes of the Russian Empire appeared in Shevchenko's 1858 poem "I'm Not Unwell, I'm Fine...":

And the masters will keep rocking the cradle,  
Putting up temples, palaces,  
Adoring their drunkard tsar,  
And praising Byzantinism,  
And that, I guess, is all.

Later, in the poem "To Lykera" (1860), Shevchenko fleshes out his dim view of "Byzantinism", characterising the "Byzantine" deity, anachronistically named after the Jewish Lord of Hosts, as false and duplicitous: "And Byzantine Zebaot will fool you!" Finally, in a diary entry from 16 February 1858, the poet refers to the twelfth-century

Nizhny Novgorod icon of the Holy Mandylion (the famous *acheiropoietos* image of the Saviour) as a “Byzantine horror”, firmly establishing his dislike for everything Byzantine and Byzantium as such.

The third factor likely contributing to this scorn for “Byzantinism” and things Byzantine was the negative attitude on the part of exponents of the fledgling Ukrainian national identity towards the Russian imperial religious and state ideology, the adherents of which actively appealed to the Byzantine heritage. Byzantium was one of the favourite toys of the Russian tsars, and so it is quite understandable that Ukrainian nation-builders sought to distance themselves from it, leaving the Russian Empire to do with it as it pleased.

Conversely, the nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Ukrainian *academic* view of Byzantium and the Byzantine footprint in Ukrainian history was much less dismissive. In the works of the historians Kostomarov, Mykhailo Maksymovych (1804–73), Oleksandra Yefymenko (1848–1918), Ivan Franko (1856–1916), Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1866–1934) and others, we find productive attempts to objectively evaluate the reception of Byzantine legacy in Ukraine. Ukrainian scholars of this era highlighted the diverse Byzantine influences on Ukrainian culture, taking issue with the antipathy towards everything Byzantine that had become commonplace in Ukrainian society by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

The question of Ukraine’s Byzantine heritage was considered in particular detail by Franko and Hrushevsky. The former, in his 1894 review of Karl Krumbacher’s famous *History of Byzantine Literature* and the first three volumes of the journal *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, argued that Byzantium’s influence on the Slavs, including the Ukrainians, could not be seen in purely negative terms. Hrushevsky, in the first volume of his *History of Ukraine-Rus’*, published in 1898, also censured attempts to interpret the Byzantine influence on Ukraine either purely positively or purely negatively.

Both of these attempts to rethink the place of the Byzantine heritage in Ukrainian history and culture hail from the west of Ukraine, which was under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Habsburgs and where the dominant church among the Ukrainian population was the Uniate Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). The church had become highly Latinised by the end of the nineteenth century, and everything Byzantine was perceived by its priesthood and laity mainly, if not exclusively, in a negative light. However, a complete rejection of the Greco-Byzantine tradition would have endangered the national essence of the UGCC; so, during the 1920s and 1930s, when the Western Ukrainian lands were part of the restored Poland and the national situation appeared especially precarious, there was some revival of interest in the Byzantine heritage and pushback against excessive Latinisation, as the camps of “Byzantinists” and “Latinisers” among the church’s hierarchs debated each other. The former advocated restoring the Byzantine rite and freeing it from Latin accretions, while the latter wanted to get rid of eastern influences as much as possible and introduce Western Catholic worship.

The main defenders of the Byzantine tradition within the Ukrainian Uniate Church were metropolitan of the UGCC Andrey Sheptytsky (1865–1944),<sup>8</sup> Father Josyf Slipyj (1892–1984, from 1929 rector of the Lviv Theological Academy) and Professor Havryl Kostelnyk (1886–1948, of the same academy). The “Latinisers” were led by Bishop Hryhorii Khomyshyn (1867–1947) of Stanyslaviv (now Ivano-Frankivsk) and Josaphat Kotsylovsky (1876–1947), bishop of the Przemyśl Diocese of the UGCC.

An important role in the controversy was played by the genre of the pastoral epistle. The position of the “Latinisers” was defended in the pastoral letters of Khomyshyn. The arguments of the “Byzantinists” were set forth in Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky’s “On Ritual

Affairs” (13 April 1931) and “Epistle on Liturgical Life” (December 1934), as well as in the important essay by Father Josyf Slipyj “Byzantinism as a Form of Culture”,<sup>9</sup> delivered as a talk at the fourth Uniate conference in Pinsk (7–9 September 1933).

Khomyshyn’s antipathy towards Byzantium and Byzantinism displayed the influence of several factors: (1) the Western Christian, Roman Catholic notion of Byzantium as the initiator of the division of Christ’s one Church; (2) the negative Western European view of the eastern empire, particularly since the Enlightenment era; (3) the use of the term “Byzantine” in European languages as a synonym for treachery, betrayal, hypocrisy, flattery, cunning and more (“the odious name”); (4) animosity towards tsarist and Bolshevik Russia as enemies of religion and destroyers of ecclesiastical freedom. This attitude was rooted in the entire previous history of the Western-oriented reception of Byzantium in Ukraine from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

In his response to the bishop of Stanyslaviv, Metropolitan Andrey unequivocally condemned the church schism and those negative traits that were associated with the term “Byzantinism”; however, he stressed that one should not renounce the rite of the Byzantine Church just because of the negative connotations of the term “Byzantinism” that had become fixed in language. Sheptytsky believed that the term “Byzantine” should not be abandoned; the name was correct, because the rite took its final form in Byzantium. He simply refused to attach to it only those negative meanings that were enumerated by Khomyshyn and posited the existence of a “false and evil Byzantinism”, the essence of which was the dogmatisation of rites. This allowed Sheptytsky to cleverly redirect the accusation of (false and evil) “Byzantinism” against the “Latinisers” themselves, for whom the dogmatisation of ritual was of fundamental importance. “Byzantinism” in its negative dimension could be both eastern and Western, and only the “breadth of Christ’s views” could safeguard against such aberrations. In order to avoid negative “Byzantinism”, we should be ritualists (that is, upholders of the Byzantine rite) and not only preserve traditions but also restore those that have been lost. Preservation of tradition and ritual, according to Metropolitan Andrey, would allow the believers to fend off external influences and protect their identity.

Of particular importance for the controversy between the “Latinisers” and the “Byzantinists” was the brilliant essay “Byzantinism as a Form of Culture” by Slipyj (1933), one of Sheptytsky’s closest associates and followers. In it, the author considered in detail the nature and components of Byzantinism and the main traits of Byzantine culture and argued that Byzantinism could play a positive role in the reunification of the Church. For Ukraine, he wrote, the Byzantine tradition was of decisive importance, because it was thanks to Byzantium that Ukraine acquired high culture. “Byzantinism” was for Slipyj a thousand-year-old cultural heritage, respect for which, acceptance of which, and reliance on which were key to the future coming together of the Universal Church.

The Byzantinism of Sheptytsky was facing not only the past but also the present and the future. It could be a basis for the unification of Christ’s Church, a guarantee of its further preservation and an asset that could help the church respond to challenges of the day. Adherence to the Byzantine tradition was an instrument for the modernisation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. “Byzantinism” was for Sheptytsky a guarantee of reforms that could open the Greek Catholic Church to the world; it embodied so-called Western values.

This position stemmed from the desire to build the Ukrainian church on the basis of ecumenism of “universal breadth” and through a deep synthesis of the “western” and “eastern”. The debate around ‘Byzantinism’ was also driven by the need to preserve or develop the distinctive cultural and national character of the Ukrainian church. “Latinisation”

from this point of view threatened the loss of identity. It was not for nothing that Sheptytsky cautioned against the danger of falling under the influence of some Western Catholic nation and adopting, under the guise of Catholicism, traditions that had nothing to do with Christianity. The metropolitan stressed the need to “be ourselves” and “restore our own traditional ways”.

The interwar-era debates between the “Latinisers” and “Byzantinists” also had an effect on the view of Byzantium in the Ukrainian Orthodox community. Ivan Ohienko (1882–1972, Metropolitan Hilarion of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in exile) addressed this subject in his *Byzantium and Ukraine. On the Ancient Sources of the Ukrainian Orthodox Faith and Culture* (1954). He argued that Byzantine cultural influence on Ukraine was entirely positive and that Byzantinism forged the very soul of the Ukrainian people.<sup>10</sup>

While we see a surge, or at the very least signs, of interest in the significance of the Byzantine heritage for Ukrainian culture in the Western Ukrainian lands under Polish rule between the First and Second World Wars and in Ukrainian emigrant circles, Byzantium played no perceptible role in the public intellectual discourse of Soviet Ukraine (1921–91). Byzantium-related matters came up here and there in works on medieval Ukrainian history, but without becoming the subject of deeper reflection or discussion. The depiction of Byzantium and things Byzantine in fiction was replete with negatively coloured stereotypes – as, for instance, in the 1968 novel *Miracle* by one of the leading lights of Soviet Ukrainian literature, Pavlo Zahrebelnyi (1924–2009), which tells the story of the construction of the cathedral of St Sophia in Kyiv.

A new pivot towards reflection on things Byzantine occurred soon after the restoration of Ukraine’s independence in 1991. The rediscovery of the legacy of pre-Soviet Ukrainian intellectuals, émigrés and Western scholars, banned in the USSR or little-known, contributed both to the resurgence of negative stereotypes about Byzantium and its influences and to the development of a new, more balanced view of the Byzantine heritage in Ukrainian culture.

Anti-Byzantine generalisations tend to be resorted to in philosophical, cultural and political journalism, primarily by public intellectuals. Texts by modern Ukrainian historians and philosophers Mykola Riabchuk (b. 1953), Oleh Pokalchuk (b. 1955), Oksana Zabuzhko (b. 1960), Oksana Pakhliovska (b. 1956) and others provide enough examples of such vivid but rather superficial constructions. For them Byzantium and its legacy are more of a symbol than historical reality, a myth that lends itself well to journalistic use.

Ukrainian historians steer clear of this kind of charged generalisation, even in general works and works that are aimed at a wide readership. The popular, but at the same time extremely thorough, study by the Byzantinist of Ukrainian origin Ihor Ševčenko (1922–2009) *Ukraine between East and West: Essays on Cultural History to the Early Eighteenth Century* has had a decisive influence on the formation of the Ukrainian academic vision of Byzantium and its legacy.<sup>11</sup> First published in English in 1996 and translated into Ukrainian in 2001, it established the basic parameters for the perception of the Byzantine cultural legacy in the writings of such Ukrainian intellectuals as the historians Natalya Yakovenko (b. 1942), Yaroslav Hrytsak (b. 1960), Serhii Plokhyy (b. 1957) and others, whose impact extends beyond purely academic circles.

To sum up this brief sketch, the first aspect of the reception of the Byzantine heritage in Ukraine is rooted in the religious sphere, demonstrating continuity from polemical literature of the turn of the seventeenth century to the present. The focal points here include the



discussion of Byzantinism within the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church during the 1920s and 1930s and reflections on the Byzantine foundations of Christianity in Ukraine among Ukrainian Christians more generally. The religious view of Byzantium in Ukrainian culture is ambivalent and ranges from acute condemnation and distancing to partial or total endorsement. Since the mid-twentieth century, a positive perception of the Byzantine heritage has gained ground in the Ukrainian religious tradition, reinforced recently by the still ongoing emancipation of the Ukrainian Orthodox community from its dependence on the Moscow Patriarchate.

The second, secular aspect of the reception of the Byzantine heritage took shape in the nineteenth century under the influence of the Western Enlightenment and developments in Ukrainian nation-building. The anti-Byzantine bias of the Ukrainian intellectual community was stimulated by the Western tradition and by the negative attitudes towards the Russian Empire. On the other hand, the secular approach also included a balanced academic assessment of the Byzantine factor in the history and culture of Ukraine within the framework of positivist historical scholarship.

After a pause during the Soviet era (1921–91), when the reception of Byzantium did not play a significant role in Ukrainian culture, the “Enlightenment-style” antipathy towards the Byzantine heritage, reinforced by anti-colonial narratives directed against Russia, returned to the Ukrainian intellectual discourse in the 1990s; it remains strong to this day. One salient example of this sentiment is a poster with the slogan “Glory to European Ukraine! Enough with the Byzantinism!!!” displayed at a rally in Kharkiv on 1 December 2013 protesting the pro-Russian about-face in Ukrainian foreign policy at the time. The poster represented “Byzantinism” simultaneously as something anti-European, anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian. “Enough with the Byzantinism!” more or less stood for “Enough with Russia!”

However, the current Ukrainian public discourse also accommodates a moderate and generally positive perception of Byzantium, determined not to leave the Byzantine inheritance at the mercy of Russia. It has been best expressed by the political scientist Oleksandr Lytvynenko (b. 1972), who during the 2004 Orange Revolution in Kyiv, identified the Byzantine civilisational legacy as a key source of revolutionary movements in countries of the Byzantine cultural orbit – Bulgaria, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. Lytvynenko argued that the main engine of the revolutionary events in Ukraine was “people’s longing for Justice”, which is the basis of the “political mentality of post-Byzantine societies”, including Ukraine.

## Notes

- 1 The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795) was a union state of Poland and Lithuania, ruled by a monarch who was both king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania.
- 2 Dziarnovych, Byrledianu and Tymoshenko 2014: 86–7.
- 3 In medieval and early modern Ukrainian literature, Constantinople was known as Tsarhorod (Tsar City).
- 4 Tsardom of Muscovy (1457–1721) – the centralised Russian state from the assumption of the title of tsar by Ivan IV in 1547 and until the foundation of the Russian Empire by Peter the Great in 1721.
- 5 Cossack autonomy or Cossack State (Hetmanate) is a historical term for the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Cossack state in central Ukraine, part of the Tsardom of Muscovy and then Russian Empire.
- 6 Bihun 2014: 388, Ushkalov 2014: 94. Faida 2018: 15.

- 7 Kutsyi 2018: 19–26.
- 8 Avvakumov 2011: 51–106.
- 9 ‘Slipyi 1969: 101–24.
- 10 Mytropolyt Ilarion (I. Ohienko) 1954: 7, 15, 79–80 and others; Faida 2018: 13–8.
- 11 Ševčenko 1996.

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## 4

# HEADING NORTH

## Scandinavia and Modern Byzantine Studies

*Christine Amadou*

It took time before scholars in the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, engaged with Byzantine studies. The first chair in Byzantine philology was created at the University of Uppsala in Sweden as late as 1980. However, in the century preceding this institutionalisation, the Scandinavians explored Byzantium as a topic in popular culture and developed Byzantine studies as part of existing academic disciplines. As summed up by the modern historians Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff, the approach to Byzantium is often presented as passing through four stages, namely from humanist indifference (from around 1450) through baroque enthusiasm (seventeenth century) and enlightenment (eighteenth century) contempt to nineteenth-century institutionalisation.<sup>1</sup> In the Scandinavian countries, the first stages in this sketch were so poorly represented that we can say Byzantine studies headed North directly in the period of institutionalisation. In the Scandinavian countries, this period was also marked by a search for national histories and roots. This may explain why a considerable part of the Scandinavian interest in Byzantium was prompted by a fascination with movement in the opposite direction, namely, with the ancestors who headed south – that is to say, with the stories about Scandinavians who served in the Varangian guard and other medieval visitors to Constantinople. In this chapter, I follow some strands of the history of this national way of entering into the field of Byzantine studies. This leads to an exploration of how Byzantine studies were institutionalised in Scandinavia and of how they broke away from existing academic disciplines to become what the renowned Swedish philologist Vilhelm Lundström (1869–1940) in 1900 defined as “A new science”.<sup>2</sup>

### Crusaders and the Varangians

When visitors entered the Norwegian Pavilion at the *Exposition Universelle* (Universal Exposition) in Paris that same year, 1900, they discovered two monumental tapestries exclusively made for the occasion, each measuring 15 square metres. The most impressive of these was *Indtoget i Myklagard* (The Entry to Myklagard), showing King Sigurd the Crusader (1090–1130) about to enter Constantinople on his return from the Holy Land in 1111, while the other depicted King Sigurd and King Baldwin I (1058–1118) riding from

Jerusalem to the Jordan River. When these weavings were returned to Norway, they were named *Riksteppene* (The National Tapestries) and given a prominent place in the Royal castle in Kristiania (later Oslo). They were considered the pinnacle of *national* art. Until 1905, Norway was in union with Sweden and the country was marked by strong movements claiming independence. In this context, the tapestries got a double national stamp: they retold highlights from the sagas and, at the same time, they revitalised Old Norwegian textile handicraft, through their weaving technique and the use of geometrical forms and colours, which were made from traditional recipes based on Norwegian plants and even urine.<sup>3</sup> The artist behind the sketches for the tapestries, Gerhard Munthe (1849–1929), won a gold medal in Paris. The international and the local press emphasised the political mission of the tapestries, namely, to present “Norway in the world”, both in the past and in the present.<sup>4</sup>

Munthe was one of the artists chosen to illustrate *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson’s (1179–1241) history of the Norse kings, including the saga of Sigurd the Crusader (in The Saga of the Sons of Magnús). The illustrated edition was part of a cultural nation-building project and one of the iconic scenes in *Heimskringla* recounted how King Sigurd ordered his men “to ride into the city [Constantinople] with a proud bearing and not to show any astonishment at all the new things they might see”.<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, this episode was interpreted as proof of the pride of the medieval Norwegian king, and thus of the independent spirit of the contemporary Norwegian nation. The scene was first illustrated in the saga edition and then became the basis for the tapestry. However, whereas the saga illustration was small and in black and white, leaving little room for details, the tapestry had space enough for an elaborate image of Constantinople. In the woven version, the city that welcomed the Norwegian king became a superb reflection of oriental fantasies. The medieval *Myklagard* (Constantinople) was furnished with onion domes and minarets. In this way, the tapestry connected the national language to a common European representation of Byzantium as the exotic other.<sup>6</sup>

Munthe’s tapestry and its dichotomous representation of the independent Norsemen and the orientalised *Myklagard* show the interrelatedness between national identity-building and the fascination with the Byzantine Empire. This growing fascination with medieval Scandinavians’ visits to Constantinople contributed to both the public appropriation of Byzantine history and opening the door for scholarly interest in it, as we can see in the case of the Norwegian historian Gustav Storm (1845–1903).

In 1884 Gustav Storm, best known as the translator of the 1899 edition of *Heimskringla* from Old Norse to Norwegian, published a series of articles in the *Historisk Tidsskrift* (The Norwegian History Journal). One of them included translations of passages from the newly published *Strategikon* by the Byzantine author Kekaumenos (c. 1020–70). This was, together with a Danish *Alexiad* from 1879, one of the first translations of a non-theological Byzantine text into a modern Scandinavian language.<sup>7</sup> Storm’s purpose was clear: to shed light on Norwegian figures and their activities in Constantinople and confirm the historicity of the sagas.<sup>8</sup> Storm reproduced the Greek original, as edited by the Russian historian Vasily Vasilievsky (1838–99) (sic) in 1881, as well as a Norwegian translation of the paragraphs directly concerning the Norwegian king Harald Hadrada (1015–66, called “Arantes” in Byzantine sources). Hadrada had visited Constantinople as he served in the Varangian guard, and the colourful story of his Byzantine adventures is found in *Heimskringla* as well as in *Harald’s Saga* in the earlier chronicle *Morkinskinna* (the title meaning

“rotten parchment”). Storm explains his interest in a brief foreword: “Until today, Harald’s deeds in the service of the Greeks have been known only from Nordic sources that could be suspected of partiality, here we have a Greek report confirming the main points of the saga tradition”.<sup>9</sup>

Both Sigurd Jorsalfar and Harald Hadrada have been central figures in Scandinavian literature since the nineteenth century. The earliest instance was in the work of the Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), called *Væringerne i Miklagard* (The Varangians in Miklagard), from 1827.<sup>10</sup> In 1872 the Nobel Prize-winning writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) published the drama *Sigurd Jorsalfare* (1872) with music by the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg (1843–1907),<sup>11</sup> and from the first half of the nineteenth century, several suspense novels depicting Varangians were published in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The Nazi-directed National Theatre in Norway also found it relevant to stage Bjørnson’s *Sigurd Jorsalfare* in 1944.<sup>12</sup> The interest in these Norse visitors to Constantinople/*Myklagard* was greatest in Norway. The Norwegians first achieved their independence from Denmark in 1814, then from the Swedes in 1905, and these events made Norway the country most in need of national and patriotic affirmation. Nevertheless, the Norse presence awakened interest in Byzantium both among scholars and artists in Sweden and Denmark. This also generated a new interest in the Nordic interactions with the Rus’. A “Scandinavian doctrine” promoted Russia’s roots to be Scandinavian, as defended by the Danish philologist Vilhelm Ludvig Peter Thomsen (1842–1927) in three lectures in Oxford in 1877. The conclusion leaves no doubt regarding his purposes: “It was the Northmen who laid the foundation on which the native Slavs have raised a colossal superstructure, and the insignificant germ planted by them has developed into one of the greatest empires the world has ever seen”.<sup>13</sup> In this way we should also consider the Scandinavian interest in Byzantium as a turn to the East. Historians explored the river ways from Scandinavia to the Black Sea, and the relations between the Rus’, Scandinavia and the Byzantine Empire, thus turning European medieval history eastwards. The patriotic gaze was directed towards the connections and relations with Russia, the mighty and threatening neighbour in the East. During the Nazi occupation of Norway, the idea of Scandinavian supremacy was exaggerated, as for example in novelist Eivind Kvålen’s (1894–1975) book *Det norske landnåm i aust* (“The Norwegian conquests in the East”) from 1944.<sup>14</sup>

### A Young Science

Ideological motivation is also present in the only Scandinavian “manifesto” for Byzantine studies, namely the booklet *En ung Vetenskap* (“A young Science”) by the Latin lecturer Vilhelm Lundström.<sup>15</sup> For Lundström, the philological study of Byzantium was both a *young science* and a *new science*. In this enthusiastic opusculum of 35 pages, he invited Swedish scholars to follow their European colleagues and engage in studies of Byzantine texts. Lundström presented numerous arguments: among them, one was that classical studies were so dominant that they risked the disregard of scientific methods and aims other than their own.<sup>16</sup> Classics scholars were, according to Lundström, not open to studies of the entire Greek tradition, even if this meant that “we lose sight of the connections in the European culture”. *The new science* had experienced its great *momentum* in the last decades of the nineteenth century, thanks to emerging national movements, first seen among the Greeks. The *youth* of Byzantine studies meant, in Lundström’s terms, that it was the

“youngest of the philological sciences, both in inner vitality and in the quality and quantity of material”, but it was nevertheless “ready to challenge the older siblings”.<sup>17</sup> The novelty of the science went hand in hand with its youth:

Twenty years ago, the existence of this [Byzantine philology] as an independent science was unknown. Today we have at our disposition two scientific journals, several important yearly publications and archives, a ceaselessly working archaeological institute and a large number of scholars in different countries.<sup>18</sup>

Lundström’s launch of Byzantine studies corresponded to wider European currents.<sup>19</sup> However, whereas Byzantium elsewhere had been studied, even as a negative model, before being institutionalised in the late nineteenth century, Scandinavian scholars did not have such a local prehistory.

Lundström’s admiration of German scholar Karl Krumbacher (1856–1909), the dominant personality in the emerging field of Byzantine studies, is evident. His text can be read as a *homage* to Krumbacher, whose *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur* (History of Byzantine Literature, 1891) represented, in Lundström’s words, “a watershed in the history of this whole field of studies”. However, in an essay about Lundström, the Swedish Byzantinist David Westberg underlines the pioneering character of Lundström’s historiographical position.<sup>20</sup> Lundström discovered – and defended – a new historicising paradigm in the humanities and identified Byzantine philology as its spearhead. Byzantine philology, as launched by Krumbacher, was not only “a study of language, but of *culture* ... The most important and the most integrative part of the philology is the study of *literature*”.<sup>21</sup>

In his pamphlet, Lundström discusses the status of Byzantine studies in several European countries, with important passages on the Russian tradition, before he finally takes up the Swedish case. He invites Swedish scholars to get involved in European history, not only their own. According to Lundström, the Swedes should strike while the iron was hot and engage in this new and *virginal* science. He urged the Swedes not to let themselves get left behind, and this appeal had political echoes as well: “We must not permit a new science to grow up, in which Sweden is unable to follow and surpass its eastern neighbour”. Lundström’s concluding words remind us once again of the patriotic agenda which prevailed at the very beginning of twentieth-century Scandinavia.

Byzantine philology hides the solution to the most important secrets in the early history of our people. It also conceals the true saga of our first connections with the Gardaríke, which later played such an important and fatal role for the Swedish people.<sup>22</sup>

This aspect made the new science a *relevant* science in Lundström’s eyes, unlike classical philology. He argued that it helped to understand not only the entire Greek tradition, Russia and the Balkans, but also the Swedes themselves. Byzantine studies could elevate their Swedish ancestors to equality with medieval Rus’.

### **New Science, Old Disciplines**

Lundström identified Byzantine studies with philology, although he conceived of philology in a broad sense. However, his visions for Swedish involvement did not bear fruit. The

same is true of Denmark and Norway. There were scholars who edited and studied Byzantine texts, but they did not create a new field or discipline. They were mostly classical scholars, some of them theologians, and their engagement with Byzantine texts was always a secondary matter. From 1900 to 1970, we find prominent scholars in this category: Danes such as Anders Bjørk Drachmann (1860–1935) and Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1854–1928); Heiberg's main contribution to Byzantine studies was his edition of the medical treatises of Paul of Aegina, Drachmann's contribution was his work with lexicography.<sup>23</sup> In Sweden, Sigfrid Lindström (1879–1939) who taught Byzantine and Modern Greek Philology at the University of Gothenburg translated the Grottaferrata version of the *Digenis Akritas*.<sup>24</sup> At Uppsala University, several of the professors of Greek edited Byzantine texts, including papyri; the most important of them was probably Carl Otto Lagercrantz (1868–1938), with his edition of Early Byzantine magic papyri.<sup>25</sup> At the University of Lund, Albert Wifstrand (1901–64), professor of Greek, was an expert on the Greek of Late Antiquity and he initiated works on theological texts (by St John Chrysostom and St Basil) as well as on post-classical epic poetry. In Norway, Byzantine philology was even less well represented in the academic sphere. However, the Norwegian *Symbolae Osloenses* (Journal of Classical Philology), founded in 1922, gave rise to several articles concerning the early Byzantine period. Professors Samson Eitrem (1872–1966) and Leiv Amundsen (1898–1988) regularly published texts on papyri and ostraca from the collection of Egyptian papyri that Eitrem had initiated in 1910.

All these men (yes, only men) in Sweden, Denmark and Norway were scholars in classical philology. They did not leave that discipline but rather enlarged it. The majority of their “Byzantine” contributions can be covered by the periodical term “Late Antiquity”. However, since this was still long before the “explosion of Late Antiquity” as an academic field in the 1970s, these works should be considered as an integral part of the dawn of Byzantine studies in Scandinavia.<sup>26</sup> They all, each in their own manner, paved the way for the academic chairs in Byzantine philology that were established in the 1980s. In Uppsala, Lennart Rydén (1931–2002) was the first professor of Byzantine studies, working mainly on early Byzantine hagiography.<sup>27</sup> His doctoral thesis (1963) was a critical edition of the *Life* of the holy fool Symeon Salus and his subsequent hagiographical studies, combining literary and philological perspectives, led the Swedish Council for Humanistic Research to create a personal professorship for him.<sup>28</sup> When he retired, the chair was taken over by the University of Uppsala and assigned to Jan Olof Rosenquist (born 1944). Uppsala, the Scandinavian centre of Byzantine philology, both attracted scholars from and sent out scholars to other Scandinavian universities and still keeps its central position, both in Scandinavia and in Europe. From 2010 Ingela Nilsson (born 1970) has kept the position and has confirmed Uppsala's central position for international Byzantine studies through her important works in Byzantine literature and narratology. At Copenhagen University, the Department for Greek and Latin Medieval Philology was founded in 1958, although without a pronounced Byzantine strand. In 1984, the Byzantinist Sysse Gudrun Engberg (born 1939) helped found the Department of Modern Greek and Balkan Studies at Copenhagen. In Norway, Tomas Hägg (1938–2011) from Uppsala was appointed professor in Greek at the University of Bergen in 1977. There he met the Slavonic professor Jostein Børtnes (born 1937), and they founded a lively Byzantine research milieu in the 1980s and 1990s, focusing on patristic texts as well as on Byzantine literature and biography, notably, in the case of Hägg, the antique and Byzantine novel.<sup>29</sup>

### Beyond Philology

This rapid survey has followed Lundström in his definition of Byzantine studies as identical with philology. But as an academic object of study, Byzantium has also turned up in other fields. Scandinavia accommodated and is still accommodating, pioneering milieus for the study of Byzantine art and music. The latter began when the young Danish philologist Carsten Höeg (1896–1961) was asked in 1917 to catalogue two late Byzantine musical manuscripts in the Danish Royal library.<sup>30</sup> Both were part of the “Papadike” corpus and Höeg’s work on them opened the door for modern studies in Byzantine music. Höeg was one of the founders of the edition series *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae* from 1931 onwards. Aside from academic publications, he also felt it was his duty to publish in Danish on Byzantium and Byzantine arts.<sup>31</sup> Under the guidance of Höeg and his student Jørgen Raasted (1927–95), Copenhagen became a centre for the study of Byzantine chant; the University of Copenhagen still houses an active milieu for research on liturgical music and notation and is in charge of an international publication series. Today, this activity is connected to the Faculty of Theology and financed by the Carlsberg foundation.

The other field where Byzantine studies “headed north” was in the study of Byzantine art. Here again, scholarly interest began with Late Antiquity, with the Norwegian art historian Hans Peter L’Orange (1903–83) and his studies of the stylistic evolution in Roman imperial portraits and triumphal arches. L’Orange was the first director of the Norwegian Institute in Rome, where a new generation of art historians working on Byzantine church architecture and mosaics emerged. Among them were Per Jonas Nordhagen (born 1929) and Hjalmar Torp (born 1924), later joined by the Danish art historian Bente Küllerich (born 1954). They brought Byzantine studies to the North, linked to research milieus in Italy, Germany and Finland. In this field, the historical relation between the North and Byzantium was also a favoured topic. It was even chosen as the overarching theme for an international Byzantinist conference held in Uppsala in 1979.<sup>32</sup>

Whereas classical antiquity was central as a model in nineteenth-century Scandinavian architecture, and classical languages and history were integrated into the educational curriculum, Byzantine history had not undergone a similar domestication. Byzantium was, as pointed out by the Swedish literary scholar Helena Bodin (born 1964), “a peripheral cultural phenomenon” and as good as absent from the horizon of Scandinavians.<sup>33</sup> When Byzantium was introduced, it was in a period of active nation-building, and the stories about medieval contacts with Constantinople became vehicles for the assertion of an independent identity. At the same time, Byzantine studies were introduced as a “new science”, also offering a new methodological approach to European history. For Vilhelm Lundström engagement with Byzantine studies was a way to define and defend national independence: “We have a politics of cultural defence; it is as important and as necessary as the ordinary politics of defence”.<sup>34</sup> Bodin has studied the presence and images of Byzantium in Swedish literature, with the modernist poet Gunnar Ekelöf (1907–68) as a prime case study.<sup>35</sup> Such literary echoes interacted continually with the scholarly research. Whereas the early history of Byzantine scholarship in Scandinavia was inseparable from the nationalist quests or identity and paved the way for institutionalisation, the later history is strongly connected to other academic disciplines as well as to literary and artistic movements.

## Notes

- 1 Aschenbrenner and Ransohoff 2021: 3.
- 2 Lundström 1900.
- 3 Thue 1986: 24–6.
- 4 Gjesvik 2021: 572–4.
- 5 Sturluson 1995: 698.
- 6 Cameron 2003.
- 7 Hovgård 1879–80.
- 8 Storm 1884b: 354–86.
- 9 Storm 1884a: 203.
- 10 Oehlenschläger 1827.
- 11 Bjørnson 1872.
- 12 Nationaltheatret 1944.
- 13 Thomsen 1877:130.
- 14 Kvålen 1944.
- 15 Lundström 1900.
- 16 Lundström 1900: 6.
- 17 Lundström 1900: 7.
- 18 Lundström 1900: 30.
- 19 Aschenbrenner and Ransohoff 2021: 3–4.
- 20 Westberg 2015: 70.
- 21 Lundström 1900: 15.
- 22 Lundström 1900: 35.
- 23 Rydén 1989: 485.
- 24 Lindstam 1940.
- 25 Lagercrantz 1924.
- 26 Cameron 2016.
- 27 Rydén 1989: 501.
- 28 Balicka-Witakowska and Heldt 2002.
- 29 Hägg 1980.
- 30 Blatt 1961: 76.
- 31 Höeg 1955.
- 32 Zeitler 1981.
- 33 Bodin 2016:13.
- 34 Lundström 1900: 35.
- 35 Bodin 2011: 201–66.

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## 5

# THE “ARMENIAN VOICE” IN THE RECEPTION OF BYZANTIUM

## A Cultural Interpretation Within a Political Framework

*Nazénie Garibian*

*(with the assistance of Mary Ghazaryan)*

The reception of Byzantium in Armenian scholarship developed from the end of the nineteenth century in connection with increasing general interest in Byzantine heritage in the European and Russian academic milieus. It was influenced by various intellectual and ideological trends of the time, such as the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Protestant Positivism, Stalinist “Socialist Realism” and Marxism-Leninism. However, its specific characteristics were primarily determined by two factors. The first was the geographical, political and cultural proximity of Byzantium and its interference in Armenian affairs, which persisted throughout the empire’s history across different spheres and levels of society and to varying extents. The second pertained to the political fate of Armenia and its people during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Armenian intellectuals attempted to evaluate their own history to support the struggle for liberation and the establishment of an independent nation-state. Accordingly, the Armenian reception of Byzantium has developed from the outset in close connection with Armenian studies, on one hand, and with the developing modern sense of national identity, on the other.

The Armenian contribution to Byzantine studies could therefore be defined as studies on the history of Armenian-Byzantine relations, which need to be understood within the wider context of the place of Armenia between Byzantium and the Iranian (then the Muslim) worlds. As a people, who for a long time developed their culture under foreign rules, modern Armenians explored via academic studies the distant memory of their political troubles with Byzantium as a kind of marker against which to understand and define their identity. The study of Armenian-Byzantine relations has thus had from the outset, and perhaps still has, practical political significance.

The historiography of the study of Armenian-Byzantine relations is an almost unexplored topic, and as one of the first attempts to give this subject focused attention, this chapter does not profess to present a complete or in-depth picture. It outlines some key

issues pertaining to the discipline's methodology and the scholars who have made important contributions. In a separate section it presents the political and ideological context influencing interpretations regarding Armenian-Byzantine cultural relations in particular. The information and analysis necessary for writing this chapter have been taken mainly from materials related to European and Russian Byzantine studies; bibliographical surveys and introductions summarising the state of research in works on Armenian-Byzantine relations; publications covering the activities of individual scholars; as well as significant studies on the historiography of Armenian art history over the past decades.

### The Methodological Substratum of Armenian Studies on Byzantium

At the dawn of the development of modern scholarship (beginning of the nineteenth century), the former Greater Armenia, reduced to an Armenian ethno-territorial entity, was divided under the rule of three eastern empires (Ottoman, Iranian and Russian; see the [maps 5.1](#) and [5.2](#)), while a significant proportion of Armenians also lived in ancient or newly established migration colonies and religious communities which were scattered around the world and which very often played a leading role in political and cultural matters.

This twofold situation took stronger roots with the formation of a new Diaspora after the Armenian Genocide in Turkey (1915) and the Sovietisation of the Russian part of Armenia (in 1920 as an independent republic, then included in the USSR after 1922 until 1991; see the [Figures 5.3](#) and [5.4](#)).



**Figure 5.1** Map of the Kingdom of Greater Armenia, early fourth century. Courtesy of C. Mutafian, E. van Lauwe © Creative Commons CC0; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Claude Mutafian, Eric van Lauwe

À la suite de la convention égypto-ottomane de Londres

1841



Figure 5.2 Map of the Armenian lands divided between the Ottoman, Persian and Russian Empires after 1828. Courtesy of C. Mutfian, E. van Lauwe © Creative Commons CC0; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Claude Mutfian, Eric van Lauwe

À la suite du traité de Sèvres

1920



Figure 5.3 Map of the Republic of Armenia, 1920. Courtesy of C. Mutfian, E. van Lauwe © Creative Commons CC0; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Claude Mutfian, Eric van Lauwe



Figure 5.4 Map of the Republic of Armenia, after 1991. Courtesy of C. Mutaftian, E. van Lauwe © Creative Commons CC0; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Claude Mutaftian, Eric van Lauwe

It is thus difficult to define the geography of the Armenian reception of Byzantium and, even more difficult, to separate the scholars of Armenian origin who studied and worked in European, Russian and American academic institutions from those who worked in Armenia proper, who founded the Armenian University and Academy but mostly received higher education abroad in the same schools.<sup>1</sup> To track the differences and similarities in their approaches and to identify the peculiarities of the latter, comprehending their background is crucial.<sup>2</sup>

Geographically, the Byzantine Empire – with its capital in Constantinople and its culture developed from the Greco-Roman world – was located to the west of Armenia. Consequently, and unlike the European orientalist vision, from an Armenian perspective it represented and represents a Western civilisation. From a political point of view, any historical pro-Byzantine inclination has been considered a “western orientation” in modern scholarship.<sup>3</sup> The “East” in Armenian perception comprised the Persian Empire, the Mesopotamian (Persian) churches and the Iranian and then Muslim cultural world, against which the Armenian spiritual and secular elite has waged an intellectual and military struggle for centuries. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, precisely because in Western scholarship Byzantium was considered an eastern civilisation, the first Armenian art historian and future Catholicos of the “Great House of Cilicia”, Garegin I Hovsepien (1867–1952) thought it necessary to explain that “by saying Eastern, we understand Persia, Mesopotamia, Armenia and Assyria”.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, in striving to create an academic model of national history, the Armenian intelligentsia tried to value and situate their own political and cultural past within the

Western orbit. As mentioned in the editorial of *Bazmavēp*, the first academic journal devoted to Armenian studies which was created in 1843 and greatly contributed to the national project of modernisation and acculturation: “Armenians, in this case ensure that you distinguish yourselves from other Eastern people!”<sup>5</sup>

Such perceptions concerning geographical orientation between East and West were (and still are) of great importance not only in evaluating Armenian Christian identity in the relation to Byzantine civilisation but also, through the centuries, they informed expectations of receiving assistance from the “West” to restore the Armenian kingdom. Indeed, this asserted western orientation played a crucial role in shaping political thought, first in the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia (twelfth to fourteenth centuries)<sup>6</sup> and then within the agenda of the Armenian national liberation movement of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, wherein association with Byzantium was identified with a connection to the “West” or Europe.<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that this perception, sustained by academic research, became relevant once more in political discourses of the 1990s, with the emergence of an independent Armenian Republic, with famous Soviet Byzantinist and orientalist Karen Yuzbashian (1927–2009) noting that “over the centuries, when appropriate conditions arose, our [Armenian] people behaved more in line with Western [Byzantine] rather than Eastern nations, our orientation was almost overwhelmingly Western”.<sup>8</sup>

Modern Armenian scholars commented on this state of affairs, expressing disparate viewpoints about the historical consequences of the Armenian “Byzantine orientation”, which were determined by the general context and individual circumstances in which they were operating. During WWII and its aftermath, when the narrative of liberation warfare against foreign invaders dominated Soviet discourse, scholars from the Caucasian Republics (mainly Armenia and Georgia) adopted an anti-Roman and anti-Byzantine position.<sup>9</sup> The prominent Soviet-Armenian historian Hacob Manandian (1873–1952), for example, called the policy of political and cultural rapprochement with the eastern Roman Empire devastating for Armenia.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, Sirarpie Der Nersessian (1896–1989) – a major connoisseur of Armenian and Byzantine art, who worked in the Western world – although considering that between Armenians and Byzantines there could be no common ground for real mutual understanding or lasting friendship because of completely opposing political interests, nevertheless, assumed that relations were particularly fruitful “in many cultural domains and fields dependant on the Byzantine and philhellene traditions”.<sup>11</sup>

Der Nersessian’s approach took root in the following decades in both Soviet and Western studies, receiving a perhaps more paradigmatic interpretation in the post-Soviet period, with the words of the most famous Byzantinist in Armenia, Hratch Bartikian (1927–2011):

The significance of Byzantium in Armenians’ life was twofold: positive and negative. The negative one was due to the persistent desire of the emperors to conquer Armenia, to turn it into a province within the Empire. The positive aspect was the beneficial influence of this civilisation on various spheres of Armenian culture.<sup>12</sup>

In any case, it should be noted that due to the negative role played by Byzantium in the political history of Armenia, the attitude of Armenian scholars towards Byzantine studies has been and still remains generally negative.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, a complex and vibrant thread within the study of Armenian-Byzantine relations is the question of self-determination in relation to Byzantine civilisation, which is expressed in terms of the proportionality between the two sides in a dialectic of “suzerain–vassal”,

“centre–periphery”, “metropolis–province” and “influence–autonomy” relations. This rhetoric has been most widely and comprehensively explored in studies of Armenian art and architecture, the field which has propagated the earliest and most abundant contributions in the sphere of Armenian-Byzantine studies.

### **From Armenia to Byzantium**

Historian and philologist Nicholas Adontz (1871–1942) can rightfully be considered the founder of Armenian-Byzantine studies.<sup>14</sup> His life’s trajectory was characteristic of the Armenian intelligentsia of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries more generally, moving from Armenia to Russia and then to London, Paris and Brussels.<sup>15</sup> Adontz introduced two new approaches to Byzantine studies. The first was his emphasis on the importance of Armenian sources for the history of Byzantium, which made Armenian studies inseparable from Byzantine ones. The second was his demonstration of the important role that the Armenian element played in the history of the empire, especially in the military sphere and among the ruling elite, including imperial dynasties.<sup>16</sup> Adontz’s methodology was at first sharply criticised and even ridiculed, but in the following decades it was not only accepted internationally but it also largely determined the ongoing development of Armenian-Byzantine studies.<sup>17</sup>

Among the generation of scholars that immediately followed Adontz, Sirarpie Der Nersessian (1896–1989)<sup>18</sup> and Cyril Leo Heraclius, Prince Toumanoff (1913–97)<sup>19</sup> injected fresh insight into the study of Armenian-Byzantine relations. Der Nersessian’s academic activity mainly focused on the history of Byzantine and Armenian art, but the monograph *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire* (1947), one of her earliest works, was the first publication that gave an almost complete picture of Armenian-Byzantine historical, religious, cultural and artistic relations. Der Nersessian made an attempt to highlight the nature of the Byzantine Empire’s policy towards Armenia, and the East in general, within which the usual relations between suzerains and their vassals had always remained unchanged. From this perspective, she offered a political analysis of inter-church relations and religious issues. As for the sphere of art, Der Nersessian put forward a balanced, intermediate assumption, which she would continue to substantiate and develop in numerous studies.<sup>20</sup> Recognising the significant Byzantine influence on Armenian art, she nonetheless distinguished the individual character of the latter through stylistic differences, which were expressed in what she identified as two distinct artistic currents.<sup>21</sup> In this way, she affirmed the existence of Armenian-Byzantine relations in the cultural studies as well.

Augmenting Adontz’s methodology, Toumanoff touched upon the factor of not only the Armenian but also the Caucasian element in the history of Byzantium, clarifying the main aspects of Armenian (Caucasian)-Byzantine relations.<sup>22</sup> According to him, the latter had two levels, both important for Byzantium: external politics, i.e., Byzantium and Armenia, where the latter played a passive role; and internal politics, i.e., Byzantium and Armenians (Caucasians). The contribution of the Armenians (Caucasians) to the political, military, social and, to some extent, cultural life of the Byzantine Empire evolved mostly within the spheres defined by the scholar as “Manpower” and “Leadership”, which eventually left an “imprint” on Byzantine civilisation. This pertained mainly to noble families of Armenian (Caucasian) origin, whose genealogy and social structure were precisely the core topic of Toumanoff’s research.

It was by the same fate as the “White Russians” who fled the Bolshevik Revolution that great historian, Byzantinist and Armenologist Nina Garsoïan (1923–2022) immigrated to Paris and then to the United States.<sup>23</sup> Questioning the Eurocentric and classical approach to



Armenian civilisation as “Rome beyond the Imperial Frontier”, on the one hand, and the biased Armenian historical sources which sought to obscure the Iranian legacy, on the other, she tried to rectify these imbalances while situating the Armenian Christian civilisation between the Roman-Byzantine and Iranian-Muslim worlds, even in her first book of 1967, which dealt with the Paulician heresy that spread widely throughout the Byzantine Empire, presumably from Armenia.<sup>24</sup> From Garsoïan’s point of view, despite periods of domination, the massive presence of Armenians in the empire, and the brilliant career of some families in the service of the imperial court: “Armenians remained essentially unassimilated in a world from which they were separated by religion, language and social institutions”.<sup>25</sup>

In the opposing camp, Hratch Bartikian (1927–2011), a native of Athens who was repatriated to Soviet Armenia in 1946, remained faithful to Adontz’s principles.<sup>26</sup> Manoeuvring within the framework of a Marxist methodology, which required scholars to study history from the point of view of peasant movements, class struggle and secular content in general,<sup>27</sup> Bartikian was nevertheless able to discover new and valuable facts, archival materials and Greek sources about the Paulician heresy, the socio-economic policy of the empire, Byzantine epics and hagiography and Armenian noble families in Byzantium.

Bartikian’s research paved the way for two new thematic directions, which were further systematised in the works of Viada Arutyunova-Fidanjan, an Armenian Byzantinist based in Moscow (born in 1937). The first addressed the perception of Byzantium in Armenian medieval sources, which she studied as the “other’s image” within the context of cultural dialogue, focusing on dialectical mechanisms such as “appropriation and alienation” and “exclusion and vesting” in the context of “making the other one’s own”.<sup>28</sup> The second dealt with the issue of the Armenian Chalcedonian community, developed particularly in the border regions (such as the provinces of Tayk’/Tao, Ekeleac’/Akilisene, Tarōn, Karin/Theodosiupolis) after the final rejection of the Council of Chalcedon by the Armenian Church at the beginning of the eighth century. The existence of Armenian-Chalcedonians has been widely ignored in the historical sources and consequently in scholarship. Through their study, Arutyunova-Fidanjan put forward the theory of a new social model for the peripheral regions of the Byzantine Empire, calling it a “contact zone”.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike other Armenian scholars, Karen Yuzbashian (1927–2009), a Tbilisi-born Armenian representative of the orientalist school of Saint Petersburg University, addressed Armenian-Byzantine relations with the opposite approach, i.e., dealing with Armenian topics to the extent that they related to Byzantine studies. He too started with research on the Paulician heresy and then focused on the Byzantine system of administration in the new dioceses created by the empire on Armenian territories.<sup>30</sup> Yuzbashian was one of the founders of the interdisciplinary journal *Кавказ и Византия* (*Caucasus and Byzantium*) in 1979, which aimed at studying the parallel histories of Byzantium and Caucasian countries.

### **Armenian Art and Architecture between “East” and “West”**

The first ideas about the history of Byzantine art penetrated the Armenian academic milieu in the second half of the nineteenth century, during a period in which the Armenian intelligentsia was engaged in elaborating a model for a “modern and cultural nation”. In this regard, the main task was to evaluate their own medieval art and architecture in relation to, and in comparison with, “others”.<sup>31</sup> The first Armenian art historians, inspired by the methodology of world art classifications proposed by German scholars and familiar with various Eurocentric and Russian-centric theories on medieval cultures, sought to adapt

these approaches in order to apply them for their own purposes. In this endeavour, they intended to characterise the “Armenian style” separately from the influence of the “Byzantine style”, striving to raise the former to the level of the so-called great styles.<sup>32</sup> Since initially the Armenian “style” was examined in European and Russian publications exclusively through examples of architecture and miniature painting, the debate about Byzantine art in Armenian scholarship was mainly conducted in these areas.

The fact is that in the universalising model of world history, which in German Romantic thought was built on the basis of the Hegelian theory of the “freedom of the spirit”, the Armenian people and their culture were assigned a third place as a “sub-altern” of Asian Christianity, after the “altern” Byzantium, as defined in relation to Europe.<sup>33</sup> Considered outside of the orbit of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, the features of Christian art in Armenia were thus associated with other, larger and more dominant metropolitan styles, namely those of the Byzantine and Muslim civilisations.<sup>34</sup>

In parallel, the expanding Russian Empire of the nineteenth century, also inspired by German Romanticism, adopted a political ideology aimed at building a homogeneous unified nation and national culture on the basis of Orthodoxy and common Byzantine roots.<sup>35</sup> To this end, the medieval art of the Georgians and Armenians, presented as a single tradition, was again considered amidst the framework of the Byzantine tradition, but with the additional role of an intermediary link between Byzantium and Russia, safeguarding the Russian-Byzantine hereditary kinship.<sup>36</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, theories opposing these traditional viewpoints created opportune circumstances for Armenian intellectuals determined to challenge both the European and Russian paradigms for Armenian culture. These theories granted significant autonomy to the “Armenian style” within the discourse occurring on the “eastern” or “western” origins of European art. However, this assessment also had a “darker side” since it was formed as part of the European orientalist vision. In French scholarship of this period, for instance, the increased interest in Oriental Studies was due to an imaginary concept of a common and immediate past that Europeans shared with ancient eastern civilisations. Seeking to locate “the traces of Eastern peoples’ migrations to Europe”, the Armenian Plateau was recognised as “the cradle of the oldest traditions”.<sup>37</sup> It was in this context that Jules Mourier (b. 1846), Frédéric Macler (1869–1938) and others presented Armenian miniature painting as a “Byzantine-free”, unique phenomenon with an original style. In this “pure” form, these artistic traditions would have reached Europe and greatly influenced the development of “western” art, mainly the so-called Carolingian Renaissance and Romanesque styles. Nevertheless, for the French orientalists, the “originality and independence” of Armenian art was assimilated into the “much greater” Western current.<sup>38</sup>

Almost the same attitude towards Armenian artistic heritage characterised German orientalist studies, the impetus for which was the drive to build identity through opposing the “German Folk tradition” to the “common Latin civilization”.<sup>39</sup> The national-racial ideology concerning the eastern, and particularly Iranian, origins of German culture adopted a new, archaeological-geographical approach at the end of the nineteenth century, according to which medieval Armenia, and through it the Middle East, acquired primary importance: located in the Iranian sphere of influence, the monuments of Armenian art could serve to trace more easily a direct link back to Iranian artistic forms.<sup>40</sup>

A pioneer of this approach was Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941), one of the most influential scholars working around 1900.<sup>41</sup> Reconsidering widespread



ideas concerning the Roman origins of medieval art, he questioned, through the artistic tradition of Armenia, the dominant status of Byzantium vis-à-vis the rest of eastern Christian art. He firstly separated the Armenian miniature style from the Byzantine one and placed it within the framework of Syro-Mesopotamian artistic traditions that he considered older. Therefore, according to Strzygowski, it most likely inspired Byzantine art and not vice versa.<sup>42</sup> Then he applied the same hypothesis and method in the analysis of Armenian architecture, which he regarded as a transitional stage connecting the “Aryan” architecture of ancient Iran with that of medieval Europe: “it is the duty of the Nord to trace its culture back to Armenia, Persia and India”.<sup>43</sup> The core tenet of the argument was focused on centrally planned, domed edifices and the domed square space as the foundational proportional unit in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, which according to Strzygowski had their roots in Iran rather than in Byzantium.

Despite Strzygowski’s problematic nationalist and racist ideological orientation, his work has had a long-lasting and decisive impact on Armenian scholarship, mainly regarding the study of interconnections between the Byzantine and Armenian artistic traditions. It found fertile ground in the Soviet Union, where due to political and ideological requirements, and related rhetoric, a generally negative attitude towards Byzantium, described as a “feudal-clerical” monarchy, prevailed and, consequently, towards Byzantine studies.<sup>44</sup> This contributed to the gradual advancement of assumptions regarding the autonomy and “non-Byzantine” genealogy of medieval art and architecture of the “peoples of Transcaucasia”.

In the first Soviet book devoted to Byzantine art (published in 1924), which was still in line with theories from the end of the nineteenth century, Armenian architecture was considered an integral part of Byzantine architecture.<sup>45</sup> However, a decade later, *Essays on the History of Architecture* – which aimed at deconstructing Tsarist Russia’s imperial and colonial mentality and affirming the Soviet vision of art history – highlighted the importance of comparing Armenian and Georgian monuments with Persian ones, in parallel with the Byzantine influence.<sup>46</sup> In the years following WWII, the ideological mainstream reframed the role of the Byzantine legacy in the formation of Russian medieval culture by pointing out the “best traditions” and the “vivid popular creativity” of the latter as they developed from Byzantine roots. In this new context, the “independent academic value” of Armenian art and architecture clearly prevailed with regard to the creative revival of the techniques of “ancient masters” (i.e., those of Urartian and pre-Christian times) and the “national style” of Armenian art; in the latter, the “Iranian background” and “popular features” (such as the ceiling of country houses as a prototype for the dome) were stressed.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, the “formalist” method was established in Soviet art historical scholarship, which in focusing on the stylistic and artistic analysis of the monuments made it possible to avoid addressing their iconographic and sacred content and thus allowed for the study of Byzantine and Christian works of art in general without risk.<sup>48</sup> From the 1950s to the 1970s, the question of continuity with the past was revised according to the well-established official Marxist methodology in the humanities, which instituted a secular interpretation of Christian medieval culture. The role of religion in art and architecture was definitively blurred or silenced, giving room to the study of cities and civic buildings, lay themes and elements in sculpture and painting and typological classification of churches.<sup>49</sup> In this context, Byzantium was almost removed from rhetoric on the origins of Armenian medieval architecture and sculpture, while Der Nersessian’s *via media* concept, which advocated for a compromise between Byzantine influences and local original styles, became the *doxa* in studies of miniature painting.

## Conclusion

In recent years, the expression “Byzantine Commonwealth” has been more frequently used in academic discussion, which implies a “democratic” or “horizontal” approach to the study of the empire.<sup>50</sup> In this context, the concept of the “other’s image” is being reassessed through topics dealing with internal flexibility and the cultural diversity of the empire, its dialogue with neighbouring regions, countries and peoples and the dilemma of the assimilation and alienation of different nations and ethnic and religious groups.<sup>51</sup> Such discussions are redefining the role and importance of the Armenian substratum in the history of Byzantium, as well as the nature and causes of Byzantine influence in Armenian Christian culture.<sup>52</sup>

Today, Adontz’s approach remains prevalent for Armenian scholars engaged in Byzantine studies for the most part, and the nationalist position predominates in the fields of art and architecture. However, in parallel, more open-minded and balanced approaches to the Byzantine background of Armenian Christian culture can be observed, partly as contacts with international academic trends and events have increased. In this sense, a number of important initiatives have played a stimulating role, such as the organisation of a conference on Armenian-Byzantine relations in Paris (1994), the creation of the National Byzantine Committee in Armenia (2003), participation in the International Congress of Byzantine Studies (since 2006), the series of workshops “Armenia and Byzantium without borders” (Vienna, 2018–2022)<sup>53</sup> and the “Armenian Scholars in Byzantium and Byzantine Scholarship in Armenian Byzantine Studies Colloquium” (Dumbarton Oaks, 2023). One of the most important steps towards the future development of Armenian-Byzantine Studies would be the institutionalisation of the discipline through targeted educational and research programmes that would allow deeper, “Byzantine-centred” research to be undertaken, breaking free from the basic approach of making the Armenian “voice” heard in the “Byzantine commonwealth” polyphony.

## Notes

- 1 To overcome this issue, it is proposed to divide the ‘spheres of scholarly influence’ into the language zones. See [Foletti and Palladino 2023](#): 26.
- 2 Gohar [Grigoryan Savary 2018](#) names four more or less distinct ‘schools’ of approaches to the subject: Russian, German-speaking, French and Armenian.
- 3 The ideological impact on the scholarly perception of the ‘East’ and ‘West’ is also noted by Gohar Grigoryan Savary. See [Grigoryan Savary 2018](#).
- 4 [Yovsepean 1910](#): 250.
- 5 See *Bazmavēp* 1858: 5.
- 6 On ‘western’-orientated political thought in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, see [Pogossian 2010](#); [Garibian 2013](#).
- 7 See on this [Johannissjan 2016](#): 41–73.
- 8 [Yuzbashian 2006](#): 28.
- 9 See, for example, [Trever 1953](#): 232–3; 266–7.
- 10 [Manandian 1941](#).
- 11 [Der Nersessian 1947](#): 14–15; 24–25.
- 12 [Bartikian 2002\(I\)](#): V, 275–84.
- 13 See [Shirinian and Torosyan 2022](#).
- 14 On Adontz, see Grégoire 1939–1944; Adontz 1965; [Garsoïan 1970](#); [Yuzbashian 1971](#); Adontz 1996, 2006.
- 15 He was invited by Henri Gregoire to work at the newly founded ‘Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientale et Slave’ in Brussels.
- 16 Two publications by Adontz related to Byzantine studies should be mentioned: *Armenia during the Period of Justinian* (1908, eng. trans. 1970) and *Etudes Arméno-byzantines* (posthumous, 1965).

- 17 See Grégoire 1935, 1939–1944; Stein 1949–1951: 158; Adontz 1965; Garsoïan 1970. Adontz’s methodology is widely accepted in the works of Romilly J. H. Jenkins; Peter Charanis; Alexander Kazhdan; Gilbert Dagron; Jean-Claude Cheynet. For a recent bibliography, see Augé 2018. Greenwood 2022
- 18 Der Nersessian was a student of Charles Diehl, Gabriel Millet and Henry Joseph Focillon; she was the first female professor at Harvard University and the first Professor of Byzantine Art and Archaeology at Dumbarton Oaks.
- 19 Cyril Toumanoff, Georgian prince Armenian descent in the Russian Empire, personally studied under the supervision of Adontz when, after graduating from Harvard, he went to Brussels to work on his doctoral dissertation.
- 20 Including the collection of articles *Etudes Byzantines et Arméniennes* (1976).
- 21 Der Nersessian 1947: 3; 113–36; Der Nersessian 1978.
- 22 Toumanoff’s assumptions on this issue are mainly set out in two works: *Caucasia and Byzantium* (1971) and *The Social Myth: Introduction to Byzantinism* (1984).
- 23 She was the first female professor at Columbia University.
- 24 It was her doctoral thesis, see Garsoïan 1967. See also Garsoïan 1985: vii–viii.
- 25 Garsoïan 1996: xiii; Garsoïan 1998.
- 26 See Shirinian and Torosyan 2022 for his academic career and bibliography.
- 27 For example, unlike Nina Garsoïan, he considered the Paulician heresy as a movement of the Armenian and Greek working classes. He paid special attention to the topic of ‘Armenian workers’ who emigrated to Byzantium, and he even considered the testament of a certain Eustathius Boilas (written in 1059) as, above all, a testimony to the uprising and liberation struggle of the local Armenian lower classes against Byzantine oppression.
- 28 This topic was discussed during the 16th ICHS (Stuttgart 1985), the 19th (Copenhagen 1996) and 21st session of the ICEB (London 2006). See Ahrweiler 1985; Arutjunova-Fidanjan 1991, 1996, 2021.
- 29 Arutjunova-Fidanjan 1972, 1991–1992, 2002.
- 30 On his main works in this field, see Yuzbashian 1957, 1958, 1973–1974, 1988.
- 31 Azatian 2007: 277–9; Grigorian 2011: 10–13, 51–52.
- 32 Grigorian 2011: 21–26; 41–46, 57–62; Grigoryan Savary 2018.
- 33 See Herder 1792(IV): 97–98; Schnaaze 1844(III): 275–76. This definition of ‘Eastern of Eastern’ continues to this day in western publications on medieval art (see Nelson 1996, quoted in Azatian 2007: 88).
- 34 Azatian 2007: 96–97.
- 35 Grigoryan Savary 2018; Foletti and Rakitin 2020; Khakhanova 2024, ch. 1.
- 36 Grigoryan Savary 2018; Khakhanova(V); quoting Vladimir Stasov (1886: 140) and Alexej Uvarov 1882. Official Russian thought even tried on occasion to emphasise the Byzantine and, consequently, Orthodox origins of Armenian Church, also by highlighting the Byzantine background of Armenian and Georgian architecture; see, for example, Muraviev 1848(II): 96; *Obituary to Norev*; Grimm 1859; Bakradze 1882 (quoted in Foletti and Rakitin 2020; Khakhanova 2024, ch. 1).
- 37 Mourier 1887, 1894: 109; De Morgan 1889.
- 38 Grigoryan Savary 2018.
- 39 See more in Azatian 2007: 192–9.
- 40 Azatian 2007: 193–203, 220–36; Grigoryan Savary 2018.
- 41 On his ideas and works, see Marchand 1994, 2015; Ghazarian 1995; Maranci 1998, 2001: 72–138; Azatian 2007: 193–214, 219–32; Palladino 2023: 79–81.
- 42 Strzygowski 1901, 1907, 27–28.
- 43 Strzygowski 1918, Forward, p. 1 (quoted in Maranci 2001–2002). He expressed more radical ideas two decades later (see Strzygowski 1934).
- 44 Sashanov 2016; Foletti and Rakitin 2020.
- 45 Nekrasov 1924.
- 46 Brunov 1935–1936.
- 47 See Tokarski 1946: 5–6; Haroutiounian 1946 (written in 1944); Lazarev 1947(I): 39–41, 95; Babenchikov 1948: 13; Khalpakhchian 1966.
- 48 See Lazarev 1947 (*Introduction*): 6; Foletti and Rakitin 2020.
- 49 These new ‘ideological’ approaches are clearly presented in the forewords to the volumes devoted to medieval art in capital publications on the world history of art and architecture, see *Art. Hist.* II/1 (1960: 9–22); *Arch. Hist.* I (1958): XI–XIV; II (1966): 5–15.

- 50 See Obolensky 1971; Shepard 2006; Rapp (Jr.) 2012; Trantas 2020.
- 51 See, for example, ‘Byzantium and Beyond’ general project with its subprojects (Austrian Academy of Sciences); publication series ‘Moving Byzantium’ (2023–); Gaul et al. 2018; Brizay 2018; Nakada 2020.
- 52 See on this Maranci 2001, 2003, 2023; Augé 2018; Cartwright 2018; Bromige 2019; Bozoyan et al. 2023 (Introduction).
- 53 See Bonfiglio and Rapp 2023.

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## 6

# FLYING TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC

## The Byzantium of North American Academia

*Elizabeth Dospěl Williams*

Today Byzantine studies is a vibrant field of study on campuses across North America, evident in its numerous subfields and variations across the continent. This chapter focuses on the development of Byzantine studies in North American academia (with a particular focus on art history) beginning in the mid-twentieth century, both between and following the world wars.

There is no comprehensive account of engagement with Byzantine topics in North American universities or museums before the beginning of the twentieth century, in part because materials documenting the trajectories of individual scholars, departments and collections remain scattered in individual and institutional archives. That the evidence for this history is so dispersed itself points to the decentralised nature of studies on Byzantine themes in American universities and museums prior to the mid-twentieth century. Before that time, scholarship on late antique and Byzantine topics reflected the research agendas of individual scholars and curators working in their methodological specialisations (such as philology, literature, art history, history, to name a few examples), often under the umbrella of classical, medieval or regional studies. Given the relatively new foundations of American universities and museums compared to their European counterparts, many of these early North American scholars necessarily sought expertise in Europe's established universities and collections.

In most general terms, the formalised definition and consolidation of Byzantine studies as a distinct field of study per se may be described as an early twentieth-century phenomenon. As a representative snapshot of Byzantine studies in the United States at this time, we can consider the formation and expertise of the American members of the international "Comité d'Honneur" of the formative *Exposition d'art byzantin* held in Paris in 1931.<sup>1</sup> Notably, many of the names remain legendary among art historians thanks to their foundational roles in major academic organisations and institutional projects, and not only for Byzantine studies. Charles Rufus Morey (1877–1955), an art historian whose work came to define late antique art, studied classics at the University of Michigan and he went on to develop the foundational Index of Christian Art during his tenure at Princeton University. Arthur Kingsley Porter (1883–1933), a professor at Harvard University, specialised in western Romanesque architecture. John Shapley (1890–1978), specialised in Byzantine and



Italian art, was a foundational figure in the formation of an art history department at the University of Chicago. Morey, Porter and Shapley were in turn important personalities in the College Art Association and (what is still today) its flagship journal *The Art Bulletin*. In this way, they played leading roles in the broader development of art history as a professional field and academic discipline across North America.

Equally important are the less widely familiar names among those listed in the 1931 Comité d'Honneur. These include several influential women who played important roles in the development of Byzantine studies in American universities and collections. Myrtille Avery (1869–1959) spent her career at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, where she studied Greek and Latin, worked as a librarian, gained expertise in Italian medieval art and advanced a career in curatorial administration. Marion Lawrence (1901–78) completed her undergraduate studies at Bryn Mawr and a PhD in early Christian art at Radcliffe (then Harvard University's college for women), later serving as art history chair at Barnard College, New York. Similarly notable is the presence of Joseph Breck (1885–1933) who graduated from Harvard to become a curator of decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, rising to director of the newly formed Western medieval collection at the Cloisters before an untimely death.

The training and professional careers of these individuals offer opportunity to reflect on several important trends as they pertain to the development of Byzantine studies in North America. Firstly, topics that would now fall under the umbrella of Byzantine studies were called variously “medieval”, “early Christian” and so on, rather than associated with Byzantium per se. Secondly, Byzantium's study was advanced primarily in scattered pockets in the northeastern and midwestern United States, in elite universities where faculty developed methods and student bases for its specialised study. Thirdly, many of this earliest generation of scholars had themselves been trained in or had studied in Europe, bringing knowledge of French- and German-speaking scholarly traditions (such as early Christian archaeology or philological training), and adapting these specialisations to new university structures and formats. Indeed, many of the scholars of the generation participating in the exhibition's Comité d'Honneur were in fact foundational in promoting and defining Byzantine studies in their own universities, through the establishment of major projects and chairs in their fields over the course of their careers.<sup>2</sup>

But the most important catalyst for the growth in Byzantine studies in North America after the 1930s was arguably due to the contributions of one wealthy couple, Mildred Barnes (1879–1969) and Robert Woods Bliss (1875–1962), and their foundation of a research centre dedicated to Byzantine studies in Washington, DC. The Blisses' dedication to Byzantine art, history and culture was motivated in large part by a deep-rooted passion for collecting objects, which formed particularly during Robert Bliss' diplomatic service during decades in Paris, Stockholm and Buenos Aires. As a home base during these years spent abroad, the couple purchased the Dumbarton Oaks estate in the Georgetown neighbourhood of Washington, DC in 1920 to serve as a permanent residence. They used the home to display their art collections from the ancient and medieval Mediterranean, the ancient Americas, and European and Asian decorative arts and paintings – purchases made following the suggestions of their art advisor, Royall Tyler (1884–1953).<sup>3</sup> Tyler was Mildred Barnes Bliss' childhood friend and he shared with her an abiding passion for Byzantine and Pre-Columbian art, authoring an important early study on the topic in French.<sup>4</sup> Much of the Byzantine Collection at Dumbarton Oaks was formed through Tyler's recommendations during the years leading up to, during and immediately following the First and Second

World Wars, and particularly during the 1930s. Indeed, the effects of these tumultuous decades pervade the Blisses' extensive correspondence with Tyler, who had also served as a diplomat and was, like the Blisses, attuned to political developments in Europe. The Blisses' and Tyler's letters frequently reference devastating events on the continent, in what appears from today's perspective to be a disconcertingly cavalier tone, amidst extensive discussions of negotiated art purchases.<sup>5</sup> Alongside this extensive art collection, the Blisses also assembled an extensive library, seeing the books and objects as mutually reinforcing the study of the historical past, and cementing their books and objects as major resources to scholars. Thus, it was through their collection that their vision for a scholarly centre first took shape, a vision cemented in 1940 when the Blisses transferred Dumbarton Oaks' gardens, library and art collections to Harvard University, thus establishing a centre for humanistic research for future generations of students and faculty.

The transfer of the property in the midst of the Second World War was not coincidental; the Blisses expedited their donation precisely because of their perception of the effects of war in Europe. The Blisses' background as diplomats – particularly their experiences of witnessing Europe's devastation during the First World War – deeply affected their worldview and by extension their collecting interests and institutional goals.<sup>6</sup> Their very interest in Byzantine art – and the art of the Ancient Americas – arguably reflected an abiding fascination in the comparisons between Old and New World civilisations and empires, both those ascendant and those perceived to be in decline.<sup>7</sup>

Concerns about war, empire and world order percolate throughout the institution's collections, archival resources and founding projects, though this historiographical perspective is rarely brought to bear on discussions of the field's development in North America. For example, the institution's wartime activities as recorded in the archives provide important context for the experience of staff at the institution and its effect on the scholarly activities of the institution. These documents paint a picture of a unified effort, with dispatches and reports sent on a semi-regular basis to the Blisses over the course of 1941.<sup>8</sup> For example, the establishment of a project known as the Census of Byzantine Art in the late 1930s represented a patriotic effort to document all Byzantine art in the United States, against a backdrop of extensive looting and the damage of cultural heritage in Europe's libraries, museums and landscapes. That project, as with many of the other institutional activities at this time, was largely staffed by women, including textile specialist Louisa Bellinger (1900–68). Although these projects and the wartime period more generally at Dumbarton Oaks are not widely known about outside the circuits of specialist provenance researchers and historians interested in Dumbarton Oaks' institutional history, the resonances of this era continue to pervade the institution. Readers visiting Dumbarton Oaks Library today pass by a monumental inscription at the entrance avowing the humanities as “inherently realistic essentials of life ... in this epoch of disintegration and dislocation”, a quotation drawn from a 1942 letter between Mildred Bliss and Fogg Museum Director Paul Sachs (1878–1965). The quote embodies the founders' vision for the institution in its formation, yet the sentiment teems with on-going significance in today's destabilised world to the readers who pass by it even now.

Arguably, however, the most significant event at Dumbarton Oaks during the War which related to notions of empire was the Washington Conversations on International Organization. Although the Conversations rarely draw the attention of Byzantinists, they remain important to Dumbarton Oaks' institutional history and have been the subject of scholarly considerations among political historians. The event was hosted by Dumbarton



*Figure 6.1* Schutz Group Photographers (Washington, DC), Washington Conversations on International Organization, Dumbarton Oaks, August 1944, photograph.

Source: Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007664153/> © Per LOC website: “No known restrictions on publication”.

Oaks through Robert Bliss’ initiative and diplomatic connections, representing his on-going interest in contemporary politics. Representatives of the American, Soviet, Chinese and British governments gathered in August 1944 at Dumbarton Oaks with the goal of establishing rules for a post-Second World War order.<sup>9</sup> The event is commemorated in a series of photographs now archived at the Library of Congress, including a sepia photograph of several rows of men starkly clad in suits and military uniforms standing before Dumbarton Oaks’ Main Building ([Figure 6.1](#)). That comparable interests in empire underpinned the collection and study of Byzantine and Pre-Columbian cultures at Dumbarton Oaks suggests the pervasive, largely unacknowledged impact of contemporary historical events on the development of these fields, both in Dumbarton Oaks and beyond. Indeed, the shape of Byzantine studies in North American academia, as formed at Dumbarton Oaks and diffused beyond its walls, was deeply entangled in the same geopolitical forces that brought these delegates to Washington in the waning months of Nazi control of Europe.

Perhaps the most enduring impact of the Second World War at Dumbarton Oaks and in the wider sphere of North American academia, however, was the arrival of scholars as refugees from Europe. A 1947 article by one of these scholars, Kurt Weitzmann (1904–93), for example, describes a rapid flourishing of Byzantine studies in the United States at Princeton University and Dumbarton Oaks specifically linked to the influx of expertise already developed in Europe and the accessibility of library collections and art objects for scholars in America.<sup>10</sup> Towering figures associated with Dumbarton Oaks’ early years – Wilhelm Koehler (1884–1959), Francis Dvorník (1893–1975), Andre Grabar (1896–1990), to name only a few – left Europe to remain in residence as staff: they were variously employed as research scholars, administrators for the studies programme and/or given honorary professorships. The involvement of Americans who had participated in the war effort in Europe in the administration of the collection and fellowship programme is also notable. As just one example, art historian Marvin Ross (1904–77) – who authored many of the collection’s earliest catalogues and served as Chief Curator at the Hillwood Estate of the Russophile Marjorie Merriweather Post – had previously served in the War as a “Monuments Man”.<sup>11</sup>

The biographies of these important foundational figures demonstrate the pervasiveness of the War in the experiences of those who shaped the early years of the institution. By extension their experiences informed the entire field of study influenced by their teaching, scholarship and publications.

One unusual aspect of research support at Dumbarton Oaks during its wartime formation was its openness to junior scholars, many based in American graduate programmes, and sometimes born in Europe. These young scholars were invited to Dumbarton Oaks to conduct dissertation research and at times they supported projects focused on the collections. Several went on to become important scholars who further defined the scope of Byzantine studies in North America. The 1941–42 cohort of junior fellows, for example, were a mix of American and ex-patriate German students, including Paul Julius Alexander (born in Berlin, 1910–77), Milton Vasil Anastos (1909–97) and Herbert Bloch (born in Germany, 1911–2006).<sup>12</sup> Some of these early “junior fellows” worked alongside senior faculty and invited fellows, both on institutional projects and in support of their own graduate research. In this manner, the fellowship programme facilitated the impartation of the immense knowledge of older, European scholars to American-based students. Taken together, the support for scholarship at Dumbarton Oaks went beyond what many American universities offered at the time.

One trend worth highlighting as unique to Dumbarton Oaks in these decades was the important roles women played in the early history of the institution. Sirapie der Nersessian (1896–1989), a specialist in Armenian Art, for example, was the first named Dumbarton Oaks faculty member of Byzantine Art and Archaeology and she played an important role at the institution from 1944 onwards (Figure 6.2).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, women were responsible for authoring some of the earliest catalogues of the collection. This included pioneering curator Frances Morris’ (1866–1955) unpublished 1940 catalogue of the textile holdings<sup>14</sup> and Gisela M. A. Richter’s (1882–1972) 1956 catalogue of Dumbarton Oaks’ classical sculpture, the very first of the series to appear in print.<sup>15</sup> Alison Frantz (1903–95) and Florence Day (1908–90) were among the first class of junior fellows to start at the institution in 1941.<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that the role of women in the institution precipitously diminished following the transfer of the university to Harvard and in the years after the war, probably reflecting the increased involvement of male administrators as well as paralleling larger societal trends concerning women’s roles in the United States as soldiers returned from the war.

Dumbarton Oaks’ impact on American Byzantine studies went well beyond its support for émigré experts and the fostering of younger scholars, however. From 1945 onwards, the institution hosted specialised symposia around specific research themes of interest to the fellows, a programme that continues to this day in the form of the annual Spring Symposium.<sup>17</sup> Related to this was the development of an extensive publication department, responsible for publishing not only proceedings from the symposia but also a yearly periodical, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*. This standard-bearing journal published its first issue in 1941 to coincide with the establishment of a formal research institute. Many of the early issues of the journal feature objects from the Byzantine Collection published in depth for the first time by senior resident scholars and visiting junior fellows, again showcasing the close relationship of the art collection, the institution’s scholarly arm and the fellowship programme. These activities reflected the institution’s internal priorities, while also setting standards for scholarly research and publications that shaped the practice of Byzantine studies in American academia beyond Dumbarton Oaks’ walls.



*Figure 6.2* Byzantine Symposium, 1951, photograph. From left to right: Andre Grabar, Sirarpie Der Nersessian, Paul Julius Alexander, Francis Dvornik, Albert Mathias Friend, Jr. (seated), Milton Vasil Anastos, Gerhart Burian Ladner.

*Source:* Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC, BYZSYMP1951a. © Creative Commons CC0; Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC, BYZSYMP1951a.

Thus, thanks to the influx of scholars from Europe during the War and the support of research activities at Dumbarton Oaks through the Blisses' endowment, Byzantine studies in the United States increasingly came to be defined as its own field of research in a more formal manner than had ever been the case before the war. Of the many faculties that supported Byzantine studies in these early years, Harvard University and Princeton University emerged as particularly important hubs. At Harvard, connections with Dumbarton Oaks grew increasingly important in the post-war period. William Koehler, who had arrived from Europe in 1932 as a visiting professor and served as Harvard faculty from 1935 to 1953, also served as the first research fellow at Dumbarton Oaks. Other important émigré faculty included Ernst Kitzinger (1912–2003), who arrived at Dumbarton Oaks as a junior fellow in 1941 before obtaining the Arthur Kingsley Porter University Professorship at Harvard from 1966 to 1979 and Cyril Mango (1928–2021) who was professor of Byzantine Archaeology, also at Harvard, from 1968 to 1973. The Fogg Museum (founded at Harvard in 1895 and today known as the Harvard Art Museums) was itself an important centre for the collection of Byzantine artefacts, such as collections of coins and seals that came to be divided with Dumbarton Oaks.<sup>18</sup>



At Princeton University, meanwhile, Byzantine-adjacent topics had long been supported and this continued during and after the war. In addition to projects like the Index of Christian Art (founded in 1917 by Charles Rufus Morey), the university supported field-defining excavations at Antioch in the 1930s. Support for that research by a variety of universities, museums and individuals and the distribution of finds through partage meant that objects from those excavations can be found scattered throughout the United States today. The towering figure Kurt Weitzmann left Nazi Germany in 1935 for Princeton and remained at the Institute for Advanced Study throughout his entire career, while also working in various capacities at Dumbarton Oaks, organising symposia and research projects and publishing its collection of ivories.<sup>19</sup> Weitzmann's work on the icons at Mount Sinai, carried out in collaboration with George Forsyth (1902–91), graduate of Princeton and faculty at University of Michigan, for example, dramatically changed scholars' access to and appreciation of these artworks.

Alongside university research, American museum special exhibitions during and in the decades after the war also pushed research on Byzantine topics in new directions, building on the model seen in the 1931 exhibition in Paris.<sup>20</sup> A few notable installations are worth mentioning here as representative examples. At the Worcester Art Museum, MA, the 1937 *Art of the Dark Ages* exposed major artefacts of Byzantine Art alongside other medieval artworks.<sup>21</sup> In Boston, at the height of the war in 1940, the Museum of Fine Arts organised an exhibition on medieval European art, *Arts of the Middle Ages*.<sup>22</sup> At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Weitzmann coordinated the *Age of Spirituality* in 1977, the first of what came to be a series of large-scale exhibitions on Byzantine Art held at the museum from the 1990s through the 2020s. Like the model of the 1931 *Exposition d'art byzantin*, these American special exhibitions borrowed works from around the country and globe to advance curatorial ideas about Byzantium's place both in relation to European medieval art and to the arts of the classical worlds.<sup>23</sup> Many of the exhibitions featured new scholarship on Byzantine topics and generated new methodologies of research, such that their effects on the development of Byzantine studies in North America remain profound.

The trajectory of Byzantine studies in the United States from the 1950s onwards becomes more diffuse and difficult to summarise, due in large part to the successes of research support at Dumbarton Oaks, to the increase in specialised faculty supervising graduate students at American universities and to the role of museum exhibitions and permanent galleries in promoting Byzantine art to the wider public. This diversity and diffusion also reflect the political circumstances of American academia, as younger scholars have increasingly demanded equal treatment and transparency in their institutions and research. Calls for broader representation in Byzantine studies in America, for example, were at the heart of the formation of the Byzantine Studies Conference in 1975.<sup>24</sup> This event's rationale was rooted in a desire for generational and thematic diversity that became increasingly important beginning in the 1970s: whereas the symposia at Dumbarton Oaks had always been formal, closed undertakings with presentations vetted by senior scholars, a younger generation of scholars saw the importance of an open forum for discussion among researchers of all ranks, affiliations and organisational backgrounds. The Byzantine Studies Conference, which continues to this day, serves now as the main meeting of the Byzantine Studies Association of North America, itself formed in 2006 and composed of United States and Canadian committees. Increasingly, Byzantine studies in North America takes into consideration cultural conversations about diversity and inclusion, reflecting also the growing importance of DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility) in North American universities and

museums.<sup>25</sup> The relevance of contemporary political events to the study of Byzantium is another recurring theme in current research and publications, a contrast to earlier generations of scholarship where such connection was less explicitly acknowledged.<sup>26</sup>

Today, Byzantine studies is a robust field in North American academia, with a range of sub-specialisations and fields falling under its umbrella so that the very definition of “Byzantinist” and its historical positionality might be reasonably debated. At Dumbarton Oaks, for example, the scope of what qualifies as “Byzantine” takes an increasingly wide view, with recent research topics ranging from late antiquity to the Ottoman periods, in geographic areas from Europe to Central Asia, in a range of languages, and including new approaches to material and visual culture. This diversity of interests reflects the changing focus of a field that challenges previous conceptualisations of a monolithic, static imperium.<sup>27</sup> In an era where support for the arts and humanities is in decline and shifts in student and museum demographics have changed the direction of research, Byzantine studies’ multifaceted, multilingual and multidimensional aspects have come increasingly to the fore.

### Notes

- 1 *Exposition Internationale d'Art Byzantin* (Paris, 1931): 13. The other national committees included Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Spain, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (with names listed pp. 11–6).
- 2 The experiences of Comité d'Honneur members mentioned here serve as representative examples of the European travels and training of this generation of scholars. Morey completed an MA at the University of Michigan in 1899 and held a research fellowship at the American School of Classical Studies in Rome from 1900 to 1903; Porter travelled extensively in France during his graduate student years, before completing studies at Columbia and Yale; Shapley received his PhD at the University of Vienna in 1914; Lawrence earned a BA from Bryn Mawr, held a fellowship at the American Academy of Rome between 1925 and 1927 and received a PhD in 1932 from Radcliffe; Breck graduated from Harvard in 1907 and first worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the German curator Wilhelm Rheinhold Otto Valentiner. For information about the training and travels of these and other influential early art historians, see the *Dictionary of Art Historians*, Duke Digital Art History & Visual Culture Research Lab, <https://arthistorians.info>.
- 3 Kirin 2005; Nelson 2010; Dospel Williams 2023; Jones 2023.
- 4 A photo album in English, see Peirce and Tyler 1926; a two-volume book in French, see Tyler 1932 and 1934.
- 5 See, for example, the negotiations around ivories from German museums. James N. Carder, “German Ivories,” Bliss-Tyler Correspondence, Dumbarton Oaks, <https://www.doaks.org/resources/bliss-tyler-correspondence/annotations/german-ivories>. For recent discussion, see Salto Santamaría 2022.
- 6 James N. Carder, “Washington, DC, Geneva, and the Second World War (1941–1949)”, <https://www.doaks.org/resources/bliss-tyler-correspondence/historical-introductions/washington-dc-geneva-and-the-second-world-war>.
- 7 Treadgold 1998: 66.
- 8 “The Underworld Courier” ran from 11 January to 1 November 1941. Digitised issues are available on the Dumbarton Oaks website, <https://www.doaks.org/research/library-archives/dumbarton-oaks-archives/historical-records/the-underworld-courier>.
- 9 Hilderbrand 1990; Wolschke-Bulmahn 1994. See also archival material at “The Dumbarton Oaks Conversations, 1944,” Dumbarton Oaks (June 15, 2017), <https://www.doaks.org/newsletter/news-archives/2015/the-dumbarton-oaks-conversations-1944>.
- 10 Weitzmann 1947: 413–6.
- 11 Ross 1965.
- 12 “Fellows and Visiting Scholars in Byzantine Studies,” features a full list of scholars from 1940 until today, <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/scholars>.



- 13 “Sirarpie Der Nersessian, First Professor of Byzantine Art and Archaeology,” Dumbarton Oaks Archives, June 15, 2017; updated January 10, 2024, <https://www.doaks.org/newsletter/news-archives/2016/sirarpie-der-nersessian-first-professor-of-byzantine-art-and-archaeology>.
- 14 Morris 1940.
- 15 Richter 1956.
- 16 James N. Carder, “75 Years Ago This Month: The First Junior Fellows Arrive,” Dumbarton Oaks (February 2016), <https://www.doaks.org/newsletter/news-archives/2016/75-years-ago-this-month-the-first-junior-fellows-arrive>.
- 17 “Byzantine Symposia photographs, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1945–2009,” Harvard University Libraries, <http://id.lib.harvard.edu/via/olwork448713/catalog>.
- 18 For more on the Harvard Art Museums, particularly its influential “Museum Course”, see Duncan and McClellan 2018.
- 19 Weitzmann 1994.
- 20 Salto Santamaría 2024.
- 21 Worcester Art Museum 1937.
- 22 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 1940.
- 23 Weitzmann 1977. See Eastmond’s essay in this volume.
- 24 Talbot 1999.
- 25 As an example, the Byzantine Studies Association of North America established a “Byzantinists of Color” fund to support travel and research aligned with the organisation’s DEI commitments. See “Byzantinists of Color Conference Grant,” <https://bsana.net/byzantinists-of-color-conference-grant/>.
- 26 Anderson and Ivanova 2023.
- 27 Kaldellis 2023.

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# BYZANTINE STUDIES IN ARGENTINA

## A Retrospective Review of Scholarship and an Analysis of the Present State of Research

*Pablo Cavallero*

It is difficult to determine exactly when scholarly interest in Byzantium began in Argentina, since some of the relevant information is missing and there is always the possibility that the picture is incomplete due to these lacunae. It should also be said that the points of entry into the appreciation of Byzantine culture and the areas of Byzantine reception have been varied in Argentina. Nonetheless, this case study intends to make clear that Byzantine studies very much exist as an academic field in Argentina, and that it is increasingly expanding and diversifying its areas of interest.

### The Beginnings

Pablo Ubierna, Professor of Medieval Studies at the Pedagogical University of Buenos Aires (UP) and Researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), has suggested that Byzantine studies in Argentina began with Clement Ricci (1873–1946), a classicist and historian of religions, who was Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), Director of the Institute of Ancient and Mediaeval History from its foundation (5 October 1927) and Founder of the Chair of the History of Religions (1933).<sup>1</sup> Ricci's work – apart from his studies in epigraphy and papyrology – focused on the link between classical antiquity and Christianity up until what is now variously referred to as Late Antiquity or the Patristic Era. These works arguably marked the beginning of Byzantine studies in Argentina since they were the first to focus on common Byzantine subjects' however, they did not utilise Byzantine texts directly.

The line of enquiry was broadened by Albert Freixas, Ricci's disciple, who published in 1947 *The Language of Procopius* and also *The Byzantine Seventh Century*. Furthermore, with the *Anales de Historia Antigua y Medieval* (Chronicles of Ancient and Medieval History), the journal that he founded in 1948, he initiated the publication of various articles on Byzantium, such as "The End of Byzantium", as well as three works on Procopius of Caesarea (sixth century). Some of his disciples also wrote historical articles on Byzantine topics. In 1951, Sara de Mundo Lo presented at the UBA the first thesis on a Byzantine

topic which was published six years later as *The Crusaders in Byzantium*. These studies coming from the school that emerged around Freixas focused primarily on the history of Byzantium; so that at that time there was only one approach to, or perspective on, Byzantium. The foundation of the Argentinian field of Byzantine studies was thus marked by its historical focus.

A significant moment for the growth of Byzantine studies in Argentina came with the foundation of the Centre of Byzantine and Neo-Hellenic Studies by the exiled Greek Fótios Mallerós in 1968, in Santiago (Chile), and the founding of the journal *Byzantion Nea Hellás* (Byzantium New Hellas, 1970) there. The links of some Argentinian historians with the Chilean historian Héctor Herrera Cajas and with the philologist Miguel Castillo Didier there boosted further the interest in the field: Argentinean Byzantinists started to attend the Chilean congresses and conferences and to publish in the *BNH*.

## Areas of Interest

### *History*

Pablo Ubierna has opened up and developed the area of research in Byzantine history more than any other Argentine scholar. In 2005 he was awarded a doctorate by Sorbonne University for his thesis *The Byzantine apocalyptic. Studies on an economy of time*. As a researcher in the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) in Argentina, he has devoted his research to the study of apocalyptic literature and biblical exegesis in Byzantium and in the Syrian world between the sixth and tenth centuries. He has also served as the Director of the Medieval Department at the Multidisciplinary Institute of History and Human Sciences (IMHICIHU) and has presided over the Argentinian Centre of Byzantine Studies (CAEBiz; cf. *infra*). Ubierna has also supervised various research projects and doctoral theses related to Byzantine history, and he has produced a series of notable publications in the field (articles, papers, book-chapters and books).

Active in the same field is Héctor Francisco, who in 2008 presented his thesis *Texts, practices and history. Discursive strategies in the anti-Chalcedonian historiography of the sixth century*, at the UBA. Currently, he works on Eastern Christianity in the Syriac language, with a focus on hagiography and an emphasis on martyrdom accounts (*martyria*) in the Sasanian Empire.

Both Ubierna and Francisco have founded schools of historical research that have developed up until now in various directions and in relation to diverse research topics, such as the relationship of St John Chrysostom (d. 407) with the Jews (Andrea Simonassi Lyon); the relationship between episcopal and imperial authority in the provinces during the Middle Byzantine period, imperial hagiography, the political dimension of the hagiographic genre, with a focus on Constantine the Great (Victoria Casamiquela Gerhold); Jewish communities in the eastern Mediterranean during Late Antiquity (Rodrigo Laham Cohen); the relationship between Latin hospitals in *Outre Mer* and the hospital tradition in Byzantium (Esteban Greif); the tradition of Philo of Alexandria in the Armenian language (Stefanía Sottocorno); the Papacy as a Byzantine institution during the sixth and seventh centuries (Adrián Viale); the reception of Byzantium in the French Renaissance (Santiago Peña); law in late antique Egypt and the circulation of Manichaean literature in Egypt and Central Asia (Diego M. Santos); the Syrian presence in Arabic pharmacopoeia (Daniel Asade); the *Chronology* of Michael Psellos (1018–78) and the hagiography of the Early-Byzantine

period, and gender studies that constitute a new approach to the issue (Laura Carbó, University of Mar del Plata).

All of these topics represent just some of the research areas in the study of Byzantine history in Argentina, and they have been selected on the basis of the personal interests of each researcher, along with the advice of their supervisor. Research on Byzantine history continues to date; however, there is a notable absence of archaeological and art historical studies; Byzantine art history is particularly underdeveloped in Argentina (see *infra*, part C), since there is a lack of specialists in this area.

### *Philosophy*

In the field of philosophy, the figure of María Mercedes Bergadá should be noted, who in 1967 founded the Department of Mediaeval Philosophy at the Institute of Ancient Philosophy at the UBA. In 1975 she launched the journal *Patristica et mediaevalia*. Her work and studies focus on Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395). Her successors, Francisco Bertelloni and Claudia D'Amico, have focused also on Byzantine and mediaeval Latin philosophy, and its impact on the Renaissance, particularly in the writings of German cardinal and philosopher Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64). They have now many disciples.

Héctor Padrón has also focused on Gregory of Nyssa, producing a series of works that outline the tradition and innovation of Gregory in relation to the thought and works of Plato and Aristotle. Padrón was also the founder of the Centre of Mediaeval Studies in Mendoza. Other doctoral researches include José Julián Prado who worked on Maximus the Confessor (579–662) (University of Río Cuarto, 1974) and Pablo Argárate who worked on the same author but with a theological, rather than philosophical, focus. The latter has translated the *Spiritual homilies* of Pseudo-Macarius (fourth century) and he has studied the pneumatology and the ascetic and mystic traditions, adopting a historical and theological approach. Significant contributions are those of Graciela Ritacco (UBA), who collaborated with me in the translation of *The divine names* of Pseudo-Dionysius (fifth–sixth century). Ritacco has devoted her studies to the Neo-Platonic world, in particular to Plotinus (d. 270), Iamblichus (245–325), Syrianus (d. 437), Proclus (412–85), John of Damascus (d. 749) and Pseudo-Dionysius. She has particularly focused on the Cappadocian and Alexandrian Church Fathers, tracing any possible Pythagorean or Platonic influences in their philosophy and works. Ritacco has produced not only academic articles but also various courses, curricula and conferences.

Álvaro Perpere Viñuales earned his doctorate at the University of Navarra, Spain (2013). His research deals with the reception of Dionysius in scholasticism, in particular by Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), Scotus (d. 1308) and John de Matienzo (1520–79). Dionysius the Areopagite (fifth–sixth century) has been the main focus also of José María Nieva, though he has focused more so on Maximus the Confessor – particularly his *Mystagogia*. Later, Nieva turned his interest to John of Damascus and his theory of the image. Nieva has published extensively on the connections between Maximus and Thomas Aquinas, symbolism and spiritual experience in Maximus the Confessor, images of the holy, the perception of divine essence and energy, image theory in Dionysius the Areopagite, his aesthetic theory and various other topics.

Francisco Bastitta Harriet's field of specialisation is anthropological and ethical questions in the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers, the theory of free will in Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395) and its reception in the Renaissance. Bastitta Harriet has edited, in collaboration

with José Luis Narvaja, the Latin translation of Gregory of Nyssa's *De oratione dominica* made by Athanasios Chalkeopoulos (d. 1497).<sup>2</sup> Rubén Peretó Rivas, a distinguished scholar of the Society of Patristic Studies in Argentina, has published in collaboration with Santiago Vázquez and Fernando Martín de Blassi a series of studies on the Fathers of the Egyptian Desert as well as on Plotinus.<sup>3</sup> Peretó has also completed the Spanish edition, with translation, introduction and notes, of Evagrius Ponticus' (345–99) *Antirrheticus*. This is a text originally written in Greek but preserved only in the Syriac version. In addition, he has published a number of studies on the *acedia*, anguish, death and memory.

The work of Francisco García Bazán (Buenos Aires, Kennedy University), who has developed many studies on Gnosticism and its relationship between the Church Fathers and Neo-Platonism, is also very important. He has produced many articles, book chapters, conferences and papers, although his interests only reach the year 500.

As it is possible to see from this synthesis and summary, there is a certain pattern in these philosophical studies: they explore for the most part the various lines of connection and influence between the Church Fathers, Neo-Platonism, Dionysius, Maximus, John of Damascus and the influence of these Byzantine authors in later thought. These topics have seen great progress and development in the work of this new generation of scholars.

### *Philology and the Study of Byzantine Literature*

Freixas's work on Procopius' language (1947) paved the way for pioneers in this area, such as Professor of the Catholic University, Raúl Lavalle. Since 1989, Lavalle has presented papers on the natural poetry of Manuel Philes (1275–1345), on the view of Persia in Menander Protector (sixth century) and on the poetry of Romanus the Melodist (fifth–sixth century) and George of Pisidia (580–634). He has also published a study of George Gemistos Plethon's (1355–1452) *Hymns*. Several other articles followed this work that address classical influences in the epigrams of Gregory of Nazianzus (329–90), the Neo-Platonic and George Gemistos Plethon, Digenis Akritas (twelfth century) as a Byzantine hero and the poem *To Mary Magdalene*, by Casia (810–65). Aside from his original work, Lavalle has also published a translation of a historical document related to Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–55). Lavalle has opened a varied line of philological research, highlighting diverse figures of the Byzantine literature.

As researcher in the CONICET, I have myself conducted research on the Greek language in Byzantium, publishing translations and philological studies on the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, John of Damascus and Theodore of Paphos (seventh century). Besides these, I have supervised team projects too, on other subjects (see below).

To sum up, in the philological area several topics have been studied and some of them have connections with philosophical and historical considerations.

### **Institutions**

With regard to the Argentinian institutions and research projects that deal with aspects of Byzantine culture, they have recently developed along two separate lines that, nonetheless, converge the Department of Medieval Philology at the UBA and the Argentine Centre of Byzantine Studies.

My participation in a research team directed by Amalia Nocito (founder of the Mediaeval Department at the Institute of Classical Philology, UBA, and its Director from 1985 to 2000), that focused on the Latin text of the *Report about the Embassy to Constantinople*

by Liutprand of Cremona (920–72), sparked the idea to create the Colloquium Byzantinum when I took over the direction of this department. It was a team that worked between 2000 and 2008 on the edition in bilingual format of the *Antapodosis* of the same Liutprand and started the study of Leontius of Neapolis's (590–668) work.<sup>4</sup> Julio César Lastra and Tomás Fernández were also members of this team. Together, we have launched successive interdisciplinary UBA projects from 2008 to the present day, with the participation, among others, of Alberto Capboscq and Analía Sapere. We have managed to edit the five works by Leontius. A CONICET project, conducted between the years 2014 and 2017 and based also at this department, was entitled “Early Greek Hagiography: Social history, *propaganda* and biography between the fourth and seventh centuries”. Another project, undertaken between 2019 and 2023, focused on Early-Byzantine fiction. The research team of the latter included historians, philologists, linguists and art-historians from several Argentinian universities such as Cristina Silventi, Professor at the Cuyo University, Mendoza, whose thesis was about George of Pisidia (580–634); Elisa Ferrer from the University of Córdoba, whose research focuses on the Homilies of Germanos (d. 730), Patriarch of Constantinople; Jorge Rigueiro, Professor of Arts at the UBA, who has studied Byzantine mosaics; Daniel Gutiérrez, a doctoral student at the UBA, who has focused on the poem *Hero and Leander* of Musaeus (fifth century) and Julián Bértola, a doctoral student and now professor at Ghent, who has studied the translation of *Job* in a poem of Leo VI the Wise (866–912).

On another front, from 2015 a series of Byzantine *Colloquia* was launched under the auspices of the UBA. At the Mediaeval Philology Department (UBA), I have also organised courses on Patristic literature, as well as courses on the Modern Greek language as an important tool for the study of Byzantium. These courses are run by Professor Jerry Brignone, after short involvements of Nikos Bozás, Sabas Rouzálēs and Ioanna Katsigianni, who were all professors of the Hellenic Society in Argentina. In addition, two Argentinian scholars were appointed to conduct their post-graduate research in the Catholic University of Leuven: Tomás Fernández, now researcher in the CONICET and professor at the UBA, and José Maksimczuk, at present based in Hamburg. Both, they have edited books of the *Florilegium Coislinianum* in the Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca. Later, Fernández turned his interests to hagiography and fiction, while Maksimczuk is now devoted to the palaeographic and codicological analysis of Aristotle's manuscripts.

A series of younger scholars has emerged from these UBA research projects. Dr Julián Bértola, who now works in Ghent University on classical reception in librarian epigrams, that is to say poems inscribed in codices, such as the colophons of or commentaries on the books, as verse *scholia*; Dr Diego Fittipaldi (PhD at Bonn University after undertaking some years of research in Greece) who has published an edition of the liturgical *typikon* of St Saba's monastery, based on three manuscripts and Agustín Ávila, who, after studying in Turkey, is now working on his PhD thesis in Munich University, on Cardinal Bessarion's (1403–72) correspondence. Paloma Cortez has also finished her thesis at the UBA on the twelfth century Byzantine novel of Nicetas Eugenianus (twelfth century).

Parallel to the activities of UBA, another trajectory for Byzantine Studies in Argentina began with the founding of the *Argentine Centre of Byzantine Studies* (CAEBiz), thanks to the efforts of Pablo Ubierna, Héctor Francisco and me. The centre started its activities in 2001 with the organisation of the First Argentine Meeting of Byzantine Studies, which took place in the National Academy of Sciences of Buenos Aires (19–22 September 2002). Since then, the Centre has set up a specialised library, located in the IMHICIHU, and organised round tables on Byzantium at the Congresses of the Argentine Society of Mediaeval Studies.



As part of its activities, it has produced scholarly articles for the journal *Temas medievales* (*Medieval Themes*). In addition, it has designed courses on Syriac, Coptic, classic Arabic, Hebrew, Sogdian, Pahlavi and launched the series *Byzantina atque Orientalia Studia*.

The year 2016 marked a turning point for this institution. In August of that year, during my service as vice president of the CAEBiz, I presented its activities to the Assembly of the International Association of Byzantine Studies (AIEB) gathered in Serbia. The Assembly unanimously approved the admission of the CAEBiz to AIEB, which includes more than 50 similar national organisations. It should be pointed out that in a plenary session of the XXIII Congress of the AIEB (Beograd, 22 August 2016), Sergei Ivanov highlighted the achievements made by the Argentinian researchers on Byzantium *in fine mundi*.<sup>5</sup> Two years earlier, the Italian philologist Paolo Cesaretti had expressed a similar sentiment.<sup>6</sup> From that point onwards, the CAEBiz has sponsored the Byzantine *Colloquia* of the UBA, organised by the Mediaeval Department of UBA in collaboration with the University of Leuven. In 2020, a web page was created. During the pandemic, quarterly virtual meetings were scheduled with the participation of Argentine and foreign scholars, strengthening our presence in the world of Byzantine studies.

It is the author's firm belief that these personal and institutional research initiatives in the scholarly world of Argentina will lead to the formation of a "Byzantine School" within Argentinian academia. It is our hope that this school will expand its activities and research into diverse areas within the academic discipline of Byzantine studies.

## Notes

- 1 Ubierna 2010.
- 2 Bastitta Harriett and Narvaja 2021.
- 3 Peretó Rivas and Martin de Blassi 2020.
- 4 Cf. Cavallero 2007.
- 5 "Highly commendable is the emergence of critical editions of hagiography in places where the tradition of Byzantine studies is not deeply rooted, as Buenos Aires (Leoncio de Neápolis, *Vida de Espiridón*, eds. P. A. Cavallero et al.)." Cf. Ivanov 2016: 2.
- 6 Cesaretti 2014: 390–1: Ed è stato non propriamente dalla "fine del mondo" ma dalla Buenos Aires di Borges, (...) che Pablo Adrián Cavallero negli ultimi anni ha dedicato studi di sicuro rilievo, anche con il concorso di altri collaboratori, al complesso dell'opera di Leonzio, (...) una sorta di retour à l'ordre contro quelle che potrebbero definirsi esplorazioni ermeneutiche non sufficientemente attente alla realtà dell'opera nel suo contesto.

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## 8

# BYZANTINE STUDIES IN CHINA

*Chen Zhiqiang*

The 1980s saw the beginning of Byzantine studies in China. Prior to that, Chinese scholars followed the Byzantinists of the Soviet Union, reading their articles that had been translated into Chinese and discussing their topics. After that time, the national 'Reform and Opening up Policy' (1978) facilitated Chinese scholars studying more abroad, and Byzantine studies in China made marked progress which fundamentally changed the nature and extent of Chinese Byzantine studies.

More scholars, especially from the younger generation, are now engaging in Byzantine studies and research. More than ten universities across China now teach courses on Byzantine history and the Greek language, having programmes also for graduate students, with more than ten postgraduate students now completing an M.A. or Ph.D. degree in Byzantine studies in universities every year. Prior to the 1980s, there was no course in any university in China, but now the number of full-time Chinese faculty members who are Byzantine scholars stands at more than 100, including those who have gained doctoral/master's degrees from places such as the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece, along with Oxford University in England. Postgraduate students also have opportunities to engage in advanced studies or do special topic research in other countries, such as at Princeton University, the University of Birmingham, Harvard University, Athens University and so on. Many of the permanent faculty members who specialise in Byzantium are brilliant in their teaching and research as professors at different universities in China. Both the quantity and quality of Byzantine scholars in China are steadily increasing.

Research institutes for Byzantine history and culture have now also been established, with the financial support of research funds from the National Foundation. For example, the Centre for Byzantine and Eastern European Research at Nankai University was established in 2003, with ten members, including four professors who focus on Byzantine topics. The centre supports a curriculum on Byzantine history, culture, language and the Orthodox Church for undergraduate students and a programme for postgraduate students also. With the financial support of the National Foundation and the University Foundation, the centre set up a specialised library with resources such as the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) and other databases, which have been opened up to scholars throughout China. The centre was the

first one in China, and other recently established centres have followed it. This is impressive progress given the situation before the 1980s when there was no centre for Byzantine studies and no basic materials for Byzantine research, especially original historical data, in China.

Chinese Byzantine scholars are now consistently producing high-quality research outputs, including articles, monographs and translations of important works by famous Byzantine writers related to various Byzantine topics. A preliminary statistical analysis can be given here: there have been more than 400 articles published during the last 40 years that means more than ten research papers per year. There have been more than 100 books in Chinese, some monographs and other textbooks and also more than 20 dissertations by both undergraduate and graduate students. These academic works and popular reading materials meet the needs of both Byzantine researchers and students, and ordinary readers. Before the 1980s, only one book on Byzantine history in Chinese could be found in China, a translation of a work by Mitrofan V. Levchenko (1890–1955) (*History of Byzantium*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1940), translated into Chinese by Bao Xi, Beijing (San-lian Press, 1960). Suffice it to say that the day when readers could not find a book about Byzantium in Chinese has now thankfully passed.

With National Foundation support, a group of 30 scholars from universities across China have also spent eight years (2014–23) completing a national project entitled “Research on Byzantine History and Culture”. The final result of this important project has been a monumental work with the title *A General History of the Byzantine Empire* (4 vols.), a work of more than 4 million Chinese characters. The work’s chief editor is Prof. Chen Zhiqiang, who has supervised both the project and the publication of the work. It includes the biographies of all of the Byzantine emperors of more than ten dynasties with Constantinople and Nicaea as their capitals, and the princes of the Despotate of Epirus (founded 1205), along with those of Trebizond’s emperors. Each biography has an average of 10,000 Chinese characters, and the section with these biographies constitutes about half of the entire work. The other half of the work addresses subjects such as the most important events of Byzantine history, political systems, important figures and statesmen and so on, organised according to the historical periodisation of 330–610, 610–1204 and 1204–1453. In keeping with the requirements of writing such an ambitious work, the project has utilised a vast array of historical materials and second-hand sources, addressing also the most pertinent problems and debates amongst the international community of Byzantinists. *A General History of the Byzantine Empire* was published by Jiangsu People’s Printing House in 2023.

Finally, in order to support and encourage the academic performance of all scholars in Byzantine studies in China, the Chinese Association of Byzantine Studies (CABS) organises academic activities, including national congresses and special topic meetings and seminars, at different levels and about various subjects. The best works by Chinese scholars in Byzantine research are selected each year (refer to the Important Publications by Chinese Scholars below). The topics which Chinese Byzantine scholars are interested in and pursuing at present are truly diverse, including Byzantine economic development, political events, the monetary system, Byzantine coins found in China, Constantinople’s art and architecture, foreign mercenaries in the Byzantine army, the Balkans under Byzantine control, Byzantine literature, Byzantine food, Byzantine medicine, Byzantine intellectuals, the relationship of Byzantine and Italian humanists, the Byzantine army and so on. These seminars on specialised topics related to a given article are held each semester, with about 20 participants, at different universities. For example, the titles of the seminars for the 2022 autumn–winter semester were the following: reasons for the dissolution of the Byzantine navy; new

perceptions; prejudice towards the Byzantines by the Crusaders in Latin historical materials; analysis of the chronicle by John Malalas (491–578); characteristics of Michael VIII Palaiologos' (r. 1261–82) marriage diplomacy; functions of old-age care in the Byzantine monastery; Byzantine control in the western Balkans; the failure of Byzantine diplomacy in 966; the Byzantine imperial fiancée (bride); the breaking of the Byzantine relationship with the Ostrogoths' kingdom; Andronicus I Comnenus' (r. 1183–85) political reform; Alexius I Comnenus's (r. 1081–1118) reform of the aristocrat elite; Byzantine themes and the farmer-soldier; the Greek identity of the later Byzantines; the research of Byzantine legal history; the army and the bureaucracy of the Byzantine “dark age” and the life and thought of Basil the Great in the fourth century.

To conclude, Byzantine studies in China are steadily developing, with new attitudes and perceptions opening up the research space in the discipline and leading to increasingly diverse research topics. Innovative research methods have helped scholars to explore their research questions, with new technologies being utilised to access both primary historical materials and academic books and to engage increasingly with other Byzantinists from across the globe on the internet, to communicate and collaborate, to exchange research outputs and to engage in knowledge and linguistic exchange.

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## PART III

# Politics





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# WRITING BYZANTIUM, WRITING THE NATION

## Historiography, Politics and Identity in Southeastern Europe

*Diana Mishkova*

Critical strains in the humanities have long recognised the intrinsically political stakes of scholarly practice, especially in history, given that such practice is invariably informed by and contributes to contemporary politics, even when not explicitly stated. The way Byzantium has been researched, explained, represented and consequently perceived – the purview of Byzantine studies *tout court* – offers no exception, raising questions about its legitimising, nationalist, imperialist or even colonialist rationale and implications.<sup>1</sup> Approaching these questions critically ultimately subverts any strict opposition between “western” and “eastern” disciplinary politics. At the same time, it highlights the importance of proximity to the eastern Roman Empire as a differentiator in terms of engagement with and responses to Byzantium as well as of political expectations placed upon the Byzantine legacy. Ever since the early modern period, western scholarship has been closely involved in the construal of and contest over Byzantium’s imperial legacy; yet the latter never became fully an integral component in the founding narratives of these nations, which relied, for the most part, on a self-portrayal that asserted the civilisational superiority of the Latin West over the Byzantine East.

In southeastern Europe since the early nineteenth century, however, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the crystallisation of nations on the erstwhile territories of the so-called Byzantine Commonwealth – those either ruled for a time by the Empire or that fell under a perceived soft power exerted through Orthodoxy and (political-) cultural allegiance – Byzantium and its legacy shaped the national narratives of these nascent states, legitimating their domestic and regional politics. Implicated deeply in issues such as ethnogenesis and collective identity, historical rights, national patrimony, culture and “mentality”, Byzantium and the Byzantine were deployed politically and ideologically. At the same time, Byzantium – and Byzantine studies generally – long remained subsidiary to or subsumed under these countries’ national medieval histories, variously appropriated and instrumentalised and subject to often conflicting interpretations from discrete national points of view that subverted the idea of a shared past.<sup>2</sup>

This introductory chapter explores through the vantage point of history writing the reception of Byzantium in relation to politics and the construction of national identities in

the countries of southeastern Europe during the modern and contemporary period. For it is the vagaries of politics that account in prevailing measure for the multiplicity and changeability of representations of Byzantium. The complex dialectic of identification with and disavowal of Byzantium and the contestations, tensions and dialogue between different interpretations have unfurled against the backdrop of changing political, geopolitical and intellectual contexts. The fundamentally different meanings, functions and values attributed to “Byzantium” are thus in need of careful historicisation. In what follows, I seek to make sense of the shifting receptions of Byzantium by examining their roots in the recreation of an authentic and sovereign past for each nation, in domestic political strife and regional geopolitical dynamics and in the legitimisation of power and projects of national expansion that fused nationalist aspirations and imperial imageries. Western and Russian receptions of Byzantium have also influenced the construction or modification of local narratives, along with the interactions – and, in a political sense, “reactions” – between persons writing from outside and those working within and speaking on behalf of a given polity. Readings of Byzantium have also been undoubtedly affected by intellectual currents and professional standards, in particular those pertaining to Byzantine studies properly speaking, which, however, were not only “domesticated” in national cultures, but also played a secondary role in charting the direction these studies took.

Already the late-Enlightenment and Romantic narratives between roughly the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the turn of the twentieth century had effectively woven together the political and intellectual strings in forging modern identities and proping up political and civil rights.<sup>3</sup> In western European Enlightenment thought, Byzantium became the epitome of everything the “Age of Reason” disdained: despotism, religious fanaticism and irrationalism, political corruption, ignorance and effeminacy. This imaginary Byzantium of the philosophers was not supposed to be historical: “it functioned as a screen on which they could safely project all that they feared and disliked about their own world and its pitfalls, a dystopian mirror for the early modern nation-state”.<sup>4</sup> That this eighteenth-century conception has prevailed to this day, despite its historical fragility, in the general consciousness of a broad western public, is because it accommodated tendencies that had little to do with the “progressive spirit” of the Enlightenment. For the representatives of classical philology, for example, Byzantium was of significance only insofar as it conveyed ancient ideas, the bedrock of “western civilization”. Byzantium’s own achievement was only recognised inasmuch as it adapted itself to this ancient tradition in form and content. The Romantics, on the other hand, looked exclusively at the Occidental empire, whose glorification left no room for the empire of Constantinople, let alone for its claims to superiority. The Roman Catholic point of view, in turn, was able to recognise only schismatics in the Eastern Church. Finally, the scholarly tradition left behind by illustrious historians such as Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and François Guizot (1787–1874) underpinned the Eurocentric perspective that recognised only the Romanesque-Germanic state system as historically significant, while denying the Greco-Slavic East any historically formative power.<sup>5</sup> In its various metastases, contempt for Byzantium was instrumental: it helped western European scholars “to place the origins of the European states in the Latin Middle Ages ... and also to claim the heritage of ancient Greek civilization through Rome and the Renaissance”.<sup>6</sup> Nationalism and power politics – the notorious outgrowths of nineteenth-century Romanticism and historicism – grafted onto that perception a concept of the nation as the central and a priori agent of history, “conscious of its unique individuality and its overriding claims, and answerable only to itself”.<sup>7</sup>

In eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russia, Byzantine history was used as a weapon in debates over specific policies of church and state rather than as a field of erudite research. Peter the Great (1672–1725) blamed the bigotry of the Byzantine emperors, Byzantine monasticism, civil disobedience and treachery for the unenviable fate of the empire. In the heated debate between “Westernisers” and “Slavophiles” in the 1830s and 1840s, Byzantium was evoked by both parties and with different connotations, but typically as the opposite of western Europe. The political underpinnings of the growing Russian interest in Byzantium were signalled by the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji (1774), with which Russia assumed the role of protector of Ottoman Christians, and by Catherine II’s “Greek Plan” (1782), which envisaged the regeneration of the Byzantine empire with its capital in Constantinople under a Russian prince as emperor. Panslavism, the political offspring of Slavophilism, which grew after the Crimean War (1853–56), made plain the connection between Byzantinism and the “Eastern Question” concerning the successors to the Ottoman Empire. Panslavists aimed at recreating Byzantium as an empire characterised by Slavic rather than Greek culture and as one based on the union between Russia and the Balkan Slavs. This vision was driven by nationalism and imperialism in that it simultaneously associated the Byzantine legacy with the cultural and political identity of Russia and served to legitimise Russia’s territorial claims to Constantinople.<sup>8</sup>

In the Balkans, the late-Enlightenment period that for most of these countries spanned the second half of the eighteenth and the first decades of the nineteenth century, set the stage for what later became known as “national awakenings” – a process that centred on the creation of national historical narratives, national languages and national folklore. And if the search for the historical roots of these nations-in-the-making reached back to ancient times, their emergence as real “subjects of history” in the then-prevalent Hegelian understanding of the term – that is, as political entities or centralised states – was firmly located in the Middle Ages. The Greeks were an exception to this rule, a fact that confronted the neo-Hellenic enlighteners with specific challenges that would be ultimately solved by the full appropriation of Byzantium as a “Greek state”.

The particulars – geographic, social and political – of the process of medieval state-building, as well as certain methodological shifts in the writing of history, put Byzantium at different removes from the core of the respective national historical narratives. Because of its proximity to Constantinople, relatively early state formation and territorial expansion, medieval Bulgaria was more intensely and lastingly exposed to direct confrontation with and influences from Byzantium than were the Serbs, the Romanians and the Turks. These groups of causes made Byzantium a constant, albeit variously valued, key reference in the Greek and Bulgarian historical canons already at their inception in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the Serbian, Romanian and Turkish historical narratives, the Empire, even if not altogether neglected before that, emerged as a powerful factor during the late nineteenth century when the task of asserting ethnic continuity and historical mission amid growing competition over the legacy of the Empire began to loom large on the agenda of “national historians”.

In all these countries, the age of the Enlightenment marked a re-evaluation of Byzantium that in some cases was radical. Until the third quarter of the eighteenth century, all the historical works written or available in the Greek-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire espoused a strictly Christian perspective on the past informed by Orthodox providentialism. They observed chronographic and ecclesiastical patterns of narration, replicating a Byzantine literary tradition and completely omitting ancient Hellenism. The founders of modern

Greece, on the other hand, felt a cultural and political affinity with the ancient Greeks alone and considered the entire Byzantine period to be one of foreign, Roman rule and subjugation. They cultivated an aversion to the “oriental” and “oppressive” Byzantines. Presenting the Byzantine state as a medieval version of the Ottoman Empire, as the arch enlightener Adamantios Korais (1748–1833) did, resonated not only with the heroic neoclassicism disseminated during the Greek war of independence (1821–30); it also fitted well with the democratic and anti-clerical leanings of the Greek liberal nationalists, who also considered the multi-ethnic constitution of the Empire unpalatable. Parallel to these intellectual efforts, place names were changed from medieval to (often allegedly) ancient ones, medieval monuments and Byzantine churches were destroyed and “the language question” emerged, to remain unresolved for the next century and a half.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, humanist writers of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia remained faithful to the view of Byzantium as the lawful continuation of the Roman Empire, the guardian of the Orthodox faith and the possessor of political legitimacy. The Latinist orientation of Romanian culture broke radically with this humanist tradition. Its heyday, like that of the Hellenic orientation of Greek culture, was during the Enlightenment era and was epitomised by the so-called Transylvanian (or Latinist) School – an intellectual and political movement whose purely Romanian project dominated Romanian history writing from the late eighteenth century through the 1860s. The Latinists’ ideas about the identity of Byzantium, its civilisation and its relations with the Romanians were informed by Enlightenment nationalism and a determination to substantiate the Latin origins and continuity of the Romanians. A decisive break in the history of the Roman Empire, they avowed, was the seventh-century invasions of the Bulgarians and the formation of their state. The latter had separated the Latin-speakers (the Romanians) from the body of the eastern part of the empire and made the Greeks its only masters. From that moment on, the empire based on Constantinople became a “Greek state” – “Romaic”, not Roman. This transformation meant Greek usurpation of the name “Roman” and of the role of custodians of the empire. Byzantium, accordingly, came to be viewed as the result of a felony, a theft from the Romanians, the rightful heirs of Roman glory.<sup>10</sup>

Bulgarian, Romanian and Turkish perceptions vividly demonstrate the general tendency of projecting onto a distant past controversies unfolding in contemporary nation-building. The Bulgarian national Revival began largely as a reaction against “Hellenism” and evolved into a struggle against the “Greek” Church and cultural assimilation. Consequently, the Bulgarian “awakeners” made little effort to discriminate between the Byzantines and contemporary Greeks. The exacerbation of the ecclesiastical issue and nationalist strife between the Greeks and the Bulgarians since the second quarter of the nineteenth century fed into the latter’s view of the Byzantines as the progenitors of the Greeks and of Byzantium as the “Eastern Greek empire”, “Greek emperors” and “Greek land”. Such a conflation, underscoring the allogeneic, culturally and ethnically Greek character of Byzantium, was instrumental in that it mobilised the Bulgarians’ resentment towards the contemporary Greeks by pointing to the age-old confrontation between Byzantium and the medieval Bulgarian state as a confrontation between two nations. The portrayal of Byzantium as the eternal nemesis of the Bulgarians proved remarkably stable. As the nineteenth century proceeded, Byzantium came to be presented as not merely the political rival and oppressor of the Bulgarians. Byzantium and its cultural influence were now held responsible for corrupting the Bulgarian national character and causing deep cleavages in Bulgarian society.

Similarly, the “Greeks” became an issue in the Romanian context in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when a Romanian national consciousness was crystallising, by virtue of the significant Greek (Phanariot) cultural and political influence.<sup>11</sup> As in Bulgaria, this deeply embroiled the construction of Romanian national identity and history with an assessment of the role of the “Greeks”, a process whereby the prevailing cultural-political orientation of the present gave shape to the interpretation of the past. The Transylvanian enlighteners held in low regard the “Greek Church” of Constantinople and post-Byzantine and contemporary Greek culture and saw the Phanariots as the remnants of Byzantium. The national underpinnings of this anti-Greek attitude were also similar: castigation of the Phanariot regime in Wallachia and Moldavia and of budding Greek nationalism – an attitude fostered by the Romanians’ claims to represent the Latin West in the (post-)Byzantine East and to be the only rightful heirs to the Roman imperial tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Greek–Turkish relations weighed heavily on conceptualisations of Byzantium in contemporary Ottoman historiography. Frequent renditions of Byzantium as the ultimate cause of Ottoman “sickness” were an attempt at transforming the recurrent Greek–Turkish conflicts into a primordial phenomenon, dating back to at least the battle of Manzikert (1071) between the “Byzantine Greeks” and “Seljuk Turks”.<sup>13</sup>

The preeminence of the nation-state framework in the production of knowledge about the Byzantine Empire is compellingly demonstrated in all of these countries. The myth of a resurrected Hellas appeared too weak to sustain a national ideology in the face of the political and social realities that followed the establishment of the Greek state. Both the need to forge a continuous and encompassing national history and the irredentist objectives of the new state impelled Greek intellectuals to develop a historiographical model positing three successive eras – ancient, Byzantine and modern – spanning almost 3000 years of uninterrupted historical evolution. The integration of the histories of the ancient Macedonians and Byzantines into a single “general history of the Hellenic nation” was needed to produce not only a homogeneous historical (national) time, but also a national space by establishing the geographical limits of the ideal Greek state. Whereas the classicist orientation of the enlighteners was closely linked with the ideal of national dignity and liberty, the Byzantinist orientation of the national-Romantic period pursued national integration – in other words, territorial expansion. Rather than a shameful incarnation of foreign domination and decay, as the enlighteners had it, Byzantium was now consecrated as the model and forerunner of the modern Greek state, providing a standard for unity and expansion. Prime Minister Ioannis Kolettis’s speech in the Greek National Assembly (14 January 1844) signalled this change of attitude and strategy: he postulated the ideal of a united nation which would bring together Greeks living within the frontiers of the state and those left outside it. He also cast the vision for Greece’s cultural and political hegemony in the Near East – *i kath’imas Anatoli* (“our East”) in the evocative Greek diction. This speech is generally considered to mark the birth of Greece’s “Great Idea” (*Megali Idea*) and to have laid the foundations for the ideological discourse of Greek nationalism up until the 1920s. The choice of Byzantium or classical Greece as historical references was, thus, a dilemma originating not in historiography but in politics and ideology. The new national tasks required – and received – new histories, while the doctrine of national unity and continuity overrode profound or even irreconcilable structural contradictions and cultural antinomies between classical Greece, medieval Christian Byzantium and the Greek nation-state.<sup>14</sup>

The central theme of romantic and post-romantic Serbian historiography was the rise and expansion of the Serbian state under the Nemanjić dynasty between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, culminating in the “Greco-Serbian” empire of Stefan Dušan (1346–55). In this story, Byzantium was assigned the role of the chief, yet declining, adversary, with a prestigious and alluring but ageing culture which, in stark contrast with the youthful vigour and creativity of the Serbs, lacked the verve, energy and vision to carry its civilisational mission any further. As the Serbian historian, Pantelija Srećković, put it, “Dušan’s newly created empire sought to become a second or popular Slavic Byzantine empire similar to the empire of Constantine the Great...”<sup>15</sup> In subsequent Serbian historical surveys, this Serbo-Byzantine empire – an improved version of Byzantium – would feature as a stable trope. Significantly, it reappeared in the first formal political programme of modern Serbia (*Načertanije*, 1844), which drew the map of its future expansion in the Balkans. It reads:

The roots and foundations of the Serbian state are firmly embedded in the Serbian empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth century... The Serbian emperors... almost demolished the fallen Byzantium in order to rejuvenate the Eastern Roman empire and to lay the foundations of a new, Serbian-Slavic empire. This venture, however, was disrupted by the Turkish invasion... It is only now that the foundations of the Serbian empire are about to rise from the rubble of its historical base.... This state [which would replace European Turkey] could not be any other than Serbia, for, even in the Middle Ages, she would have been the successor of the Byzantine empire if the Turks had not destroyed it. In this case, moreover, Serbia would do no more than revive the ancient empire of her ancestors.<sup>16</sup>

Remarkable here, besides the clear dominance of nationalism in the interpretation of the ideology and culture of medieval Serbia and the proclaimed superiority of the Serbs among the Balkan contenders for the Byzantine heritage, is the idea of *translatio imperii* from Byzantium to Serbia.

The growing engagement with the medieval past and the Byzantine empire in the decades preceding and following the setting up of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878 sprang, in turn, from pressing questions of the Bulgarians’ present and future that involved the definition of their identity, the outlining of their political borders and the delimitation of their past. Bulgarian national “awakeners” sought to thwart contemporary Greek national-political claims derived from the Byzantine legacy – the “Great Idea”. They did this less by contesting the eastern empire’s Greek character, which was the strategy adopted by their Serbian and Romanian compeers, than by downplaying Byzantium’s historical role and prestige, a ploy that drew heavily on western European imagery. They conceived a rival medieval imperial model instead: that of the first and especially the second Bulgarian Kingdom. Concurrently, they sought to transpose the “defects” of the Empire, as contrived by the “Europeans”, onto the modern Greeks and thus to legitimise their resistance to the “Hellenizing” policies of the Greek state and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Consequently, Byzantium’s two major cultural legacies to the Bulgarians – religion and the Slavonic script – were fully alienated from Byzantium and assigned instead to the national patrimony. This is a striking case of harnessing the same (false) argument – that of the Greek identity of the Byzantine empire – in the service of two warring national causes and of instrumentalising the same thesis in two conflicting national narratives – the Greek and the Bulgarian.<sup>17</sup>



Whereas conflation of imperial and national visions is a common feature of all four historiographic traditions discussed thus far, distinctive of the Bulgarian and Serbian narratives is another ambiguity, which the “historians as nation-builders” failed to address. In both countries the “people”, the common peasant “folk”, were said to be the bearers of national authenticity, the source of all social and moral virtues and a sturdy counterforce to Byzantinism and the “Byzantinised” local elites. Such a populist rendition of the national ideology, largely foreshadowed by the agrarian (egalitarian, anti-elitist) nature of these societies, rested uneasily with the imperial (monarchical and hierarchical) imaginations cultivated by the historical grand narrative. Remarkably, the post-Romantic generations would not eliminate the inconsistency: they would continue to devolve responsibility for all kinds of social cleavages and misfortunes onto those national leaders and groups who, by following Byzantine “ways”, had jeopardised the chances of erecting a truly “national empire” epitomising the nation’s sacrosanct traditions, integrity and solidarity.

The institutionalisation of Byzantine studies in western Europe and Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ran parallel to the ascendancy of positivist standards of processing and analysing the source material. The acclaimed scientific value of such methods allowed Byzantinists at large to view the way they generated knowledge of the past as being essentially neutral. This complacent self-perception was manifestly deceptive, as all too often extra-regional Byzantine research was coloured by political leanings, either in the direction of Helleno- or Slavophilia, or by being steeped in imperialist visions. If western Byzantine Studies was instrumental in congealing the idea of Hellenism’s millennial continuity, its Russian counterpart successfully inculcated in its Balkan Slavic acolytes the understanding of Byzantine scholarship as indispensable for cultivating their nations’ counter-Byzantine identity.

In the Balkan countries, on the other hand, the emergence of the first cohort of professional medievalists and Byzantinists and the setting up of departments or seminars for Byzantine studies entailed no real break with the erstwhile Romantic tradition. The turn of the nineteenth century in the region was a period of progress and modernisation, but also of an intense nationalist and irredentist fervour, culminating in the two Balkan wars (1912–13). The shift away from the frantic national mythology of the Romantic Age notwithstanding, history writing remained pliantly responsive to the exigencies of the day and national ideology in particular – indeed, many historians believed this link was indispensable and beneficial and saw no discrepancy between history as an academic endeavour and history as a service to the nation. Significantly, moreover, a number of Byzantinists took high posts in government, and three of them, Spyridon Lambros in Greece (1916–17), Nicolae Iorga in Romania (1931–32) and Bogdan Filov in Bulgaria (1940–43) served as prime ministers in the first half of the twentieth century.

Buoyed by the arguments of the most prominent Greek scholars, the Greek political class at the turn of the century unequivocally associated the Great Idea with the resurrection of the Byzantine empire in the form of a great Greek state. Nikolaos Politis (1852–1921), the founding father of Greek folklore studies (*laografia*), believed that “to reoccupy Constantinople and again turn Saint Sophia into an Orthodox church – this is the apex of the Great Idea”, whereas historian Pavlos Karolidis (1849–1930) pointed to the momentous political implications of scholarly Byzantinism when stating that before and after the revolution of 1821 the Great Idea “had as its guidelines for national and political unity Byzantine Hellenism and Byzantine traditions”; modern Hellenism looked upon Byzantium as its “religious and at the same time national center”.<sup>18</sup>

The “Asia Minor catastrophe” of 1922 put an end to the optimistic and expansionist Greek dreams of a reconstituted Byzantium. Yet different intellectual subcultures reacted differently to the debacle. Influential modernist writers, who belonged to the “Generation of the 1930s”, once again put Greece’s direct link to the classical past at the top of the agenda and developed a stronger interest in the Byzantine legacy after WWII. In the late 1920s, a founding member of this group, the novelist Giorgos Theotokas, famously urged his countrymen to forsake Balkan and Byzantine paradigms and focus instead on Greece’s place in western Europe. He pinned his hopes on the free spirit of the young generation to cleanse Hellenism of its Byzantine (and Balkan) traditions and conform to a new, “Eurocentric Great Idea”.<sup>19</sup> The ignominious collapse of Greece’s “Eastern Great Idea” had a different effect on history writing, which was boosted by the sustained institutionalised support of the Greek state for the creation of chairs of history and cultural institutions focused on Byzantium. The field’s expansion was underpinned by political anxieties. After WWI, Greece was busy attending to its “legitimate” rights on the newly acquired territories, particularly in Macedonia, to which its neighbours also laid historical and ethnographical claims. With the centres of ancient Greece lying further to the south, it was through Byzantium that scholars hoped to confirm the Hellenic character of these lands. Driven by the ongoing dispute with Bulgaria over the “ethnographic identity” of Macedonia and the Greek Communist Party’s support for Macedonia’s secession based on the right of self-determination, the younger generation of Greek historians ardently took up the task of driving home the Greek nature of Byzantine monuments and divulging new aspects of the Byzantine period of Greek history.

The Bulgarian mainstream narrative at the turn of the twentieth century, now priding itself on a “scientific” status, continued to associate the political ascendancy, prosperity and cultural flourishing of the medieval Bulgarian state with the periods free of Byzantine influence. Byzantium’s role in the Bulgarians’ acquisition of the Christian religion and an alphabet in their language was obfuscated and presented as the development of a “unique Slavo-Bulgarian” nationhood and culture, a model for all other Slavs. Conversely, Bulgaria’s decline and ultimate demise were said to have become inevitable once its “anti-national” ruling elites opened the doors to the rotting power of Byzantinism. This was a remarkably faithful reiteration of the “prescientific” interpretation of Bulgarian medieval history characteristic of the nation-building period.<sup>20</sup>

The geopolitical order established after the Second Balkan War and WWI had a traumatic effect on the Bulgarians, who regarded themselves as the great losers of this conflagration. Combined with the post-war social and political crisis, this feeling spurred a painstaking search for the roots of the disaster and a remedy for the social and political disruption. Indeed, their sense of loss found a curious refraction in the way Byzantium’s role in Bulgarian history was revamped by the most important Bulgarian historian and Byzantinist of the first half of the twentieth century, Petăr Mutafchiev (1883–1943). In contrast to the erstwhile historical rendition, he undertook to rehabilitate Byzantium with respect to almost any aspect of its civilisation and took pains to dispel, what he called, “the widely held delusion that Byzantium had been a Greek empire”. However, when discussing its relations with and impact on the “historical life of the Bulgarians”, Mutafchiev’s interpretation featured Byzantium as the evil demiurge of all Bulgarian history. Their proximity to Byzantium and the Bulgarians’ need to preserve themselves and their state, so the argument went, doomed them to constant conflict with the empire. In this conflict, “the Bulgarian political and spiritual leaders were forced to borrow deliberately from [Byzantium] everything

to which it owed its superiority”.<sup>21</sup> The growing political rivalry thus led to growing political and cultural imitation – a process that pushed the country onto an unnatural path of development, eliminating the possibility of creating anything healthy and durable. A pattern for Bulgaria’s later development was thus set. What Mutařchiev actually did was to project onto the country’s medieval past the cultural and political dilemmas of Bulgaria’s modern development, especially those emanating from its “inorganic” westernisation. In this narrative the role of Byzantium in Bulgaria’s Middle Ages prefigured that of the contemporary West in the country’s modern history, in that it launched a long-term historical process of inorganic imitation and denationalisation. From this perspective, Byzantium appeared as the *primaeva* coloniser of the Bulgarians, the original hegemonic “West”.<sup>22</sup>

The thesis regarding the “Byzantinisation” of Balkan societies was a common one in Balkan historiographies, save for the Turkish. But in contrast to the Bulgarian narrative, the Serbian one conjured up a counterbalancing thesis that insisted on the creative refinement, not blind emulation, of the Byzantine cultural–political model, whereby the professed Serbian continuity of the Byzantine empire meant not simply conquering Byzantium but the transfer and rejuvenation of its civilisation through a vibrant national culture. The Serbian spirit, briefly put, was not content with simply imitating the Byzantine style; it asserted an independent creativity in politics, literature, legislation and the arts. Lone attempts, such as historian Stoyan Novaković’s (1842–1915), at challenging the very idea that the congruence of ethnic and state boundaries was relevant for the medieval Balkans or that “national unification” had anything to do with state interests, went unheeded. The majority of Serbian historians were not swayed from their patriotic mission to bring the medieval (imperial) past to bear on the construction of modern Serbia or to project contemporary desiderata onto that past.<sup>23</sup>

Between 1910 and 1920, Serbia succeeded in fulfilling a major part of its national aspirations by including in its boundaries all territories that could be claimed as Serbian and more. Serbian scholars’ engagement with Byzantium in the decades before the outbreak of WWII owed much to Serbia’s claim to supremacy in the new Yugoslavia and the need for an inspiring multi-ethnic precedent for the tripartite polity. The empire of Stefan Dušan and his promulgation of Byzantine law and expansionism set precedents for the newly drawn Yugoslav borders, as for further advances into Macedonia. Histories of Yugoslavia appeared seeking to weave the medieval history of the three recognised nationalities that came to constitute interwar Yugoslavia (also encompassing the “Macedonian Slavs” and “Serbo-Croatian” Bosnia) into a narrative of a single people with different cultural–political trajectories. Fourteenth-century Serbia was assertively presented as an imperial master-nation ripe to replace an enfeebled Byzantium.<sup>24</sup> Interwar Serbian historiography thus succeeded in highlighting simultaneously the multi-ethnic character of the medieval Serbian empire (an enhancement of the adopted Byzantine heritage and a paragon for post-war Yugoslavia), the state-building genius of the Serbs (to be counted in distributing political power between the national groups in the Yugoslav state) and the imperative for any state to assimilate ethnic and cultural differences if it was to survive (the task of the nation that can prove historically its potential to fulfil it).

In Romania, the intensification of Byzantine studies was closely linked with the country’s mounting aspirations to regional preeminence. The early twentieth century was the period of a very active Balkan policy, when Romania aspired to the role of principal regional power and arbiter of the Balkans, and when it was establishing itself as the protector of the Aromanians (as the Romance-speaking Balkan Vlachs came to be increasingly named)

who inhabited some parts of the peninsula. An imperial vision of the Romanian past tallied with these new horizons of Romania's regional role, and it is associated with the prodigious work of Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), the most influential Romanian historian in the first four decades of the twentieth century. In weaving his Romanian-Byzantine narrative, Iorga pursued, often together or in parallel, several mutually reinforcing strategies. One was to disprove that the South Slavs had a right to consider themselves adequate counterparts of or rightful heirs to the Byzantine tradition and culture. Another was encapsulated in the notion of *Romanité orientale* as a historical unity bringing under a single national category the Romance-speakers scattered throughout the Balkan peninsula and politically circumscribed by the Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serbian medieval states, and the Romanians north of the Danube. The third, and key, strategy concerned Byzantine survivals in the post-Byzantine era and was captured by Iorga's acclaimed (often for reasons only superficially related to its original meaning) formula, "Byzantium after Byzantium".

These themes converged in Iorga's notion of southeast European "Romania" – the vast space of a continuous eastern Romanity, whose centres were the Adriatic littoral and the two banks of the Danube River, and whose enclaves were spread all over the Balkan peninsula in between. Their Latinism "continued to live according to the ancient traditions". It continued to nourish the "creative power of the Roman element", from which the originality and all the transformations of the Middle Ages derived, as well as the idea of the restitution of the "single Roman empire". By upholding the "spirit of the West" in the East, Romania constituted an important "element of integration" of the East and the West.<sup>25</sup> From this perspective, the Romanians appeared as bearers of the same imperial tradition as the Byzantines. They were neither rivals nor imitators of the Roman imperial idea (as the Bulgarians and Serbs were); they were its embodiment and carriers, along with the Byzantines. Romania was, in this sense, the real *Byzance après Byzance*, having fulfilled a universal mission of safeguarding the distinctive post-Byzantine civilisation of southeastern Europe. The Romanians received this mission by right, since deep down they had never relinquished the Roman idea of empire and their Roman self-awareness: "If Byzantium could reign among us", Iorga wrote, "this was neither because of its Greek character nor because of our special devotion to Orthodoxy... but because, due to the Roman inception preserved in the instinct of our popular classes, we recognized its Roman basis".<sup>26</sup> With such Roman inheritance, a later critic would observe, "a whole Romanian imperial phase was inscribed in the history of the world" and the Romanians could envision themselves as being destined, in more favourable conditions, to remake the Latin empire of the East.<sup>27</sup>

The mainstream historiography of modern Turkey, the country whose territory extends over the core lands of the onetime Byzantine empire, is the only one from among those discussed so far that has vehemently rejected any meaningful Byzantine influence. In this case, again, one witnesses a break with the earlier treatment of Byzantium. The late-Ottoman imperial historiography and art history were pluralistic and open to admitting connections to Byzantium on different levels.<sup>28</sup> Yet positive interpretations of the Byzantine artistic legacy did not prevail and would be better understood as examples of a civilisation in competition with European rivals over the appropriation of the Byzantine legacy and as expressions of Ottoman imperial identity. By foregrounding the similarities between Ottoman and Byzantine art and architecture, they asserted both the legitimate right of the Turks to pose as the recipients of the eastern Roman civilisation and the Ottoman Empire's participation in the European cultural sphere.

The promulgation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 entailed the new regime's symbolically and physically dissociating itself from the Ottoman-Islamic past and arduously embracing an outwardly secularist ideology as proof of its commitment to modernity. Thereby, Turkish nationalism emerged as the only legitimate and credible political disposition, which meant the re-definition of the cultural background of the Turkish nation, if necessary, by reinventing its whole history and genealogy, and rendering historical imagination exclusively ethnically based. Consequently, historical investigations drifted heavily towards unearthing and proving the primaeval Turkish ethnic roots while privileging territorial and biological aspects of identity. By the late 1930s, however, the view that the Ottoman Empire was alien and non-Turkish gave way to a different one with a much longer sequel, namely that the Ottoman state was the last but one of a long line of Turkic states and as such worthy of special attention. The exertion to thoroughly extract Byzantium from this reframed Ottoman past can only be understood in view of the conjuncture of coveted Turkish ethnic purity, to the exclusion of anything else, and rebuttal of the European claim that Byzantine influences were responsible for the achievements of the "Turks who took on the name of Ottomans". It was accomplished by Mehmet Fuat Köprülü (1890–1966), an internationally renowned sociologist and Turkologist, praised as the founder of scientific historical studies in Turkey and a prominent Turkish nationalist and statesman, who served as a member of parliament in the 1930s and, after WWII, as minister of foreign affairs and, briefly, deputy prime minister. Köprülü forcefully asserted the quintessentially Turkish nature of the Ottoman Empire and its lack of indebtedness to Byzantium: "The Ottoman state", he wrote:

was a Muslim Turkish sultanate that had inherited the administrative traditions of the Anatolian Seljuk sultanate and was partly under the influence of the Ilkhānids and Mamlūks. [...] The Ottoman state was founded exclusively by Turks... The contacts of the Ottomans with Byzantium had no fundamental influence, neither before nor after the conquest of Constantinople.<sup>29</sup>

The real issue at stake in these conclusions was not solely the validation of the Ottomans' state-building potency in the face of European Orientalism. Just as important was to posit the Ottoman Empire within the larger context of ecumenical Turkish history. To this effect, at every step and in every respect, a Turkish Seljuk derivation had to overshadow a Byzantine one, and the genuine Turkishness of the Ottomans had to be confirmed. Similar to the Greek appropriation of the Byzantine, the "Ottoman" became subsumed within the "Turkish", thus opening the road to its rehabilitation in post-Kemalist Turkey. Köprülü's denial of any kind of Byzantine influence on Ottoman modes of governance and civilisation held sway until at least the late 1970s. His work also set the stage for envisaging "Anatolian-Turkish Islam" as progressive and pure, effectively a means of reconciling Kemalist secularism with Islam.<sup>30</sup>

The scientific paradigm in history writing, thus, was readily adopted to legitimise particular readings of the national cause, precisely because scientific terminology tends to conceal ideology and make it opaque. The close connection between history and politics, including revolutionary politics, was as manifest among popularisers of national history during the "national revival" period as among professional medievalists later on. Buttressed by it, nationalism became firmly entrenched as an intellectually respectable mentality,

cultivated by the political and literate classes alike and remained so long after the geopolitical reshuffling wrought by WWII. The period from the late 1960s on saw the resurgence of many national-romantic themes endorsing ethnic continuity and imperial precedence across the Balkan historiographies, both post-Stalinist (Romanian, Bulgarian, Yugoslav) and anti-communist (Greek and Turkish). The resultant politicisation of medieval history goes a long way towards explaining the considerable gap between the acceptance of Byzantium as a key point of reference in the national narrative and the actual interest of historians in Byzantium. Consequently, professional historiography came to be heavily implicated in producing different receptions of and instrumentalising the Byzantine history and legacy not just across national narratives – the aspect we have been concerned with in this introductory chapter – but also within discrete historiographies, on behalf of sometimes diametrically opposed political values and competing political projects. The net result, ironically, was that the Universal Empire and its ecumenical legacy ended up buttressing warring national identities and designs.

The relative variability of these receptions differed across the five historiographic traditions. In Greece, after the Enlightenment, and in the Turkish Republic, the historical representations of Byzantium demonstrated fundamental stability. Created in the nineteenth century, the Greek master narrative underwent no major changes but was fleshed out and expanded by gradually incorporating new spheres (everyday life, law, art, literature etc.). In Turkey, the confrontation between those allowing for a greater or lesser Byzantine influence and those rejecting it altogether has been uneven enough to guarantee the continued dominance of the latter camp. In Bulgaria, the antagonistic reception was relatively stable until after WWII, when a gradual but expanding shift began from confrontation with to repossession of Byzantium captured by the concept of “Byzantino-Slavic culture”. In Serbia and Romania, the dynamics unfurled primarily along the changing, and heavily contingent on political conjunctions, balance between eastern and western influences and the varying assessments of events or periods considered central to the master narrative – Dušan’s empire in the Serbian case and the first centuries of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in the Romanian case. Most of the time, alternative discourses drew their own “myths” from a repertoire shared with the dominant discourses, and as such, elicited marginal challenge to the power of the master narratives. During the latest, post-1989 geopolitical reshufflings in the region, public cleavages between pro- and anti-EU political actors ushered in a new wave of reconfiguring the “meaning” of Byzantium into, respectively, the primordial Europe (as in the Romanian discourse) or “pro-Russian” (as in contemporary Serbia).

The successive waves of exaltation and rejection, identification with and disavowal of Byzantium that the Balkan successors to the empire experienced over the last two centuries come to highlight Byzantium’s continuous functioning as an agglomerate of ideologically harnessed understandings and a point of reference structuring national grand narratives. In all these countries, articulations of Byzantium have been tied to articulations of nationhood, authenticity, continuity, independence, orthodoxies and modernity and have thus participated powerfully in the constant redefinition of the collective self. From its modern inception, history-writing was coloured by the given nation’s geopolitical standing and current concerns, and attitudes towards Byzantium changed in accordance with them. The concept of “Byzantium” proved as instrumental in forging a sense of collective identity and legitimising aspirant or newly declared polities in the nineteenth century as it was in furnishing a country’s credentials for membership in the European Union in the twenty-first century.

Extra-regional perceptions of Byzantium, which were themselves controversial – treating Byzantium as both part of European civilisation and its cultural opposite – partook with different force at different times in the formation of local images. Western philhellenic thought was decisive for the original estrangement of the Greeks from their Byzantine past; so was western Romanticism for the discovery of Greek continuity or the Russian and German byzantinistics for the Bulgarian and Serbian “Byzantine” perceptions, whereas the Turkish attitude was a direct response to western and regional deprecations of the state-building capacity of the Turks. A most recent phenomenon in some eastern European and western societies has been the mobilisation of particular receptions of Byzantium in the service of domestic far-right religious and political aims. This current runs parallel to, and takes on board arguments from, Vladimir Putin’s “imperial-eschatological” discourse about Russia’s receptivity of the Byzantine legacy, touting the country as the embodiment of Christian sanctity and antidote to liberalism and western modernity.<sup>31</sup>

In the Balkans, non-nationalist takes in historiography and in Byzantine studies in particular have gained some terrain in the last few decades. At the same time, the traditionalist national schools continue to exert considerable influence through institutionalised channels – education, media and memory politics. In history education and public opinion, the impact of non-nationally framed historiography remains limited. Its often specialised discourse – a mode of protection against plausible attacks – exerts little effect on the public use of history and historical culture. Scholars’ calls for distancing from ethnocentric paradigms and inserting Byzantine studies into global and transnational history have yielded no resounding results. The heavy impact of the politicised historiographic inheritance about Byzantium continues to obstruct the closing of the gap between up-to-date scholarship and popular perception.

### Notes

- 1 On the politics of Byzantine studies, see [Anderson and Ivanova 2024](#).
- 2 On the national interpretations of the impact of the Byzantine empire and the Byzantine legacy in the historiographies of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Turkey – countries which once belonged to the Byzantine political and cultural orbit – [Mishkova 2023](#). Many of the arguments that follow have been elaborated at greater length and subjected to closer historiographic scrutiny in that book.
- 3 [Mishkova 2023](#), 14–7.
- 4 [Kaldellis 2019](#): 14.
- 5 [Irmscher 1976](#): 252–3.
- 6 [Agapitos 1992](#): 238.
- 7 [Berlin 1972](#): ix–xii.
- 8 [Mishkova 2023](#), 39–42.
- 9 [Mishkova 2023](#), 21–4.
- 10 [Mishkova 2023](#), 30–4.
- 11 The Phanariots were members of the wealthy Greek families of the Phanar, the Greek quarter of Istanbul, who served as administrators in the civil bureaucracy of the Ottoman Empire and dominated the administration of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.
- 12 [Tanaşoca 2003](#): 198.
- 13 [Heraclides 2013](#).
- 14 On the transformation and its political underpinnings of the Greek historical narrative following the setting up of the modern Greek state, see [Mishkova 2018](#): 42–54.
- 15 [Ignjatović 2016](#): 674–5.
- 16 [Stavrianos 1944](#): 52.
- 17 [Mishkova 2023](#), 55–63.



- 18 Politis 1928: 153; Augustinos 1977: 27.
- 19 Calotychos 2003: 159–66.
- 20 For this interpretation of Bulgarian history and Byzantium's role in it, elaborated on with the techniques of professional history, see especially Zlatarski 1895, 1971.
- 21 Mutafchiev 1931.
- 22 Mishkova 2018: 132–39.
- 23 Mishkova 2023, 99–109.
- 24 See, among others, Ćorović 1933 and Radojčić 1942.
- 25 Iorga 1939b: I, 178–80, 193.
- 26 Iorga 1939a: 21–2
- 27 Boia 2001a: 178.
- 28 Ursinus 1986, 1988.
- 29 Köprülü 1999: 141–2, 145.
- 30 Mishkova 2018: 186–90.
- 31 Drost and De Graaf 2022. See also Sarah Riccardi-Swartz's contribution further down.

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# 10

## BYZANTINE LAW, A EUROPEAN LAW

### Byzantium in the Legal Systems of France, Germany and Greece During the Nineteenth Century

*Caroula Argyriadis-Kervegan*

The importance of Byzantine law for the legal systems of modern states has varied depending on whether they were part of western Europe or once formed part of the Ottoman Empire. Until the fifth-century invasions of the Germanic tribes and the subsequent fall of the Roman Empire, Europe's common legal matrix was the law of the Roman Empire. After the fall of the Roman Empire, European territories moved away from the Roman legal tradition and conformed to the customary laws of the newly formed Germanic kingdoms. During the twelfth century, scholars studied the *Corpus Juris Civilis* – the modern title for Byzantine emperor Justinian's (r. 527–65) legislation, which was based on Roman laws and the work of Roman jurists – at the University of Bologna, which led to renewed interest in Roman law. Roman law, designed for a large, centralised empire or empire-state with extensive trade relations, was a valuable tool for imperial governments aspiring to establish a centralised political and administrative system in which the emperor held a higher position over vassals. From the twelfth century onwards, legal science was established as an autonomous discipline and studied in universities. Legal studies provided emergent states with jurists specialised in Roman law, and advisors to the king of France, as well as to the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, for example, helped to lead them towards modernisation.

The territories in the Balkan region followed a different path to modernity. As part of the Byzantine Empire, they followed the evolution of the code of Justinian according to the traditions of the eastern Roman Empire. The evolution of Byzantine academic and legal systems in these territories came to an abrupt halt with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century. In these territories, therefore, there was no continuity of government or progressive formation of the legal system or legal science as there was in western European kingdoms. The states formed in the Balkan territories had to catch up on legal development in the nineteenth century and cover a four-century hiatus within a few decades. The aim of this chapter is to consider the differing responses to Byzantine law during the nineteenth century in France, Germany and Greece.

## France

In France, Byzantine law was studied from the perspective of humanism – an intellectual, literary but also political movement focused on the study of Greco-Latin scholarship – from the sixteenth century onwards.<sup>1</sup> It was thanks to the humanist scholars Guillaume Budé (1467–1540), André Alciat (1492–1550) and above all Jacques Cujas (1522–90) – who extended his study beyond Justinian’s *Corpus Juris Civilis* to ninth-century Byzantine legislation, the *Basilica*, which was based on it – that the study of Byzantine law acquired an academic and political dimension.<sup>2</sup> The study of Byzantine law enabled the kings of France to use the Byzantine example of a centralised state as a point of reference in the early modern period.<sup>3</sup>

The emergence of the Modern School of natural law in the seventeenth century introduced new requirements in legal composition. Thenceforth, human reason had to be the basis of legislation, and laws had to guarantee the natural rights of subjects. Laws had to be brief and clear, without any of the contradictions that had existed in traditional, customary law. Under the influence of Enlightenment philosophy, any law voted for by the parliament was defined as the expression of general will: this consolidated a legitimate process for the generation of law and aimed to guarantee the exclusion of arbitrariness.<sup>4</sup> National legislative systems had to replace the inherited legal systems derived from Justinian either in its Latin or in its Greek–Byzantine iteration. This necessity resulted in the national legal codifications of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in Prussia, France and Austria.<sup>5</sup>

The mission of the politically motivated Napoleonic Civil Code of 1804 was to unify French law. From medieval times to Napoleon’s accession to power, France had two legal systems: a written law stemming from the Roman legal tradition in the south of France and a customary law in the North. After the promulgation of the Civil Code in 1804 and until the last decades of the nineteenth century, French civil science was dominated by the exegetic method. Although this method had several dimensions, the most prevalent was the interpretation of the law on the basis of the Civil Code, without references to secondary disciplines such as history, philosophy or sociology. This left no room for the study of law from a historical perspective, especially when it came to law which was relatively distant from the French tradition, such as Byzantine law.<sup>6</sup> The study of Byzantine law in France from the nineteenth century onwards thus had a purely historical interest with no real connection to contemporary legal reality, which was dominated by the Civil Code. Indeed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the historian of Byzantine art Charles Diehl (1859–1944) began his article “Introduction à l’histoire de Byzance” (Introduction to the history of Byzantium) in an apologetic tone which betrayed the perceived uselessness of the Byzantine system: “There are disreputable words, the word Byzantine is one of them. When parliaments lose themselves in idle and useless debates, journalism has a ready-made expression to condemn them: it is engaged in Byzantine discussions”.<sup>7</sup>

In 1843, Jean-Anselme-Bernard Mortreuil (1806–76), a jurist and legal historian, published *Histoire du droit byzantin* (History of Byzantine law). In it the author shared a personal anecdote regarding his first encounter with Byzantine law: while reading a commentary on the topic of the French Civil Code concerning “prescription” (a legal term according to which there is a limitation on the admissibility of a legal action) Mortreuil expressed his surprise at encountering a juridical collection, the *Basilica*, hitherto completely unknown to him. This was the starting point for his interest in Byzantine law.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent interest of French jurists in Byzantine law was also purely historical. Charles Giraud (1802–81), who held the Chair of Roman Law at the University of Paris, published in 1847 the *Histoire du droit romain ou Introduction historique à l'étude de cette législation* (History of Roman law or Historical introduction to the study of this legislation), in which he deplores the alterations that the notable Byzantine jurist, and advisor of Emperor Justinian, Tribonian had made to classical Roman law, saying “Tribonian has laid a barbaric hand on the admirable remains of Roman jurisprudence”.<sup>9</sup> A brief account of the history of Byzantine law after Justinian’s era in both the East and West is given in the epilogue of the book. Byzantine studies in France received fresh impetus in 1868 with the creation of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, however, the most prestigious place for academic studies, which revived interest in Byzantine law.<sup>10</sup> The study of Byzantine law was initiated in universities with law professor Henri Monnier’s (1851–1920) course on the history of Byzantine law at the University of Bordeaux, and a course on Byzantine history was created within the University of Paris in 1899.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, negative attitudes towards Byzantine law persisted. Paul Collinet (1869–1938), a Byzantinist and professor of Roman law and the history of law at the University of Paris, specialising in the Justinianic era, described the attitude of his colleagues towards Justinian’s law in the early twentieth century. He opined that the version of Roman law transmitted by Justinian’s codification was so devalued according to the almost universally accepted judgment of the present day, that one would not be far from giving the most insignificant jurist of the third century precedence over Tribonian and his assistants.<sup>12</sup>

Collinet severely criticises the exegetic method applied in the nineteenth century, which was tainted with subjectivism, preferring instead the historical method that interprets texts in light of the circumstances that produced them. He advocates for the historical study of Justinian’s legislation so that legal historians can understand the evolution of legal institutions. Collinet criticises his contemporaries who study classical Roman law but depreciate the law of the late Roman Empire, which was “contaminated by the Greeks”. He regrets that the historical method was not applied by the historians of his time, whose only goal was to unearth vestiges of classical Roman law in Justinian’s legislation. The sole purpose of studying Justinian’s code, according to Collinet, should be to establish whether Justinian’s legislation corresponded to the needs of its time.<sup>13</sup> Methodologically, he was influenced by the German Byzantinists and historians Karl Krumbacher (1856–1909) and Ludwig Mitteis (1859–1921), as well as the French historian Diehl.

## Germany

Germany’s relationship to Roman and Byzantine law differed from that of France. Germany’s administrative system was the opposite of France’s in that the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (962–1806) was a mosaic made up of many semi-independent states. In the absence of a homogeneous law promulgated by a centralised state, Roman law was practised in Germany from the fifteenth century onwards.<sup>14</sup> According to the Historical School of Law, an intellectual stream of very important and influential German jurists which emerged in the nineteenth century, the Justinianic code was the common law of the German states. German legal science focused on the unification of German law, and the task of the jurist was to establish and rehabilitate this common legal basis. Therefore, the study of Roman law was not driven exclusively by historical interest in Germany, but by the desire to discover in Roman law the origin of present institutions. Accordingly, seminal

publications like Friedrich Karl von Savigny's (1779–1861) treatise were entitled *System des heutigen römischen Rechts* (System of current Roman law). The influential Historical School established by Savigny and his disciples approached the *Corpus Juris* as a legal compilation and not as a historical source.<sup>15</sup> Justinian's law, thus, became part of the collective consciousness of nineteenth-century jurists.

During the nineteenth century, many German scholars and historians extensively studied and published texts related to Byzantine legal literature. The 1816 discovery made in Verona by historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831) of the *Institutes* – a second-century introductory handbook on Roman private law by Roman classical jurist Gaius – gave fresh impetus to the study of Roman and Byzantine law. In addition, education in high schools placed great emphasis on the learning of Greek, and as a result, German scholars produced a lot of publications on the sources of Byzantine law.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the jurist Karl Wilhelm Ernst Heimbach (1803–65) edited the *Basilica* between 1833 and 1850, the first edition since that of jurist Charles-Annibal Fabrot's (1580–1659) in 1647. The edition was enriched by the addition of the *Prolegomena et Manuale Basilicorum*, containing Heimbach's commentary and indexes. His younger brother Gustav Ernst Heimbach (1810–51) also published several volumes of Byzantine law after conducting research in French and Italian libraries. These included the *Anekdotia zur byzantinischen Gesetzgebung* (Anecdotes on Byzantine legislation, 1838–40), *Authenticum. Novellarum constitutionum Iustiniani versio Vulgata* (1846–51) on Justinian's novels and an edition of the *Hexabiblos*, *Const. Harmenopouli Manuale legum sive Hexabiblos* (1851). Finally, the eminent German Byzantinist Karl Eduard Zachariä von Lingenthal (1812–94) studied and edited a significant number of Greek legal manuscripts and thus enabled the study of Byzantine law to gain a certain autonomy and independence from Latin sources.

The path initiated by Savigny introduced a dichotomy between purely historical studies of legal texts and the search for the usefulness of Byzantine law for the modern jurist. As German professor Paul Koschaker (1879–1951) points out, the practices of Savigny and his disciples evoked somewhat those of early modern commentators on Roman law, who also sought topical solutions in the *Corpus Juris* of Justinian. Johann August Bach (1721–58), professor at the University of Leipzig, included the development of Byzantine law in his *Historia Jurisprudentiae Romanae* (History of Roman jurisprudence, 1754); and the Novels of Emperor Leo the Wise (866–912) were still cited before German courts in the eighteenth century. Gustav Hugo (1764–1844), professor of law at the University of Göttingen, praised at the beginning of the nineteenth century the study of Byzantine law introduced by Jacques Cujas in the sixteenth century. But after Savigny, the study of Byzantine law was increasingly marginalised.<sup>17</sup> The German historical school placed increasing emphasis on historical studies and sources but bypassed and ignored Byzantine law.

## Greece

In Ottoman Greece, there was a rivalry between legal systems. The courts of the *demogerontes* (the wise men of the community) and the ecclesiastical courts used the *Hexabiblos* (c. 1345), a legal handbook based on the *Basilica* by the judge of Thessaloniki Constantine Harmenopoulos (c. 1320–85); the ecclesiastical collections of the canons of Orthodox church synods; the laws of Byzantine emperors; the *Nomokanon* of Manouel Malaxos (sixteenth century); and the *Bakteria Archiereon* (guide for high

priests, seventeenth century), as well as customary law. On the other hand, the Ottoman courts, to which Greek populations were also referred, used Ottoman law.

During the War of Independence (1821–29), several legislative texts and “provisional” constitutions issued by local and national assemblies established the laws of the “Christian emperors” as the authoritative source of civil law. However, these references were vague and did not refer to any specific corpus of laws or chronological period from which Byzantine laws should be applied: art. 98, *Προσωρινόν Πολίτευμα τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (Provisional constitution of Greece) 1822; art. 80, *Νόμος τῆς Ἐπιδαύρου ἢτοι Προσωρινόν Πολίτευμα τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (Law of Epidaurus i.e. the provisional constitution of Greece) 1823; art. 142, *Πολιτικόν Σύνταγμα τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 1827 (The political constitution of Greece).

After independence was achieved, the governor Ioannis Kapodistrias (1776–1831) stated in Decree no. 19 of 15.12.1828, *On the Organisation of Courts*, that, in the field of civil law, the courts must follow the laws of the Byzantine emperors contained in the *Hexabiblos* of Harmenopoulos. The administrative Act 64 of 4.2.1830 declared the government’s intention to prepare a collection of Byzantine civil laws contained in the *Basilica* and in the *Novels* of later emperors. Finally, Resolution 152 *On the organisation of courts* of 15/27.8.1830 stipulated that courts must follow the laws of the Byzantine emperors, but that until the publication of the collection of “these laws”, they must “refer to” the *Hexabiblos*.

During the reign of King Otto (1833–62), the Decree of 23.2/7.3.1835 *On Civil Law* was promulgated, which stated that “the civil laws of the Byzantine emperors contained in the *Hexabiblos* of Harmenopoulos shall remain in use until the publication of the Civil Code, the preparation of which has already been ordered”. However, long-established customs validated by uninterrupted use or by court rulings would take precedence over Byzantine law. The *Hexabiblos*, thus, became the provisional corpus of civil law in Greece, which remained in use until the introduction of a modern Civil Code in 1946.

The use of the *Hexabiblos* was a solution of necessity, as it was the only Byzantine legal compilation available in Greece, although it was difficult to find. Adapting this medieval compilation to the conditions of a nineteenth-century state, along with the scarcity of the Byzantine legislative text, presented difficulties to the courts in terms of its application.<sup>18</sup> The only collection of Byzantine laws in newly independent Greece in the first half of the nineteenth century was an edition of the *Hexabiblos* by the scholar Alexios Spanos from the seventeenth/eighteenth century, translated into modern Greek (Venice, seven editions between 1744 and 1820). A new translation prepared by Konstantinos Klonaris was published in Nafplion in 1833. Concerning the *Basilica*, under the governor Kapodistrias, there were only two copies of them in private possession.<sup>19</sup> Georgios Rallis (1804–83) and Markos Renieris (1815–97), professors of law at the University of Athens, translated and published the 1838 Roman law manual by Ferdinand Mackeldey (1784–1834), a professor at the University of Marburg, adding references to the *Basilica*.

The interpretation of King Otto’s 1835 decree on civil law by Greek jurists stimulated a long and rich discussion. Given the difficulty of directly applying the *Hexabiblos* compilation, the courts and legal experts considered that it was necessary to return to its sources. A controversy arose as to whether only the *Hexabiblos* should be used or whether the original sources of this manual should also be referred to. The use of the *Hexabiblos* guaranteed legal stability and security, but allowing also for the use of its sources seemed too many to open the way to the use of diverse kinds of Byzantine legislation. On this point, a second question arose: should the *Basilica* and the *Novels* of emperors after the *Basilica* be used, or should one go back to Justinian’s law as the source of the *Basilica*? To remedy



the difficulties and fill in the gaps in the *Hexabiblos*, Greek legal experts who were trained at German universities under the influence of Savigny's Historical School, resorted to the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, and more specifically to the works and textbooks of German Roman law professors as well as to the Pandectists, those within the German Historical School who studied Justinian's *Pandects* as a model of conceptual jurisprudence during the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The island of Samos, which was declared semi-autonomous under Ottoman suzerainty (1835–1912) constituted a unique case. There the *Hexabiblos* constituted the Civil Code until the introduction of the *Civil Code of the Principality of Samos* in 1899.<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, Byzantine law had a much more direct influence on the countries of south-east Europe until well into the nineteenth century, while the countries of western Europe developed modern law by drawing on classical Roman law.

### Notes

- 1 Troje 1971: 306ff.
- 2 Troje 1970:33–63.
- 3 Troje 1971:306.
- 4 Coing 1985: 72–82.
- 5 Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preussischen Staaten 1794, Code Civil des Français 1804, Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch 1811.
- 6 Audren and Halpérin 2013: 46, 53f.
- 7 Diehl 1905: 1.
- 8 Mortreuil 1843–46: V–VI.
- 9 Giraud 1847: 411.
- 10 Diehl 1905: 27; Bréhier 1901.
- 11 Bréhier 1901: 32.
- 12 Collinet 1912: X–XI.
- 13 Collinet 1912: XXVII
- 14 Koschaker, 1947: 124.
- 15 Koschaker 1938: 26.
- 16 Schminck, 1996: 165–6.
- 17 Troje 1993: 542ss.
- 18 Argyriadis: 1998.
- 19 Pitsakis 1971: πρ'.
- 20 Troianos 2017: 376.
- 21 Pitsakis 1971: πρ'.

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# 11

## HOW “BYZANTINE” SHOULD IT BE?

### The Byzantium of the Greeks

*Marios Hatzopoulos*

The integration of Byzantine history into Greek national identity evolved significantly from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Initially, Greek intellectuals dismissed Byzantium in favour of classical antiquity, though Byzantine memories and related myths, such as the prophesied reconquest of Constantinople, remained influential. Romantic intellectuals like Spyridon Zambelios (1815–81) and Constantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–91) subsequently reshaped Greek historiography to include Byzantium, countering earlier Enlightenment dismissals. This chapter examines the evolving perception of Byzantium in Greek national identity, focusing on several key questions: How did intellectuals like Zambelios and Paparrigopoulos break new ground in reevaluating Byzantine history? What role did external influences and internal political dynamics play in this process? How did the Greek monarchy use Byzantine symbols to bolster its legitimacy and promote the “Great Idea” of national expansion? And finally, how did the institutionalisation of Byzantine studies in Greece in the early twentieth century solidify Byzantium’s place in national consciousness? By discussing these developments, my aim is to show how “Byzantium” in Greece transitioned from a neglected period to a celebrated facet of Greek national identity, influencing everything from educational curricula to national policies.

#### Memory

From the 1820s to the 1840s, the Greek intelligentsia held a complex view of the Byzantine past, oscillating between disdain and reverence. On the whole, the Greek intelligentsia denigrated Byzantium, viewing it as a period of obscurantism and foreign rule, upholding classical antiquity as the sole legitimate past of the Greek nation. However, notions like the “reconquest of Constantinople” and the “reconsecration of Hagia Sophia” persisted in public discourse, being embraced by a sizeable portion of the kingdom’s intellectual and political elites. Remarkably, several intellectuals and politicians who were critical of Byzantium on historical grounds were also captivated by its intense symbolic significance.<sup>1</sup>

This ambivalence reflected a broader societal trend within the Kingdom of Greece (established in 1832),<sup>2</sup> whereby shared myth-memories remained powerful despite “official” ideology excluding Byzantine legacies. These memories, recited through legend and myth

and transmitted through a prophetic literature,<sup>3</sup> became a crucial part of the Greek population's historical consciousness and identity. For many Greeks, especially from lower socioeconomic strata, Byzantium represented a poignant reminder of the eastern Roman Empire's fall in 1453. This cultural force inspired strong attachments, leading Greeks of various quarters to view Constantinople (Istanbul) as a sacred and ancestral Greek homeland. Similarly, the fall of Constantinople was seen as a national tragedy, Hagia Sophia as inherently Greek, and Constantine XI Palaiologos (r. 1404–53) as a national hero. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that Romantic historiography emerged, building upon these deep-seated premises.<sup>4</sup>

## History

The integration of Byzantium into Greek national history was a gradual and complex process. This transformation was significantly influenced by Spyridon Zambelios, a scholar from the Ionian Islands, and Constantinos Paparrigopoulos, a professor of history at the University of Athens. Both were key persons in shaping Greek historiography during a period when Enlightenment ideals, which dismissed Byzantium as a period of theocratic dominance and cultural decline, held sway in Greece. Their efforts marked a shift towards recognising the Byzantine era as an integral part of Greek history, challenging earlier perceptions of it as a time of Roman enslavement.

Grafting the Byzantine period into the account of Greek national identity helped to bridge the huge temporal gap between antiquity and modernity. The prevalent idea of modern Greece rising as a Phoenix from the ashes after 2000 years, which essentially romanticised ancient Greece *in extremis*, was insufficient for forming a robust national ideology. It left a significant temporal void between the idealised past and the intractable present, it conflicted with the Orthodox Christian identity of the vast majority of contemporary Greeks, and it failed to meet the ideological and geopolitical needs of the nascent Greek state. The classicist orientation of Enlightenment thinkers emphasised ethnic descent and national liberty, whereas the Greek Romantic school of historiography, which was to emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century with Zambelios and Paparrigopoulos, sought to promote national integration and territorial expansion.

The reorientation of Greek historiography towards Byzantium was partly driven by a reaction against the controversial claims of the German Tyrolean traveller, journalist, politician and historian Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1790–1861). As Romanticism flourished and neoclassical enthusiasm diminished in Europe, Western intellectuals grew increasingly sceptical about the origins of modern Greeks. Scepticism went side by side with the cooling of Philhellenism, a phenomenon which was not merely a matter of shifts in intellectual fashions. By the late 1820s, Greece had transitioned from an abstract concept into the concrete reality of international politics. Great Powers, particularly England, worried that an Orthodox state on the southern edge of the Balkans might facilitate Russian expansion southwards, and some Western observers saw Greece as too impoverished and desolate to be considered heir to the ultimate ideal of “civilized society”. These sentiments culminated in 1830 with Fallmerayer's book *Geschichte der Halbinsel Morea Während des Mittelalters* (History of the Morean Peninsula during the Middle Ages) wherein the author asserted that successive Slav invasions during the Byzantine era had led to the complete extinction of the Greek race. Greek scholars motivated by a patriotic desire to refute

Fallmerayer started gradually building a new national historical narrative by discovering the medieval roots of Greece.

Zambelios and Paparrigopoulos were instrumental in this effort, constructing a comprehensive historical framework that integrated Byzantium into Greek history and stressed the continuity of Hellenism. With his work *Ασματα δημοτικά τῆς Ἑλλάδος: ἐκδοθέντα μετὰ μελέτης ἱστορικῆς περὶ μεσαιωνικοῦ ἑλληνισμοῦ* (*Folksongs of Greece. Published with a historical study on medieval Hellenism*, 1852), Zambelios became the first to devise the tripartite schema of the ancient, medieval and modern periods in Greek history, incorporating the notion therein of “Medieval Hellenism”. His engagement with Hegelianism and the French Romantic-historical school, which in turn was influenced by German historicism, significantly shaped his approach. Viewing the year 1821 (the first year of the Greek Revolution or War of Independence) as a key moment in Greek history, Zambelios interpreted previous historical eras, from ancient times up to the present, as inevitable stages of progression towards the formation of a national state. What was previously seen as a series of national disasters and conquests became, in his view, necessary steps towards the eventual formation of independent Greece. In this long historical chain, Byzantium was not merely the essential, yet hitherto missing, link between antiquity and modernity, but also the actual source of the modern Greek nation. Moreover, Zambelios coined the term “Helleno-Christian” (*Ellinochristianikos*) to describe the symbiosis of Christianity and Hellenism. By uniting these previously exclusive notions and connecting paganism to eastern Christianity, Zambelios attempted to reconcile the bitter ideological divide between the “autochthons” (Greeks born within the kingdom borders) and the “heterochthons” (Greeks born outside). In a later work *Βυζαντιναὶ μελέται: Περὶ πηγῶν νεοελληνικῆς ἐθνότητος ἀπὸ ἡ' ἄχρι ι' ἑκατονταετηρίδος μ.Χ.* (*Byzantine studies. On the origins of the modern Greek nationality from the 8th until the 10th century AD*, 1857), Zambelios went on to incorporate the Byzantine monarchy into his historical framework, associating the former with the classical heritage and establishing an organic unity between people’s language, religion and the state.

Zambelios, however, did not produce a major historical synthesis that would organically integrate Byzantium into the continuum of Greek history. Rather, he paved the way for Paparrigopoulos to become the architect of the grand narrative of Greek history. Paparrigopoulos expanded and elaborated on Zambelios’s tripartite framework, emphasising the national significance of the notion of a “Greek empire residing in Constantinople”. His first book, driven by the desire to refute Fallmerayer, emphasised not a linear or biological continuity for the Greeks but a cultural and spiritual one. Paparrigopoulos went to great lengths to argue that the spirit of Hellenism had the power to assimilate weaker cultures, such as that of the Slavs. It was left to his magnum opus, the five-volume *Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους: Ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχαιοτάτων χρόνων μέχρι τῶν νεωτέρων* (*History of the Greek Nation from the Ancient Times until the Present*), written between 1860 and 1874, to weave cultural and political, and domestic and foreign, threads into a comprehensive historical narrative. Paparrigopoulos’s work presented Greek history as a teleological succession of Hellenisms – Ancient/Classical, Macedonian, Christian and Medieval (Byzantine), and Neohellenism – asserting that the Byzantine state was essential in preserving the collective identity of the Greeks for a thousand years by keeping alive the Greek language and ethnicity.

Paparrigopoulos’s historical narrative effectively canonised Byzantium within Greek history. The Greek historian intimately referred to the empire as “our medieval kingdom”

and “our monarchy”, calling the emperors “our emperors” and “our medieval forefathers”. For him, Byzantium was more than just a historical period; it was the era when ancient paganism was replaced by Christianity, diverse dialects were unified into a single language, and various groups of people merged into a single nation. His efforts established the Byzantine Empire (before 1204) as an ideal model for the modern Greek state, setting the standards for unity and territorial expansion. By 1882, Paparrigopoulos’s historical framework was officially incorporated into the school curriculum, and Byzantium started to be appreciated for playing a fundamental role in preserving Greek nationality and for transmitting ancient Greek civilisation to its “barbarous neighbours”, all the while serving as a guide to Renaissance Europe. By the 1880s, the Hellenisation of Byzantium was almost complete. This incorporation into the string of national achievements liberated Greek history from the restrictive view of European, and indeed modern Greek, classicism. By hammering out the grand narrative of continuity in Greek history, Paparrigopoulos indelibly marked the most significant step in the development of national ideology in Greece throughout the whole nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

### Royal Past

Before it was fully recognised as part of the national past, Byzantium in Greece had been considered a part of royal history. When the young King Otto (r. 1832–62) arrived with his Bavarian entourage (1833), he encountered not only classical ruins and the material remnants of the imperial past, be it Byzantine or Ottoman, along with the living memory of the war of independence, but also collective memories concerning the long-gone Byzantine throne and popular myths and prophecies about its future reconstitution. The Byzantine Empire – with all its regnal splendour still alive in the attire, rites and liturgy of the Orthodox Church – was the only political past to which Otto was capable of laying claim to legitimate his rule. However, it could also be said that Otto and his court embraced the Byzantine vision on grounds of political calculation. Prophecies, legends and narratives about the Christian reconquest of Constantinople permeated the populace, boosting the popularity of the foreign monarch and his court. It is remarkable that when the young Otto came of age in 1835, his resolutely anti-Byzantine court decided to have him anointed in the manner of a Byzantine *Basileus*. The Byzantine “ancestral throne” and the irredentist vision of expanding Greece to all neighbouring lands where Greek-speaking populations lived, known as the *Megali Idea* (Great Idea), came to form the basis for the dynasty’s political legitimacy. Yet eventually, Otto’s despotic reign, his falling out of favour with the great powers, his stern Catholicism and, last but not least, the childlessness of his marriage, which ensured anything but a smooth dynastic succession, did converge, leading to his expulsion from Greece (1863).<sup>6</sup>

After Otto’s dethronement, a new dynasty began with King George I of Greece (r. 1863–1913) assuming the throne in 1864. Despite the change of monarch, the symbolic resources of Greek kingship remained the same: antiquity, the Greek Revolution and the Byzantine dynastic past. King George went on to marry the Russian (and thus Orthodox Christian) Princess Olga Constantinova (1851–1926), a member of the Romanov dynasty. To further connect with the feelings of his subjects, George chose the name “Constantine” for his firstborn son, thereby symbolically connecting the heir apparent to the first and last Byzantine emperors, Constantine the Great and Constantine XI Palaiologos. As the name itself had mystical associations with the Greek prophetic tradition promising the recapture

of Constantinople,<sup>7</sup> Prince Constantine (1868–1923) became the protagonist of messianic narratives resonating with large swathes of the people. As Otto had done before, George I gained wide popularity through regnal associations with Byzantium as well as through the Byzantine-oriented vision of the Great Idea. The vision faltered in 1897 when Greece lost the war with Turkey spectacularly, but it was forcefully revitalised during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. Under Prince Constantine’s leadership, the success of the Greek army and the considerable territorial expansion of Greece affirmed the long-cultivated associations of the Greek dynasty with the Byzantine past, which in turn came inevitably to be construed as a Greek royal past.<sup>8</sup>

### **Institutionalisation**

By the outbreak of WWI, the idea of uninterrupted Greek continuity, firmly supported by the organic intermediate of Byzantium, had become established. An increasing number of Greek intellectuals started to trace the origins of various Greek cultural and political institutions, customs and mentalities back to the Byzantine period. The latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of a new branch of study that was to take the lead in the quest for the nation’s temporal unity: *Λαογραφία* (Laographia, i.e. folklore studies; a Greek translation of the German equivalent *Volkskunde*) aimed to provide evidence of Byzantium’s contribution to the transmission of Greek popular culture from ancient to modern times. The task of demonstrating that ancient Greek myths and Byzantine legends had been encapsulated in Greek folksongs, folk tales, customs and traditions provided the framework and rationale for this philological discipline, which was founded in Greece by Nikolaos G. Politis (1852–1921) in 1909. Influenced as it were by Romantic nationalism,<sup>9</sup> Greek academic research shifted from the “high” forms of cultural creation and heritage to those of the “common people”, whose language, artefacts and “spirit” were seen as repositories of Greek national “authenticity”.

Scholarly interest in Byzantium, albeit focused mostly on history, linguistics and ethnography, began soon to expand into other disciplines like philosophy, literature, art history, theology and political thought. Byzantine motifs and appreciation for what Constantine P. Cavafy (1863–1933) would call “our glorious Byzantinism”, infiltrated poetry through figures like Costis Palamas (1859–1943) and Cavafy himself,<sup>10</sup> as well as novel-writing by authors such as Alexandros Moraitidis (1850–1929) and Penelope Delta (1874–1941). Both Moraitidis (who was also a playwright)<sup>11</sup> and Delta sought inspiration for their novels in Byzantium, treating it as an integral part of Greek history. Retaining contacts with Gustave Schlumberger (1844–1929) by virtue of her high-class family background, Delta proved very successful in popularising Byzantine history in her writings (mostly historical fiction for young readers), gaining immense popularity and thereby becoming the first female author to consolidate Greek public interest in the Byzantine past.<sup>12</sup>

Along with poets and writers, Greek historians and philologists started to explore and emphasise the ways in which Byzantine culture and history were interwoven with modern Greek society. The study of Byzantine art, literature and institutions became prominent, and there was a growing recognition of the Byzantine Empire’s role in shaping contemporary Greek thought and culture. The first decades of the twentieth century saw an increased interest in Byzantine studies, with the creation of new academic institutions dedicated to exploring the Byzantine legacy. In 1914, the Byzantine Museum of Athens was founded, while the Society of Byzantine Studies followed four years later (1918). Between 1911 and



1931, three Chairs focused on the eastern Roman Empire were established at the University of Athens: Byzantine Archaeology and Art (1911), Byzantine History (1924) and Public and Private Life in Byzantium (1931). Chairs related to Byzantine studies were also created in the faculties of law and theology. In this way, Byzantium emerged as a new field of education, research and national representation.

The institutionalisation of Byzantine studies in Greece reflected a broader cultural and intellectual shift in how Byzantium was perceived and integrated into Greek identity. Yet it also had practical implications, such as the preservation and restoration of Byzantine monuments and artefacts. State interest in Byzantine heritage was reflected in decrees that protected and promoted Byzantine churches and fortresses as archaeological monuments. Foreign archaeological missions, such as those of the British and the French, gradually undertook the study and excavation of Byzantine sites, drawing the attention of European scholars to Greece's medieval past. The French Archaeological School of Athens (EFA), for example, was the first to document Byzantine antiquities, and in the 1880s, prominent French Byzantinists like Charles Bayet (1849–1918) and Charles Diehl (1859–1944) published influential works on Byzantine art.<sup>13</sup> The institutional support further cemented the connection between Byzantium and modern Greece, ensuring the Greek nationalisation of Byzantine cultural heritage. As the director of the Byzantine Museum in Athens put it in the 1920s, “[...] the Christian objects of Greek art in the Byzantine Museum present the civilization of our Fathers, just as the archaeological Museum presents the civilization of our Ancestors”.<sup>14</sup>

After the catastrophic defeat of Greece in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–22 and the Asia Minor campaign, the Great Idea collapsed dramatically. Grief spread for the human losses – the mourning of loved ones who perished at the war front or during the uprooting of the vast majority of Greek-speaking populations from Asia Minor. It was in this light that Byzantine studies were organised as a modern academic discipline while Byzantine art became the reference point for artists of the so-called 1930s Generation, a loose but dynamic group of intellectuals and artists who set out to redefine “Greekness after the trauma inflicted by the Asia Minor Catastrophe”. Their focus was no longer on how the Byzantine millennium preserved ancient Greek traditions but more emphatically on how Byzantium created and contributed to a unique and enduring cultural heritage. Short of being taken as a custodian of ancient legacies, Byzantium during the Interbellum came to be considered a creator and source of heritage on par with ancient Greece, a cultural and historical force in its own right.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

The Byzantine past holds a significant place in Greek history and identity, following a process that evolved from the early nineteenth century through various phases of intellectual, cultural and political transformation. From the 1820s onwards, the Greek intelligentsia's view of Byzantium evolved from ambivalence to reverence, transitioning from a period that was largely dismissive in favour of classical antiquity to one in which Byzantium was integral to Greek national identity. Early on, Byzantine memories and related myths, such as the reconquest of Constantinople, remained powerful despite official narratives excluding them. Romantic intellectuals like Zambelios and Paparrigopoulos played a critical role in reshaping Greek historiography, integrating Byzantium into the national narrative and countering claims that questioned national continuity. This shift was institutionalised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through academic disciplines and cultural appreciation of Byzantine history, literature and art. The Greek monarchy also leveraged

Byzantine symbols to legitimise its rule and promote the Great Idea of Greece’s territorial expansion. By the early twentieth century, the notion of uninterrupted Greek continuity, accentuated by Byzantium’s contribution, was firmly established, with Byzantine studies becoming a prominent academic field. This institutional and cultural recognition ensured that Byzantium was a critical force in shaping modern Greek identity.

### Notes

- 1 For example, see [Hatzopoulos 2013](#): 221–5.
- 2 Greece emerged as an independent state with the London Protocol of 1830 after a nine-year war (1821–29) that terminated Ottoman rule. In 1832, it became a kingdom under the Bavarian prince (later king) Otto.
- 3 On this, see [Hatzopoulos 2011](#); [Hatzopoulos 2020](#).
- 4 [Hatzopoulos 2013](#).
- 5 [Mishkova 2023](#): 42–54; [Stamatopoulos 2022](#): 34–50; cf. also, [Sykora 2018](#): 474–5; [Koubourlis 2018](#): 596–7; [Kitromilides 1998](#): 29.
- 6 [Hatzopoulos 2016](#): 145–7; [Koulouri 2023](#): 217–8.
- 7 On the prophetic associations of the name “Constantine” and its political use by the Greek crown, see in particular [Hatzopoulos 2014](#); also, [Koulouri 2023](#): 215–22.
- 8 [Hatzopoulos 2014](#); [Koulouri 2023](#): 219–20.
- 9 On the course of Romanticism in Greece and its interplay with nationalism, see [Leerssen 2018](#): 1022–48. Also available digitally <https://ernie.uva.nl/viewer.p/21/56>
- 10 [Hirst 1998](#).
- 11 [Vassileiou 2015](#).
- 12 [Spanaki 1998](#).
- 13 [Koulouri 2023](#): 227, n. 89.
- 14 Cited in [Koulouri 2023](#): 208.
- 15 [Mishkova 2023](#): 85, 87, 91, 125–7; [Koulouri 2023](#): 208–9, 222, 381–3.

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# 12

## BYZANTIUM AND ITS CONTESTED HERITAGE IN MODERN TÜRKİYE

*Ufuk Serin*

*In loving memory of my mother  
Semiramis İnanç Serin*

“What is Byzantium? Seemingly one of the simplest and most basic of questions is also one of the very hardest”. Thus, historian Averil Cameron conveyed the hazy notion of Byzantium with these words in her inaugural lecture on *The Use and Abuse of Byzantium* at King’s College, London, in 1990.<sup>1</sup> Decades later, this ideologically sensitive matter, confounded with prejudices and negative connotations, still awaits a comprehensive treatment in contemporary Turkish society – one of the heirs to Byzantium’s rich legacy in the heartlands of the eastern Roman Empire.

The eastern Roman Empire, also known as the Byzantine Empire, which endured for over a millennium (330–1453), was the longest-lasting and most recent political entity occupying Asia Minor and Thrace before – and, in some regions, alongside – the arrival of the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century. Seljuk and, later, Ottoman states, comprising different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, coexisted with Byzantium on the Anatolian Peninsula, in the heartlands of what is now modern Türkiye, for centuries. Their interaction produced not only conflicts and troubles but also cultural affinities in art and architecture, and in customs and traditions too.<sup>2</sup> The positive aspects of this cultural interplay are rarely valued, and Byzantium remains poorly appreciated in Turkish society. This is not surprising, given that interpretations of the past are influenced by “cultural and national agendas”, just as in eastern and western Europe.

Multiple motivating factors (ethnic, historical, cultural, educational, psychological, ideological/political and economic) determine the “selection” or “exclusion” of specific facets of the past, consequently affecting the processes governing historical preservation. The close relationships between nationalism, cultural identity, political priorities and the practices around archaeology and heritage have been investigated in an extensive literature at both national and international levels. Against this backdrop, different approaches to heritage preservation can be observed in Türkiye, particularly since the enactment of Law No. 2863 of 1983 on the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Properties, which

established the principal legal framework for conservation. Some of these aim at demonstrating cultural and historical continuity; some place emphasis on selected tangible and/or intangible “values” (e.g. aesthetic, architectural, historic, cultural, national, religious, symbolic) within the nation’s heritage; while others view historic preservation from an economic perspective, particularly in relation to tourism. Some politicians have regarded such processes as ways of building national identity, but the ideology of nationalism is selective, often failing to embrace the complete history of a nation. Practical factors (e.g. the physical condition of buildings and their potential for adaptive reuse) have also played a role. Safeguarding cultural and historical continuity has often been a prevailing concern in Türkiye, although without any clear-cut national policy. Limited financial resources for heritage preservation, compounded by the shifting political priorities of national and local administrations, hamper attempts to establish sustainable conservation policies.

Space prevents a comprehensive review of these myriad issues here. Neither can this short chapter cover all the facets of Turkish/Byzantine and Islamic/Christian encounters in those long Seljuk and Ottoman centuries. Acknowledging that the Byzantine past has never been neutral in Türkiye, this contribution highlights the fundamental challenges (cultural, educational and ideological) affecting the understanding of Byzantium – often marginalised and/or used as a tool in political manoeuvres – and thus the protection of its heritage.<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of Byzantium and the status of the Byzantine legacy in Türkiye can be better comprehended within the framework of the motivations and ideologies that prompted the development of archaeology in general.<sup>4</sup> The beginnings of archaeological practice in this regard can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, part of the “modernisation” or “westernisation” occurring in the late Ottoman Empire.<sup>5</sup> Unlike contemporary western European societies, however, the emergence of archaeology in the Ottoman Empire was not explicitly linked to nationalist ideologies. The notable expansion of the arts and archaeology during this period was nonetheless closely associated with the development of museology.<sup>6</sup>

It was Sultan Mehmed II, the Conqueror (r. 1444–46; 1451–81), in fact who first acquired Byzantine sarcophagi discovered at the Fatih Mosque, opened in 1470, constructed on the site of the now lost church of the Holy Apostles (fourth century). He also gathered architectural fragments and reliefs scattered throughout the Hippodrome (today’s Sultanahmet Square), relocating them to the courtyard of the Topkapı Palace, and thereby founding the Topkapı Palace Museum, formally established in 1934.<sup>7</sup> In 1869, the Ottoman Imperial Museum (now Istanbul Archaeology Museums) was founded. The Museum grew out of the first collection of antiquities, which had been housed in the church of Hagia Irene in 1846. The assets of this small church-museum, which had served as an armoury since the sixteenth century, mainly included Greek, Roman and Byzantine antiquities. Among these, the Byzantine period was particularly well-represented, featuring a variety of objects, including a collection of Byzantine bricks bearing imperial monograms.<sup>8</sup> However, influenced by the collection and display preferences of western Europe, which did not prioritise Byzantium, most antiquities housed in the Istanbul Archaeology Museums, and others established in the following decades in major cities, consisted of primarily Hellenistic and Roman artefacts, with Byzantine objects being represented to a lesser extent.<sup>9</sup> A similar strategy underpinned the selection of sites for excavation, which were almost exclusively focused on the Hellenistic and Roman periods and conducted by foreign missions.<sup>10</sup> In the later nineteenth century, the export of antiquities was prohibited and the first legal regulations for their protection (*Asar-ı Atika Nizamnameleri* – Regulation on Antiquities, in four revised versions between 1869 and 1906) were drafted

by Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910), the then-Director of the Ottoman Imperial Museum and a leading figure of Turkish archaeology.<sup>11</sup>

The serious advancement of archaeology as a scientific field can be credited to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Türkiye (1881–1938). Atatürk's primary objective for his new secular Republic of 1923 was to emphasise Turkish identity. As Anatolia was the homeland of the Turks, it followed that the material culture of preceding civilisations in this region needed to be embraced as part of the national legacy. No explicit selection or exclusion of specific areas of the past existed in this comprehensive notion of national and cultural identity. In a telegram from Konya to the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü (1884–1973) on 22 March 1931, Atatürk wrote:

In forthcoming years, emphasis should be placed on the discovery, scientific preservation and classification of those works of ancient civilizations that are spread over almost all of our country. Much more attention should be paid to the protection of those monuments which were negligently abandoned, and, accordingly, many more students should be encouraged to take up archaeology.<sup>12</sup>

Despite his inclusive attitude, archaeological pursuits during the early Republic (1920–50) were primarily focused on the Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures of Anatolia, particularly the Sumerian and Hittite civilisations, among the earliest inhabitants of the region. This was influenced by an ethno-historical theory known as the Turkish History Thesis (*Türk Tarih Tezi*), which sought to establish a connection between the origins of the Turks and the earliest settlers of Anatolia. The ideologies and motivations underlying the formulation of the Turkish History Thesis, which produced an extensive corpus of literature, are complex and cannot be disentangled here. The ideological motivations behind this approach to archaeology and the past, based on Atatürk's vision that all Anatolian civilisations were national, regardless of their ethnic origins, have persisted somewhat up to the present. Although the ideologies of nationalism and Islam, collectively known as the “Turco-Islamic Synthesis”, have prioritised Turkish and Islamic heritage, no archaeological research and excavations at pre-Islamic/pre-Turkic sites appear to have been adversely affected, with a growing number of surveys and excavations, focusing on Byzantine strata, especially in recent decades (Figure 12.1).<sup>13</sup>

In this wider context, the status of the Byzantine past within the processes of nation building in the early Republican period remained ambiguous. Approaches towards classical antiquity were equally, and understandably, ambivalent (and manifold), affected by the association of the ancient Greek and Byzantine legacies with the “historical Greek-Turkish enmity” – the result of several conflicts that arose during the establishment of the two nation states, Greece and Türkiye, in 1830 and 1923, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Even so, a major restoration project in Republican Istanbul included the repair of Hagia Sophia's dome.<sup>15</sup> The first Turkish excavation of a Byzantine building (Balaban Ağa Mescidi – a Byzantine structure of indeterminate date, converted to a mosque in Ottoman times and demolished in 1930) also occurred in this period.

The most prevalent among the shifting attitudes towards the past, ranging from full ownership to assimilation, acculturation or regional pride,<sup>16</sup> is revealed in a circular of the Ministry of Education in the mid-1930s. This document – “How to Benefit from Antiquities and Historical Assets in School Curricula” – maintains that “all historical/cultural properties in Türkiye are Turkish no matter how these are referred to: Hittite, Phrygian,



*Figure 12.1* Map of modern Türkiye showing sites of survey and excavation with Byzantine levels and remains (1980–2020). © Image produced by the author and Can Özmen.



Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman ... It is the duty of the Turks to recognize and protect these ancestral works".<sup>17</sup> Similarly, maintaining Byzantine structures was justified in both authoritative and scholarly discourses because their survival thanks to Turkish repairs and alterations actually made them "more Turkish than Byzantine".<sup>18</sup> Clearly, material remains of the Byzantine (as with the classical and Ottoman) past were neither embraced nor discarded *en bloc* in the early Republican period.

In 1950, the single-party regime of the early Republican period came to an end, and the conservative Democrat Party (DP) assumed power. The DP not only mobilised Islam as a means of consolidating power in opposition to Kemalist ideology but also introduced new agendas in planning and "urban development". This was the beginning of a new era detrimental to cultural heritage regardless of period, especially in Istanbul as historical buildings from all eras were destroyed to make way for broad boulevards and similar urban infrastructure works.<sup>19</sup>

Despite modern Türkiye's broad reconciliation to its classical and Ottoman pasts, the status of the Byzantine legacy still remains controversial.<sup>20</sup> Some scholars argue that "Byzantine cultural heritage has persistently been rejected mainly on ideological and educational grounds",<sup>21</sup> while others assume there has been no such intolerance or discrimination.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, such scholarly discussions on challenges in Byzantine studies regularly involve art history, history and archaeology, but heritage professionals often remain marginal voices in these debates. This is not surprising as some major public universities, self-acclaimed "leaders" in historical preservation, have been reluctant to give the rich legacy of Byzantium equal footing in their cultural heritage programmes alongside Seljuk, Ottoman and, to a degree, classical and modern heritage. However engendered, this negligence which affects undergraduate and graduate programmes is even more damaging in formal school education, which is fundamental for learning about the past and constructing meaning from it. School curricula are seldom neutral but embrace "selected knowledge" stemming from socio-cultural, religious and political dynamics. While the "excluded past" in education is widespread, particularly in relation to curricula for the humanities, the bias continues to operate, causing the use and abuse of the past as the public also receives it through other channels such as print, television and social media.<sup>23</sup>

Research by the Economic and Social History Foundation of Türkiye (established in 1991) indicates that prehistoric, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine times are only sketchily covered in history textbooks.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the prevailing tendency in teaching history is to instruct through a didactic narrative of historical events, unlinked to heritage resources. Accordingly, and astoundingly, even recent Republican history and the past closely associated with Turkish-Islamic identity (i.e. Seljuk and Ottoman) fail to be taught so as to increase awareness of cultural heritage in younger generations. An overview of history textbooks from the early Republican period to the present also shows that the little space allotted to the Byzantine civilisation is replete with negative attributes. The conquest of Constantinople/Istanbul by the Turks (*Fetih*) is detailed (Figure 12.2) regularly, for example, and the Turkish-Islamic identity emphasised. From 1980 onwards, following the military *coup* of that year, the school curriculum has become exceptionally ethnocentric and nationalist. Pejorative expressions towards Byzantium commonly associated with conspiracy, treachery and intrigue prevail, with Hagia Sophia seen as embodying only negative attributes associated with Byzantine society.<sup>25</sup> Another comparative study of the textbooks of both Türkiye and Greece from the same period similarly indicates the lack of any positive reference to the "Other".<sup>26</sup> Unsurprisingly, antagonistic representations of Byzantium



Figure 12.2 Istanbul, Panorama 1453 History Museum, scene from 360-degree audiovisual representation of the conquest of Constantinople/Istanbul by the Turks (Fetih), c. 2009, photograph © The author (2023).

frequently dominate popular literature, films, social and other media. This only exacerbates the general tendency in society to associate Byzantium with the enduring Greek–Turkish controversy, upon which the discourse of “Self” and “Other” was, reciprocally, established.<sup>27</sup>

Predictably, with the rise of ethnocentric and Islamist tendencies, especially following the electoral victory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, the most emblematic monuments of Byzantium have been increasingly regarded as ideological battlegrounds and used as tools for political polarisation. The Byzantine past of these structures continues in some circles to be framed as a threatening extension of Orthodox Christianity. A telling example is the statement by the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), prior to the reconversion of Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia into a mosque in 2020: “Not the sound of church bells, but the call to prayer will rise”, despite the fact that the building has not functioned as a church since the conquest of the city in 1453 and its subsequent conversion into a Muslim place of worship.<sup>28</sup>

In this context, the controversial “conservation” history of the four Hagia Sophias in Constantinople/Istanbul, Nicaea/Iznik, Trebizond/Trabzon and Bizye/Vize – among Türkiye’s nine Hagia Sophias in total – warrants particular attention.<sup>29</sup> The last, in ancient Bizye – a relatively remote location in Turkish Thrace – was the first to be reconverted into a mosque in modern times (2007), without receiving much public attention. Those

at Iznik and Trabzon shared a similar fate in 2011 and 2013, respectively, after having functioned as museums for decades.<sup>30</sup> One of the most recent and the most disputed transformations involves Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, the cathedral of Orthodox Christianity and a World Heritage Site since 1985, reconverted into a mosque by a Presidential Decree on 10 July 2020, after years of political debate and public reaction.<sup>31</sup> These events were followed by the reconversion of the church of the Holy Saviour in Chora in Istanbul into the Kariye Mosque in 2020,<sup>32</sup> and the reopening of the Hagia Sophia in Enez, Edirne, as the Fatih Mosque in 2021.

Surviving Byzantine churches, as well as later Orthodox ecclesiastical buildings, are suitable for both ideological and pragmatic reasons for either transformation into places of worship (mosques) or adaptation for cultural purposes. Symbolically important buildings like the Hagia Sophias aside, most churches in Istanbul and elsewhere have been turned into mosques or museums, or successively both. Alternatively, they are abandoned and eventually vanish (e.g. the church of St Clement in Ankara or the Koimesis in Iznik, among many others) (Figure 12.3). The reuse of historic buildings, especially religious ones now separated from their original cultural context and core communities, abets their conservation and endurance. Yet, these transformations inevitably require physical and spatial interventions to serve their new functions; whether intentional or not, this alters their original attributes and prevents visitors from appreciating their original architectural and artistic qualities (Figure 12.4).

With the Hagia Sophias, some argue that extensive restorations by Turkish authorities are designed to diminish their "recognition value" as symbols of the Orthodox Byzantine past. Such interventions are often legitimised through appeals to the protection of religious freedom and assertions of ownership over pious endowments – arguments that, paradoxically, are not applied with equal consistency to non-Muslim places of worship.<sup>33</sup> However, it would be fair to note that Seljuk and Ottoman monuments alike have suffered from inappropriate "conservation" treatments or demolition, along with the early Republican heritage which is now also under fire. The reconversion of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, functioning as a *museum* since 1934 upon the request of Atatürk, also needs to be evaluated in the framework of an ideological encounter between Islam and Kemalism, the very ideology that paved the way for the secularisation of the building in the first place.<sup>34</sup> Presented by Turkish political and religious authorities as a "return to its origins" – namely, to its role as a mosque rather than a church – this move was simultaneously framed as a symbolic reconquest of Hagia Sophia, long regarded as an emblem of opposition to Kemalism and secularism.<sup>35</sup> It is no coincidence that the public opening ceremony of the reconverted mosque occurred on 24 July: the very day the Lausanne Treaty, defining the borders of modern Türkiye, was signed by the Allied Forces and the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, shortly before the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923.

A balanced approach towards heritage amidst the overwhelmingly complex cultural and ideological challenges detailed briefly here could be sought in the relationship of a "heritage resource" to time and history (*tempo storico*). This relationship, as art critic and specialist in conservation theory, Cesare Brandi avers in his *Theory of Restoration*, can be investigated from a phenomenological rather than a formal perspective in three distinct phases of time: the first is the "creation" of the object (heritage resource); the second extends from the end of its creation to the present; the third relates to how the object is perceived by the present viewer.<sup>36</sup> This sequence of phases forms the "historical time": a "product of specific cultural, social and political conditions that contributed to the creation and development of



*Figure 12.3* Ankara, fragmentary remains of the now lost church of St Clement squeezed in between modern constructions, 2009, photograph © The author (2009).



Figure 12.4 Trabzon, Hagia Sophia, interior, covers hiding the wall paintings on the drum of the cupola (left); Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, interior, screens hiding the mosaics over the apse (right), 2025, photograph © The author (2025).

the heritage resource”.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, “authenticity”, a fundamental concept in assessing cultural heritage, needs to be understood “in relation to both original and subsequent characteristics of heritage resources and their meaning as accumulated over time”.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately, the Byzantine heritage, like any other, needs to be recognised and protected as an original product of its time, including modifications and meanings acquired over time. Seen as such, heritage is no longer a set of relics frozen between the past and present; it is a continuing and active cultural and social process, creative and inescapably didactic.<sup>39</sup> Such a definition of heritage, as the 1994 *Nara Document on Authenticity* emphasises, demands tolerance and respect for both heritage resources and their current cultural contexts.<sup>40</sup>

This wider understanding of heritage, sometimes walking a delicate line between heritage objects, with their original attributes, and their contemporary cultural contexts, cannot in any way justify a deliberate distortion of the past to suit prevailing political choices. How we define “heritage” and how and why we transform the past is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, as historian David Lowenthal opines:

Preserving things inevitably transforms them, often in unintended and undesired ways ... Present choices vitally affect how the past is experienced ... However ill-informed our responses, they [locales and relics] bespeak our concern with what has been. All knowledge of the past requires caring about it – feeling pleasure or disgust, awe or disdain, hope or despair about its legacies.

Accepting that no interpretation of the past can be purely neutral and free of judgement, it seems appropriate to conclude that “*informed* tolerance toward our legacy [on the part of both policymakers and society at large] is a necessary condition of enhancing the present and enabling the future”.<sup>41</sup>



## Notes

- 1 Cameron 1992: 24.
- 2 Recall the inspirational nature of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia and the royal architect Sinan's ambition to create an architectural masterpiece surpassing it, finally accomplished in the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne. For the eighteenth-century Ottoman narrative on this mosque (*Selimiye Risalesi*), see Morkoç 2010: 313–4.
- 3 For an expanded version of the present chapter, see Serin 2024.
- 4 Serin 2008: 217–9, with earlier bibliography.
- 5 Özdoğan 1998: 112.
- 6 Özdoğan 1999: 195.
- 7 Shaw 2003, with bibliography.
- 8 Dumont 1868: 255–63; Eldem 2021: 261.
- 9 For a discussion of Western European influences on the formation of museum collections in the Ottoman Empire, see Eldem 2022.
- 10 Özdoğan 1998: 115, 1999: 195; Eldem 2021: 269.
- 11 Madran 1996: 60–1; Özdoğan 1998: 115.
- 12 Published in *Türk Tarih Arkeologya ve Etnografya Dergisi* 1 (1933): 3. English translation is by the author: Serin 2008: 218.
- 13 Özdoğan 1999: 196–7.
- 14 Redford and Ergin 2010: 13–33. On reciprocal perceptions of Greco-Turkish conflict, see Millas 2009.
- 15 Altınyıldız 2007: 288, 290.
- 16 Redford and Ergin 2010: 29.
- 17 “Antikiteiler ve Tarihi Eserlerden Derslerde Nasıl İstifade Edileceği Hakkında Andıç”: Madran 1996: 74 (with the circular's full text and bibliography).
- 18 Altınyıldız 2007: 292.
- 19 Altınyıldız 2007: 296.
- 20 For the trajectory of Byzantine studies in Türkiye, see Akyürek and Özkılıç 2024; Durak 2023.
- 21 Durak and Vasilakeris 2013: 76–7.
- 22 Özdoğan 1998: 116–7, 1999: 196–7, 202; Redford and Ergin 2010: 206, 218.
- 23 Kaya et al. n.d.: 161.
- 24 Kaya et al. n.d.: 162–3.
- 25 Kaya et al. n.d.: 161; Durak and Vasilakeris 2013: 82.
- 26 Millas 2009: 98–9.
- 27 Millas 2009: 96; Eldem 2015: 82–3.
- 28 “Bahçeli'den Ayasofya açıklaması: Çan sesi değil, ezan sesi yükselecektir”, *Sözcü Gazetesi*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/bahceliden-flas-ayasofya-aciklamasi-5862245/> (accessed 20 March, 2023).
- 29 Aykaç 2018.
- 30 For public reaction on Trabzon's Hagia Sophia, see Don't Touch My Museum Platform: “Ben Trabzon Ayasofya'sı”, Müzeme Dokunma Platformu, <http://trabzonvakfi.org.tr/ayasofya/> (accessed 6 May, 2023).
- 31 For the Presidential Decree no. 2729: *T.C. Resmi Gazete (Official Gazette)*, 10.07.2021/31181. On the long-lasting debate on Hagia Sophia and its symbolic importance: Azak 2022; Eldem 2015.
- 32 The Chora Church was reconverted by Presidential Decree on 21 August 2020 (*T.C. Resmi Gazete*, 21.08.2020/31220), but remained closed until 2024 after the interventions undertaken to conceal the building's interior decoration in preparation for its reopening as a mosque provoked widespread criticism and controversy: “Beyaz perdeler tepki çekti, Kariye Camii'nin açılışı ertelendi”, *Serbestiyet*, 29 October 2020, <https://serbestiyet.com/featured/beyaz-perdeler-tepki-cekti-kariye-camiininin-acilisi-ertelendi-43983/> (accessed 10 May, 2026).
- 33 Aykaç 2018: 170–2.
- 34 Eldem 2015: 77, 85.
- 35 For the statement of President Erdoğan, see Anadolu Ajansı, “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Ayasofya'yı aslına rücu ettiririz”, 28 March 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ayasofyayi-aslina-rucu-ettiririz/1430912#> (accessed 1 January, 2026).

- 36 Brandi 1963: 49.  
37 Feilden and Jokilehto 1998: 16.  
38 UNESCO 2025. 30–1.  
39 For an exploration of the notion of heritage, see, among others, Smith 2006.  
40 Building upon the Charter of Venice (1964), the Nara Document on Authenticity aimed to address expanding concerns of heritage preservation and establish greater respect for cultural heritage diversity in conservation practice: ICOMOS 1994; UNESCO 2025.  
41 Lowenthal 2015: 20, 22.

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# ADDING THE BYZANTINE ELEMENT

## Byzantium and Nation-State Building in Bulgaria

*Diana Mishkova*

Since the Enlightenment, interpretations of the relations with and the impact of Byzantium have stood at the heart of the Bulgarian historical narrative. These interpretations emerged simultaneously and were closely linked with interest in the medieval precursors of the modern Bulgarian nation-state, itself precipitated by projects of national awakening and modern state-building across Europe and the Ottoman realm. For seven centuries the medieval Bulgarian *ethnos*, statehood and culture were formed in constant close interaction and recurrent political confrontation with the Byzantine Empire. Predictably, therefore, medieval Bulgarian culture and much of modern Bulgarian identity – religion, literary heritage, art, state and historical traditions – bear imprints of these entanglements with Byzantium. As such, the latter's role and influence were deployed politically and ideologically in national-historical narratives in Bulgaria, and the perception of Byzantium was determined by a stringently national point of view.

This case study explores the interpretations of the impact of Byzantium in the making of Bulgarian national identity as they emerged in modern Bulgarian history writing. It surveys the images, perceptions and understandings this field has cultivated during the last two and a half centuries. Far from revealing an overarching agreed narrative about the past, these modern representations of Byzantium demonstrate contestations and tensions amongst themselves amid the backdrop of, and in conjunction with, changing political, geopolitical and social contexts. This chapter, therefore, presents “Byzantium” as a historiographical construct that has held considerable ideological potency in shaping Bulgarian national history and identity.

Significantly, the Bulgarian national movement in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was directed not only against the Ottomans as political masters but also against the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the high clergy, who were either (linguistically) Greek or Hellenised, adopting a Greek identity despite their different ethnic origin. To the Ecumenical Patriarchate's position as an integral part of the Ottoman system of administration was added, in the age of nationalism, its imputed “Greek” character.<sup>1</sup> The Bulgarian national “Revival” began largely as a reaction against “Hellenism” and evolved into a struggle against the “Greek” Church and cultural assimilation. The notion of the

“double yoke” – political (Turkish) and spiritual (Greek) – became a common trope in the mobilisation for a national crusade.

In his *Slavobulgarian History* (1762), the monk Paisius of Hilendar (1722–73), later hailed as the first Bulgarian national “awakener”, reproduced the medieval Slavic and Latin convention of using “Greeks” as a synonym for the Romans (*Romei*, i.e. “Byzantines”), but he gave it a national meaning that it originally lacked. This re-signification was instrumental in mobilising Bulgarian resentment towards contemporary Greeks by pointing to the age-old confrontation between the two nations. The anxieties of the present provided a view on the past: the cultural (and political) role of the “Greek Church” was identified with that of Byzantium, and the ongoing nationalist strife with the Greeks was seen as the legacy or the extension of the confrontation between the medieval Bulgarian state and the eastern Roman Empire.

Paisius’s rather simplistic and crude representation supplied the matrix for subsequent historical accounts. In its fundamentals, especially in portraying Byzantium as the eternal nemesis of the Bulgarians, it proved remarkably stable. The next, Romantic, period in Bulgarian historiography (peaking from the 1830s to 1870s but with strong echoes in the twentieth century), tasked with delimiting the Bulgarians’ past and defining their identity, would add new aspects without changing the overall perception. Byzantium was no longer portrayed as merely the political rival and oppressor of the Bulgarians. Byzantium and its cultural influence, Byzantine Orthodoxy included, were now held responsible for having corrupted the Bulgarian national character and caused deep clefts in Bulgarian society, between the ruling elite and the “simple ploughmen” who were said to have preserved “the almost primeval innocent nature of the old life”.<sup>2</sup> This thesis concerning the split between the elite and the people as a result of the former’s “Byzantinisation” occupied a key place in the emerging historical narrative and proved to have a long future.

Overall, by the second half of the nineteenth century, an openly hostile image of Byzantium was firmly in place. The modern Greeks’ imperious appropriation of the empire’s cultural legacy and their insistence on the medieval roots of the “Great Idea”<sup>3</sup> reinforced Bulgarian writers’ rejection of all things Byzantine, which the general deprecation of the eastern Roman Empire in Enlightenment thought had spurred.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to state that the Bulgarian national-historical narrative, with its strong grounding in the medieval era, was largely forged against the backdrop of and in response to the Greeks’ Hellenisation of Byzantium. Bulgarian identification of the Byzantines with the Greeks (and occasionally also the Turks) facilitated the transfer of unpleasant qualities from one group to the other, but it also prevented nineteenth-century Bulgarians from capitalising on the benefits they had reaped from having been part of the Byzantine ecumene.<sup>4</sup> For the Bulgarian national narrative, Byzantium’s ethnic and cultural “strangeness” was instrumental: it made it possible simultaneously to present the medieval confrontation with the empire as nationally propelled and to justify contemporary resistance against the “de-nationalising” policies of the Greek state and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Bulgaria, the most heavily Byzantinised Balkan country, ended up as the fiercest detractor of Byzantium.

The subsequent positivist paradigm shift in Bulgarian historiography did not subvert the key notions pervading Romantic history writing. It is striking to see how much Vasil N. Zlatarski (1866–1935), the most prominent Bulgarian medievalist and the embodiment of the “critical (scientific) school” in historiography at the beginning of the twentieth century, had inherited from the national-Romantic construal of Byzantium. For Zlatarski,

the political ascendancy, prosperity and cultural flourishing of the medieval Bulgarian state were possible only during periods free of Byzantine influence. Conversely, Bulgaria's decline and ultimate demise with the fall to the Turks in 1393 became inevitable once its doors were open to the pernicious power of Byzantinism. Byzantine influence was perceived to have contaminated only the court and the boyars, however, while "the people always stayed away from it; [the people] were always hostile to it and upheld their [national] ideal".<sup>5</sup> This interpretation of Bulgarian history and Byzantium's role in it, which Zlatarski consolidated using the techniques of professional history, remained remarkably stable all the way from the 1890s through the wartime years to the radically altered political and intellectual context after WWI. But it also reveals a deep ambivalence, almost a schism, between two largely incompatible images of the Bulgarian medieval past – the political and cultural prominence of the first (681–1018) and second (1185–1396) Bulgarian kingdoms and their imputed "anti-national", "Byzantine" character. The Bulgarian case perhaps best exemplifies the inherent and insurmountable problems of building a national narrative out of imperial material.

The post-WWI period was a traumatic one for Bulgarians, who regarded themselves as the great losers in the geopolitical order established after the Second Balkan War and WWI, which buried the dream of a "Greater Bulgaria". Combined with the post-war social and political crisis, this feeling spurred a painstaking search for the roots of the disaster and a remedy for the social and political disruption. The past tendency to engage with Byzantine history almost exclusively for the sake of illuminating certain aspects of national history continued to predominate, most notably in the works of Peter Mutaſchiev (1883–1943), the pre-eminent Bulgarian historian and Byzantinist of the first half of the twentieth century.

On the one hand, Mutaſchiev endeavoured to rectify the distorted image of Byzantium bequeathed by the Bulgarian national revival with the intention of demonstrating the formidable enemy that medieval Bulgaria had to confront and co-exist with. His rehabilitation of Byzantium, conducted with insight and erudition, encompassed almost every aspect of its millennial existence: its political arrangement and *raison d'état*, its cultural and religious pre-eminence and its economic, financial and military power.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, he took pains "to dispel the widely held delusion that Byzantium had *always* been a Greek empire" and to provide access for the Balkan and near-Eastern "non-Greeks" to the symbolic capital of the empire and its legacy:

If claims to the Byzantine heritage can be raised today ... this heritage belongs not so much to the present-day Greeks, whose ancestors were a small minority, as to the various other peoples who then inhabited it and who still live in its former lands ... The peoples alien to Graecism cemented [the Eastern empire] with their blood and propped it up with their swords and with the creative genius of their best sons.<sup>7</sup>

Mutaſchiev's reading of the constitution of Byzantium signals a clear break with the national-Romantic tradition in Bulgarian historiography. At the same time, his evaluation, as a national historian, of the empire's impact on the "historical life of the Bulgarians" evidences considerable continuity with revolutionary Romanticism and post-Romantic "critical historicism". Mutaſchiev took one big step further in this direction in that he transformed Byzantium into the evil demiurge of all Bulgarian history. In an essay entitled "Towards the Philosophy of Bulgarian History", and subtitled "Byzantinism in Medieval

Bulgaria”, he sought to explain what he defined as the “abnormal” dynamism of Bulgarian history, marked by “abrupt turns of might and weakness, unexpected rises and rapid falls”.<sup>8</sup> Because of their proximity to Byzantium, the “self-preservation” of the Bulgarians and their desire to protect their state consigned them to constant conflict with the empire. In this conflict “the Bulgarian political and spiritual leaders were forced to borrow *deliberately* from [Byzantium] everything to which, according to their understanding, it owed its superiority”. The growing political rivalry thus led to increasing political and cultural imitation. This process pushed the country onto an unnatural, inorganic path of development, eliminating the possibility of creating anything healthy and durable.

So, while extolling the cultural and political grandeur of Byzantium, Mutařchiev at the same time bemoaned its ruinous impact on the Bulgarians as “a foreign culture” whose spread “had left behind only depravity or ruins”. Byzantium thus appeared as the perennial *Other* to the Bulgarians, who had set the pattern and mapped the chequered trajectory of their later development. Following a long-standing historiographic tradition, Mutařchiev projected the cultural and political dilemmas of Bulgaria’s modern development, especially those emanating from its “inorganic” westernisation, onto the country’s medieval past. On various occasions Mutařchiev drew analogies between the fate of the first two (medieval) kingdoms and that of the third (modern) one (1878–1946).<sup>9</sup> In this narrative, the role of Byzantium in Bulgaria’s Middle Ages prefigured that of the contemporary West in the country’s modern history, in that it had engendered a tragic split in the nation’s social body and “psyche” and launched a long-term historical process of inorganic imitation and denationalisation. Byzantium, in this sense, appeared to the Bulgarians to be the original “West”.

Later academic literature, especially after WWII, would revise and mitigate Mutařchiev’s portrayal of Byzantium as the evil protagonist within Bulgarian history. However, his “historical-philosophical” interpretation would continue to exert a strong influence both on the popular perception of the empire as the archenemy and cultural *Other* of the Bulgarians – a perception standardised in the teaching of history both in schools and universities – and on a wide range of academic and quasi-academic literature debating the Bulgarian *Sonderweg* or national character.

During the initial, Stalinist, post-war period, Bulgarian bourgeois historians, including the two leading pre-war medievalists Zlatarski and Mutařchiev, came under attack.<sup>10</sup> Monistic Marxist-Leninist reductionism, embellished with extravagant distortions, provided the scaffold for the new national narrative as we see it enshrined in the two- (later three-) volume *History of Bulgaria* (1954) – an intriguing example fusing neo-Romantic, anti-Byzantine sentiment, Marxist-Leninist scholasticism and outright falsifications.<sup>11</sup> Any Byzantine influence on the course of Bulgarian medieval history, other than the wars waged against its retrograde rule, was ruled out of the new master narrative. Simultaneously, the supremacy of the Slavic element in terms of population numbers, state-building capacity and socio-economic progressiveness was inordinately magnified.

Characteristic of this period was the assertion, assiduously elaborated by Dimitar Angelov (1917–96), the foremost Bulgarian Byzantinist during the second half of the twentieth century, that, as a feudal society, medieval Bulgaria developed ahead of Byzantium. It could not have “borrowed” or imitated Byzantine feudalism (as Mutařchiev thought), since its evolution was driven by intrinsic dynamics and only later did Byzantium, under Slavic pressure, catch up with it.<sup>12</sup> Assertions of this kind combined exaltation of the Slav’s innate democratism, progressiveness and love for freedom; dislike for the (non-Slavic) “upper

classes” and all sorts of elite (especially religious); presumption of relentless class struggle; and the anti-Byzantinism bequeathed by a lengthy line of historians from the nineteenth-century Romantics down to Mutaſchiev. Some medievalists, and Angelov himself, were nevertheless careful to distance themselves from those who considered Byzantinisation as a totally harmful phenomenon, ignoring the “positive and progressive” aspects of the Bulgarians’ proximity to the superior Byzantine culture and civilisation.

In the late 1970s, when the nationalist drift in Bulgarian history writing was already in full swing, Bulgarian historians made a more rigorous attempt at emancipating Bulgarian medieval history from the impact of Byzantium by highlighting its locally modulated adaptations. If the influence of Byzantium grew and could be borne, the argument went, it was because Bulgarian society had already been mature enough to accept and assimilate it. Rather than political and cultural subservience and deformation, as Zlatarski and Mutaſchiev had postulated, proximity to Byzantium allowed for the possibility, and indeed the advantages, of an osmosis between two dissimilar but equally developed feudal societies, marked not by the unilateral influence of a more developed culture on a less developed one but by a two-way interaction between societies at the same level of development. Assumed developmental synchronicity and “historical necessity” not only negated the possibility of cultural inferiority and slavish emulation but allowed for the exertion of Bulgarian influence on Byzantium, especially the impact of Bogomilism, the dualist Christian heresy that arose in Bulgaria and flourished in the Balkans between 1000 and 1500, which displayed a number of rationalist, humanist and “*sui generis* renaissance features”.<sup>13</sup>

The full appropriation of Byzantium’s cultural heritage took the form of a Byzantine-Slavic synthesis. It came about in the 1970s through the prodigious work of Ivan Duichev (1907–86), a renowned post-war expert in Slavic and Byzantine palaeography. Much of his work was devoted to the study of “*Slavia Orthodoxa*”; that is, the Byzantino-Slavic sphere, with special focus on the cultural (and above all literary) dimensions of this imbrication. For Duichev, both the national history of the Bulgarians and Byzantine history itself were incomprehensible outside of the relations between Byzantium and the Slavs, particularly “*Slavdom’s* participation in and contribution to the state, political, economic and cultural life of the Byzantine empire”.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in tacit confrontation with Romanian historians who believed that Romania (the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia) was the true heir of Byzantium, and the majority of Greek historians, Duichev maintained that if Byzantium had continued to live on long after its political extinction, it was chiefly due, not to the Greeks or the Romanians, but to the Slavs.<sup>15</sup>

From such premises Duichev undertook to throw into full relief Byzantine-Slavic relations beyond the temporal and thematic limits prevalent until then. Central to his notion of “*Slavia Orthodoxa*” was an emphasis on the Byzantine contribution to its making. He made a strong case for the “great merit of Byzantium” for having encouraged the adoption of national alphabets, the elevation of the spoken tongue to the rank of national literary language (“an extraordinary cultural invention in the old European world”) and the emergence of national Slavic literatures; in brief for having “laid the foundation of Slavic civilisation”.<sup>16</sup> In this view, the emergence of Slavic national cultures and their drive for “national originality” and independence were the result of the Slavs’ intimate communication with the Byzantines. Since the Byzantine Empire was not a national state but represented a “sublime expression of the Christian civilisation considered to be a

universal cultural asset”, the Slavs could borrow freely from it “without the risk of spoiling their ethnic identity or being stripped of national characteristics”.<sup>17</sup> The conception that Byzantine civilisation had an entirely negative effect on the Slavs by “suffocating” their original cultural development was totally wrong;

it was precisely the critical attitude towards Byzantine civilisation, its adaptation and remaking by the Slavs in the Middle Ages which determines the real place that it occupied in their evolution and the role it had played in the erection of the medieval Slavic civilisation.<sup>18</sup>

Here we see Byzantine culture playing a nationally edifying role and the (former) Byzantine “imports” being assimilated by and enhancing the Slavs’ “own national patrimony”.

All of this signalled a major shift in Bulgarian historical discourse, as it had taken shape since the Revival period, from the late eighteenth to the last third of the nineteenth century, from self-assertive confrontation with Byzantium to its repossession as shared Byzantino-Slavic cultural capital. The groundwork was thus laid for the reassessment of the nature of Byzantine culture and its symbolic appropriation, on which the next generations of Bulgarian medievalists would build. Characteristic of their interpretations are references to “Bulgarian-Byzantine reciprocity” and “comprehensive Bulgarian-Byzantine symbiosis” and promotion of the term “dialogue” to replace terms previously used in discussions of Byzantine-Bulgarian cultural relations, such as “influence”, “transfer”, “penetration”, “presence”, “acculturation” and “Byzantinisation”. In spite of, but sometimes also spurred by, political conflicts, the argument now went, the dialogue between the two cultures continued unabated.<sup>19</sup>

Such approaches marked the end point of the spectacular turnaround that the interpretation of Byzantine “civilisational” influence on Bulgarian history had undergone since the 1970s. On the whole, the positive assessment of this influence – captured by terms like “Slavo-Byzantine synthesis” or “Bulgarian-Byzantine dialogue” – was associated less with Byzantine culture per se (whose pre-eminence was generally acknowledged) than with the creativity of its Bulgarian adaptation and transformation, on the one hand, and the special civilising mission it delegated to Bulgarian culture with respect to all Slavic or Orthodox nations on the other.<sup>20</sup>

At present, one witnesses the parallel existence of two asymmetric trends. A minority, made up of professional Byzantinists and art historians, has brought to completion the radical revision of the purported antinomy between Byzantium and the medieval Bulgarian state. In some recent studies the Bulgarian medieval state of Simeon (893–927) has been described as “a state of entirely ‘Byzantine’ type”, a “*Byzance à côté de Byzance*”, an “*Imperium extra Imperium*”, not only in structure, institutions, symbolism and practices but also in terms of art, literature and law. Such a re-interpretation explicitly cancels the possibility of an ethnic or national character for the Bulgarian medieval state and the existence of a premeditated policy of ethnic unification by the Bulgarian rulers. Shorn of the telos of the Bulgarian nation, medieval Bulgaria is being granted imperial dignity unabashedly mirroring the Byzantine paragon.<sup>21</sup> The national-historiographic mainstream, on the other hand, continues to uphold an essentially agonistic view of Byzantium’s role in Bulgarian history, to insist on the “ethnic and political unification of the Bulgarians” as the *spiritus movens* of this history and to emphasise the Bulgarian transformative and creative genius in assimilating Byzantine models.



## Notes

- 1 For most of the time under Turkish domination, the Bulgarian Church, which in medieval times had the status of patriarchate, was administered by the patriarch of Constantinople through a Greek clergy. The struggle for an independent Bulgarian Church from the late eighteenth century onwards culminated in the establishment in 1870 of a Bulgarian exarchate, which however was not recognised by the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople until 1945.
- 2 Botev 1958: 139; Danova 2003: 69–70.
- 3 The ‘Great Idea’ (*Megali Idea* in Greek) was a concept that developed in the then Greek Kingdom (founded 1831), primarily after the humiliating Greco-Turkish War of 1897, although it started to form sometime around and after the Crimean War of 1853–56. It aspired to reconstitute the former Byzantine Empire by the absorption of the ‘unredeemed’ territories of the Ottoman Empire, in all regions that had large Greek populations (particularly Anatolia (Asia Minor) and parts of the Balkans). It started to fade during the Greco-Turkish War of 1921–22 and practically ended with the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. The first mention of the ‘Great Idea’ is attributed to the general and politician Ioannis Kolettis (1773/4–1847), later prime minister of the newly established independent Greek kingdom, in 1844. However, it was the renowned Greek politician Eleftherios Venizelos (1864–1936) who developed it further and is the one directly related to it.
- 4 Dujčev 1966: 73–4.
- 5 Zlatarski 1895; Zlatarski 1971: I, 1–2.
- 6 Mutafchiev 1987.
- 7 Mutafchiev 1987: 4, 87.
- 8 Mutafchiev 1931: 27–36.
- 9 Mutafchiev 1987: 139, 149–51; Mutafchiev 1940.
- 10 Daskalov 2018: 260–4, 267.
- 11 *Istoriya na Bălgariya* 1954: I.
- 12 Angelov 1948, 1963: 11–69.
- 13 See, for instance, Angelov 1979.
- 14 Dujčev 1960.
- 15 Duychev 1998: 27.
- 16 Dujčev 1960; Duychev 1998.
- 17 Duychev 1998; Dujčev 1960.
- 18 Dujčev 1960: 70–1.
- 19 Giuzelev 1981: 37–41; Gyuzelev 2011: 5.
- 20 The birthplace of the Slavic alphabet was medieval Bulgaria, where Ss Cyril and Methodius’ disciples found refuge after being expelled from Moravia. Later this alphabet and the translated literature were ‘exported’ to the other South and Eastern Slavs.
- 21 See, for example, Biliarsky 2002: 25–40, 2007: 346.

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# 14

## BYZANTINE STUDIES IN SOVIET RUSSIA (1918–90)

*Lora Gerd*

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Soviet regime attempted to build a new society. Reforms opened the way for technical studies but seriously affected the humanities: as communist ideology led to attempts to suppress vestiges of the past, religious studies and traditional approaches to history were rejected. Byzantine and Old Slavonic studies fell into decline and many scholars connected to them were repressed. Their restoration and the revival of Byzantine studies started with a change in the political line in the government of the 1940s. Soviet Byzantine studies from the 1950s to the 1980s were connected to the old pre-revolutionary school of Russian Byzantine studies and they continued many of its traditions.

### **Russian Byzantine Studies Before 1917**

The second half of the nineteenth century was a definitive period for the history of Byzantine studies in Russia. Already in the early 1830s, Russian scholars turned to the roots of Russian history and to Byzantium. In the 1860s, Slavonic and Byzantine studies found support from the government and flourished in Russian universities and in the theological academies. The political ambitions of the Russian Empire and concurrent rivalries with European powers for dominance in the Middle East required a historical and ideological foundation. The journeys of Porphyrius Uspensky (1804–85) to Mount Athos, Sinai and Egypt in the 1840s and 1850s were followed by the expeditions of Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastyanov (1811–67) to Mount Athos, and all these journeys formed the basis for future research. From the 1870s, a school of Byzantine studies was formed in Russia, with Vasily Vasilievsky (1838–99) as its head.<sup>1</sup>

Scholarship supported politics and in 1882 the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society was founded. Among other objectives, it focused on the history and archaeology of Palestine and the Near East, the editing of related historical sources and popularising this information in Russia.<sup>2</sup> In 1915, the board of the Palestine Society began discussions concerning the future Russian Institute of Palestine Studies in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

Between the 1890s and 1910s, Russian Byzantine studies were renowned among the leading European schools. The works of Vladimir Beneshevich (1874–1938) in Canon Law;

Aleksey Dmitrievsky (1856–1929) in liturgical studies; Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) and Dmitry Aynalov (1862–1936) in Byzantine art history; Ivan Sokolov (1865–1939) in church history; and Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus (1856–1912), Grigory (Grigol) Tsereteli (1870–1938) and Chrysanth Loparev (1862–1918) in palaeography and Byzantine literature became classics within Byzantine studies. In 1895 an annual journal in Byzantine studies – *Vizantiiskii Vremennik* – was started under the guidance of Vasily Regel (born Wilhelm Regel, 1838–99).<sup>4</sup> A Russian archaeological institute in Constantinople was founded in 1894, with Fyodor Uspensky (1845–1928) as its head.<sup>5</sup> The results of its work were published in an annual journal.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Challenge of the Revolution**

WWI and the revolution of 1917 put an end to foreign travel, and the collapse of the institutions of Tsarist Russia threatened Byzantine studies in the country. The civil war in Russia from 1918 to 1920 left no opportunities for research: the chaos, criminality, hunger and deprivation of basic living conditions forced people to move away from the big towns, while those who remained struggled to survive. Many Byzantine scholars died during these years: Chrysanth Loparev (1919), Yakov Smirnov (1918), Pavel Bezobrazov (1918), Yulian Kulakovskiy (1919) and Boris Panchenko (1920). Others found themselves in the provinces: Regel became the first rector of Voronezh University (1918–25); later he emigrated to Lithuania. Aleksey Dmitrievsky, after the collapse of the Palestine Society and the Holy Synod, moved to his native town of Astrakhan. From 1919 to 1922, he was vice-rector of the university there and professor of Greek and history. The communist state from the very beginning opposed Byzantine and Old Slavonic studies as “reactionary”, “ecclesiastic” and “royalist”. No place remained for the church, nor for “old fashioned” studies.

In the general atmosphere of chaos, fear and disappointment, many scholars emigrated. Kondakov settled in Prague in 1922 where he founded the famous *Seminarium Kondakovianum*; George Ostrogorsky (1902–76) occupied the Chair of Byzantine Studies at Belgrade University (1933–73). Alexander Vasiliev (1867–1953) left Russia in 1925, first for Berlin and then for Paris, later becoming a professor at Wisconsin University. Andre Grabar (1896–1990), the student of Kondakov, left Russia in 1920 for Bulgaria, and by 1938, he had settled in Paris. Nikolai Nikanorovich Glubokovsky (1863–1937) emigrated in 1921 and became a professor in the theological faculty of Sofia University.

### **Survival and Decline. Byzantine Studies in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 1930s**

Difficult years ensued for those scholars who stayed in Russia. In the 1920s, despite the lack of funding and ideological pressure from the new regime, academics struggled to continue their research. During this decade it was still unclear how far the new regime would go in rejecting the culture of the past. The Palestine Society tried to survive as a scholarly organisation.<sup>7</sup> The membership of the society radically changed in the 1920s: instead of the officials of the old regime, new members were invited. Little by little, it became a concentration of the best Byzantinists and orientalists of the time. In its papers, we see the names of prominent academics: along with specialists in classical archaeology and orientalists, active members included Uspensky, who was president of the society from 1921, Vladimir

Beneshevich, its secretary, and others. The authority of Uspensky, who was still very influential in the 1920s, saved the society during this decade.

The Soviet government seemed for a long time to have had no established position on the Palestine Society. On one hand, it was regarded as the useless heir of an extreme right-wing royalist and ecclesiastic organisation. On the other hand, protected by well-known academics and declaring itself purely a research institution, it could not be liquidated with immediate effect. However, in 1922 its premises in Saint Petersburg were confiscated, and the library and the museum were moved from one institution to another. Research seminars and administrative meetings were held regularly, and enormous energy was invested by the board of the society into attempts to legalise its status in the Soviet state.<sup>8</sup> However, for 15 years the society was separated from the object of its research and forced to use only written and secondary sources. It lost its place among the leading institutions in the study of Palestine, which it had maintained for a period of 40 years. At the beginning of the 1930s, the Palestine Society stopped its activities.

At the same time, academic projects on Byzantine topics were formed under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences, the official network of scientific institutes across Russia. The idea belonged to Uspensky, who proposed to gather the materials for a dictionary on the epoch of Constantine Porphyrogenetos (tenth century). In 1923, this project was joined by another on the Greek glossary of Charles du Cange (1610–88) which aimed to re-edit his famous *Glossarium Graecitatis*. A third commission, on the Russo-Byzantine treaties, had as its subject economic relations between Old Rus' and Byzantium.<sup>9</sup> These projects were active until 1930 and all Russian Byzantinists who stayed in Soviet Russia in the 1920s were involved in them. The activities continued mainly thanks to the energy of Uspensky, who carried on in a sustained effort to preserve "the collapsed building of Byzantinology".<sup>10</sup> Many unedited materials from these projects are preserved but remain unpublished, from historical lexicography to reports, papers and translations.<sup>11</sup>

Research projects on Byzantine topics ceased with the death of Uspensky in 1929 and the so-called Academic Process of 1929–30, organised by the Soviet authorities. On the basis of false accusations, more than 80 researchers from the Academy of Sciences lost their positions, and a number of famous historians were arrested, sent to prison and exiled for periods from three to ten years.<sup>12</sup> In the sober atmosphere of the 1930s, few scholars continued their research, save for some exceptional cases such as Beneshevich, a professor of Canon Law at Saint Petersburg University before 1917, who managed, despite his multiple arrests, to prepare a critical edition of the *Synagoga of Fifty Titles*, the collection of ecclesiastical laws or canons by John Scholasticus (Patriarch of Constantinople from 565 to 577), and to edit it in Munich in 1937.

In a letter to the secretary of the Academy of Sciences, dated 19 May 1936, Beneshevich stated that the materials gathered by him during his travels, even after the devastation caused by his arrests, were enough to sustain the work of a whole institute for many years. Once edited, these materials would form a solid basis for research on Old Russian law and society. Beneshevich also proposed a wide-scale project to prepare an edition of collected sources of Greek and Latin law.<sup>13</sup> On 15 April 1937, Beneshevich addressed a note to the Academy of Sciences on the predicament of Byzantine studies in Russia.<sup>14</sup> He stated that the brilliant period of Byzantine studies in Russia had ended, and that it was necessary to revive student interest in them. In this regard, he proposed work in the following directions: bibliographic studies; research on the manuscripts conserved in the Soviet Union; translation of Byzantine sources; using Byzantine sources for studying the history of the peoples of the

USSR; creating critical editions of the texts; the writing of social and economic histories and translating Byzantine literature into Slavonic languages. Having spent years in prison and witnessing the persecution and decline of Byzantine studies in Soviet Russia, Beneshevich was surely sceptical regarding their imminent revival. On 27 November 1937, Beneshevich was arrested. He was sentenced to death and executed on 27 January 1938.

### **From Decline to Revival: Byzantine Studies in the 1940s**

By the end of the 1930s, the old school of Byzantine studies in Soviet Russia seemed to have come to an end. A link between the old and the new generation of Byzantine scholars was provided by scholars such as Eugenia Granstrem (1911–91), a disciple of Beneshevich at the Public Library in Saint Petersburg. For many years she was the only specialist in Byzantine palaeography in Russia. Yelena Lipschitz (1901–90) graduated from the Kiev Archaeological Institute in 1923, and the Institute for the History of Art in 1930. She became the first in Soviet Russia to defend a thesis on Byzantine history (*The Farmer's Law and Agricultural Society in Byzantium from VI-VIII Century*, 1936). Without having had personal acquaintance with Beneshevich, she regarded herself as his disciple and successor.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile attempts to revive Byzantine studies were undertaken by some historians of the new generation. Mitrofan Levchenko (1890–1955), graduate from Nizhyn Historical-Philological Institute (1915), greeted the October Revolution with enthusiasm. From 1933 he worked in the Academy of Material Culture in Saint Petersburg, and later in the Saint Petersburg Institute of History where he organised a group for Byzantine studies. In 1941 he prepared an edition entitled *Vizantiiskie Ocherki* (Byzantine Essays, published in 1945). On his initiative, in 1945 a Department of Byzantine History was established at Saint Petersburg University. Levchenko was among the first Soviet Byzantinists with a Marxist approach, concentrating his studies in social and economic history.<sup>16</sup>

A centre of Byzantine studies was active from the 1940s at Sverdlovsk (Ekaterinburg) University under the guidance of Michael Sjuzumov (1893–1982). A convinced Marxist himself, Sjuzumov gathered around him different people, among them many archaeologists. A second wind for Soviet Byzantine studies came in the years of WWII with the change in Soviet ideology to imperial nationalism and the related legitimisation of the church and Slavic studies. A group for Byzantine history was created in 1943 at the Moscow Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences under Eugene Kosminsky (1886–1959) who, without being a Byzantinist himself, was a tutor to post-graduates in Byzantine history.<sup>17</sup>

In 1945, on the occasion of celebrating the 100-year anniversary of Uspensky, the Academy of Sciences decided to restart the publication of *Vizantiiskii Vremennik*. In 1948, the third volume of *The History of the Byzantine Empire* by Uspensky was published.<sup>18</sup> The taboo around Byzantine studies had eased and they were legitimised in post-war Soviet Russia. Moreover, continuity with the old school was accepted, though under certain conditions and with exceptions. The “iron curtain” and communist ideology greatly limited the subjects, methods and audiences of Soviet scholars. Research in church history and theology was almost impossible. Some ambitious younger scholars, especially in Moscow, were closer to the ideological mainstream and concentrated on research in social and economic history, such as the Byzantine group at the Institute of History under Gennady Litavrin (1925–2009). The prominent scholar Alexander Kazhdan (1922–97), a student of Kosminsky, after years of complications for ideological and other reasons, left for the U.S.A. in 1978. Others avoided work with greater ideological implications, such as Boris

Fonkich (1938–2021), who concentrated on Byzantine palaeography and became a world-renowned specialist.<sup>19</sup>

Byzantinists in Saint Petersburg, feeling themselves heirs of the old tradition, worked mainly on the texts of sources and manuscripts, avoiding engagement with anything ideological. In 1952, the Palestine Society was restored by a circle of orientalists, including Nina Pigulevskaya (1894–1970), Karen Yuzbashyan (1927–2009) and Elena Meshcherskaya (b. 1946). Since 1954 the society has published an annual journal, *Palestinskii Sbornik*. At the heart of this enterprise was Pigulevskaya. At the beginning of the 1920s, she started her research on the history of early Christianity, as a student of the Oriental faculty of Saint Petersburg University. She was a member of the religious educational circle called “Resurrection”, which aimed at bridging the gap between the intelligentsia and the people, spreading ideas of Christian socialism. Together with other members, she was arrested in 1928. In 1934 she returned to Saint Petersburg and continued her work on Syriac manuscripts. Byzantium was constantly the subject of her research. In this way, she resurrected the topic of Eastern Christianity as which had been forgotten during the 1930s.<sup>20</sup>

At the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg, Byzantine studies were continued by Igor Medvedev (1935–2024) and Elena Piotrovskaya (b. 1946). In his doctoral thesis *Byzantine humanism in the XIV–XV centuries* (1978), Medvedev argued that late Byzantium was much closer to the Italian Renaissance than it was supposed before. In cooperation with Lipschitz and Piotrovskaya, he prepared a critical edition of *The Farmer’s Law*.<sup>21</sup> Later he edited a book on Byzantine diplomacy.<sup>22</sup> In the 1990s he led a large-scale project on the history of Byzantine studies which restored from oblivion the half-forgotten names of Russian Byzantine studies. In the 1990s, Yakov Lyubarsky (1929–2003), a specialist in and translator of Byzantine literature, became one of the founders of the Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Philology at Saint Petersburg University.

### **Beyond Ideology: Art History and Archaeology**

Studies in Byzantine art remained relatively free from ideological pressure.<sup>23</sup> In Moscow, Viktor Lazarev (1896–1976) led the study of Old Russian and Byzantine art. His disciple Ol’ga Popova (1938–2020) created a school of Byzantine art historians in Moscow University after the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> The Hermitage in Saint Petersburg remained a centre of Byzantine studies during the whole Soviet period.<sup>25</sup> From 1919 to 1949 Byzantine studies in the Hermitage were guided by Leonid Matsulevich (1886–1959). In his volume *Byzantinische Antike* (1929), he posited ideas on early Byzantine art as a development of Hellenistic art.<sup>26</sup> Alice Bank (1906–84) started her research at the Hermitage in 1931, and from 1940 she was head of the Department of Byzantium and the Middle East.<sup>27</sup> Bank gathered around her a group of scholars, specialists in applied art (Vera Zalesskaya, 1938–2023), icons (Yuri Pyatnitsky), sigillography (Valentina Shandrovskaya and Elena Stepanova) and numismatics (Vera Guruleva).

### **Conclusion**

After an unfavourable period for Byzantine studies in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, a period of revival came in the 1940s. Stalin’s new policy required studies of the national and non-Western roots of Russian history. On one hand, essays in Byzantine social and economic history were written according to Marxist theories, while, on the other hand,



research in archaeology, manuscripts and art history remained independent from official ideology. In all branches of Byzantine studies, continuity with the old school was maintained. Research going forward needs to concentrate on both further study of the archives and on writing an objective history of Soviet Byzantine studies, free from ideological clichés and prejudices.

## Notes

- 1 For the bibliography on Uspensky's journeys, see [Gerd and Potin 2018](#); [Pyatnitsky 2020](#). On Sevast'ianov's collection and the organisation of the expedition of 1859–60, see [Pyatnitsky 2020](#). On Vasilievsky, see [Greus 1899](#); [Litavrin 1994](#).
- 2 [Gerd 2021](#).
- 3 Archiv Vostokovedov (Archives of the Institute for Oriental Manuscripts, Saint Petersburg), fol. 120–3, 1, fol. 127e–j; [Grushevoi 1995](#).
- 4 [Medvedev 1995](#): 157–80.
- 5 [Basargina 1999](#); [Üre 2020](#); [Gerd 2022](#).
- 6 *Izvestiia Russkogo Archeologicheskogo Instituta v Konstantinopole (Herald of the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople)*.
- 7 [Gerd 2021](#): 290–301.
- 8 More than 20 reports are preserved in the papers of the society, covering a period of ten years (1919–29). At one of the last meetings, on 1 July 1929, a resumé of the decade was made.
- 9 This work was fulfilled 50 years later by [Malingoudi 1993](#).
- 10 [Gorianov 1947](#): 97.
- 11 [Beneshevich 1927](#); [Barynina 2004](#).
- 12 *Academicheskoe delo 1929–1931*; [Anan'ich and Paneiakh 1999](#): no. 3.
- 13 [Medvedev 2020](#). The same project was presented by Beneshevich for the 4th International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Sofia in 1934: *Corpus scriptorum juris graeco-romani tam canonici quam civilis* (Sofia, 1935).
- 14 [Buhert 2022](#).
- 15 [Lipschitz 1961, 1976, 1981](#).
- 16 [Levchenko 1940, 1953](#). About him, see “Pamiat' M. V. Levchenko”, *VV* 8 (1956): 3–6.
- 17 [Sashanov 2016](#).
- 18 [Uspenskii 1948](#).
- 19 See his collected papers: [Fonkich 2014](#).
- 20 [Pigulevskaya 1964](#)). See [Meshcherskaia 1998](#).
- 21 [Lipschitz, Medvedev and Piotrovskaya 1984](#).
- 22 [Medvedev 1988](#).
- 23 An unsuccessful attempt to make art history ideological was made by F. Schmidt, ex-member of the Archaeological Institute in Constantinople. See [Schmidt 2012](#).
- 24 [Zaharova 2008](#).
- 25 [Shandrovskaya 1991](#).
- 26 [Matsulevich 1932, 1940, 1959](#).
- 27 Main works: [Bank 1960, 1960, 1978](#). About her see [Zalesskaya 1986](#).

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# BYZANTIUM AND THE THIRD ROME IN REACTIVE ORTHODOX IMAGINARIES

*Sarah Riccardi-Swartz*

In recent years, classics and art history scholars have drawn our attention to how contemporary right-wing and far-right communities engage with both the medieval Western world and Byzantium to recapitulate new visions for their political projects.<sup>1</sup> From the White nationalist “New Byzantium” movement at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which was a touchpoint in modern American history for galvanising reactionary right-wing groups, to the shadowy corners of the internet where anonymous users post images of Byzantine flags as they speak of taking back power from the elites, the Byzantine Empire seems increasingly fashionable among right-wing contingents.<sup>2</sup> Often the work of scholars interested in this social trend centres on digital “Manosphere” movements of pro-masculine content creators interested in the patriarchal power of empire or the technomonarchic values expressed by the “bros” of Silicon Valley seeking a bureaucratic, corporatised form of caesaropapism.<sup>3</sup> Yet within these prescient contributions, largely focused on aesthetics and technology, little has been written about the role of religion in constructing new articulations of the past for political futures.

My own ethnographic work with reactionary White American converts to Russian Orthodoxy in Appalachia has shown how the concept of imperial religious history has potent traction for individuals and groups trying to grapple with social-moral progressive change.<sup>4</sup> For my American interlocutors and other far-right actors, making sense of life in late modernity often entails drawing on narratives and concepts attached to historical projects they find compelling. They look to the history of Christian and imperial entanglements to find political projects for their religious futures. One such concept is that of Moscow as the Third Rome, which suggests that the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow is heir to the politics and Christianised empire under Constantine I (r. 306–37), linking the contemporary Russian Church to the legacy of imperial, institutionalised Christianity, where church and state supposedly worked together in symphonic alignment.

To illuminate how imperial history is reimagined in contemporary political movements and social politics, this chapter focuses on how Byzantium and its attendant imperial politics, particularly during the reign of Constantine I (r. 306–37), are transmogrified by some on the contemporary far right for religio-political aims. I argue that understanding the political theology of *symphonia* is crucial to considering why Byzantium still has potent political appeal for certain

far-right groups on/offline as they aim to insulate their communities from liberal progressive values founded in democratic principles. In what follows, I first look briefly at how Byzantium has been written into Orthodox histories of church-state relations. Then I trace how Byzantium has become central to the political theology of the Russian Orthodox Church to position itself as the Third Rome. Finally, I draw together the looming historical centrality of imperial politics and spiritual succession in the reactive far-right imaginary that conceives of new American governmental structures forged from the ancient polity of Byzantium.<sup>5</sup>

### **Byzantium and *Symphonia***

Byzantium holds a special place in the history of the Orthodox Church, shaping how both cultural and ecclesial practices developed and continued throughout the centuries. The imperial politics of Byzantium, particularly the relationship the empire had with Christianity after Constantine the Great's reign, continues to affect how contemporary Orthodox communities wrestle with church-state relations in both their ancestral/heritage lands and in diaspora communities across the globe, including in the United States. In particular, the Byzantine legal concept of *symphonia*, constructed by Justinian I in Late Antiquity, which emphasised a cooperative relationship between the ruling authorities and Christian Church officials, has played an impactful role in how Orthodox hierarchies relate to governmental powers.

Davor Džalto suggests that within the Byzantine Empire, *symphonia* was more of an idea than a practised policy.<sup>6</sup> Yet, still, the symphonic type of Christianity that supported the advancement of the Byzantine Empire did win out, as William Connolly notes, over competing expressions of the faith. In doing so, “the Constantinian doctrine of an omnipotent, sovereign, salvational God supported the imperial Roman doctrine of the emperor as unquestioned ruler”.<sup>7</sup> Crucial to the formulation of *symphonia* was the idea that authority stemmed not only from the emperor but also from God. This transformative theology has racial, economic and political reverberations that have resonated within the shifting constructions of Christianity through time and are echoed in the language used by some contemporary Western “strongman” politicians to legitimise their conceptions of sovereign rule.<sup>8</sup>

*Symphonia*, as a type of divine-imperial authority, historically flourished in the Christian East, becoming of particular importance to the Russian Empire as it expanded both in geopolitical power and social identity. The Byzantine legal doctrine of *symphonia*, while largely applied retroactively to the state from which it was developed, has maintained longevity in Orthodox worlds, particularly in Russia both prior to and after the period of the Soviet Union in differing yet resonant ways. As Aristotle Papanikolaou notes,

The basic frame of the Russian Empire did resemble the Byzantine Empire: An Orthodox Christian emperor and an Orthodox patriarch attempting to work in harmony for the good of the Orthodox Christian society. How the church and the state were to relate to each other in the course of the history of the Russian Empire was not self-evident and always in flux.<sup>9</sup>

In pre-revolutionary Russia, *symphonia* took on a much more public role, becoming a critical part of church-state relations – depending on the whims of the given ruler.

While the practicalities of *symphonia* varied on the ground, its historical existence in Orthodox countries serves as an ideologically cogent religio-political possibility for

the far-right actors with whom I conducted fieldwork between 2017 and 2018 in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia. Drawn to both the Russian and reactive varieties of *symphonia* dependent upon their own cultural and historical contexts, far-right Orthodox Christians in the United States position Byzantine *symphonia* as essential for understanding the role of Russia as the Third Rome, heir to the Christian empire and the country that “stands for traditional morality and beliefs”.<sup>10</sup> This idea is geo-politically bidirectional in its influence and theological traction. In the post-Soviet period, expanding the Russian political footprint is largely supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow offering theological justifications for war and even nuclear advancement based in a culture wars rhetoric that positions Russia as an existential saviour in late modernity.<sup>11</sup> The language of salvation entangles *symphonia* with the political theology of Moscow as the Third Rome or the inheritor of Byzantium’s religio-political legacy, thereby reinscribing the idea of Russo-Byzantine connections and future rule.

### **Moscow as Third Rome**

At the 2010 and 2014 Olympics, Russian athletes’ tracksuits featured a double-headed eagle insignia, causing scholars to take notice, pointing out the image’s historical link to Byzantium.<sup>12</sup> Russian President Vladimir Putin has spent much of his political career engaging with historical ideas to craft Russia’s future, with an emphasis on utilising the country’s connections to the Byzantine Empire to suggest why Russia has always been a unique country and a holy Christian nation.<sup>13</sup> Scholars have shown that Putin not only links contemporary Russia to the legacy of both the Byzantine and Rus’ Empires, he also utilises the “usable past” of the Third Rome ideology to continually market himself and his country as traditional solutions against modernity and the West – a prophetic bulwark against secular values.<sup>14</sup>

The Moscow Patriarchate (MP) has long viewed itself as the spiritual successor to Rome. From its foundational moments, Rus’ and the Russian Orthodox Church looked to the Byzantine Empire for models of both religious and governmental structures. Because the Kievan Church (what would eventually become the Slavic forms of Orthodoxy) emerged out of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, it drew on the legacy formations of Byzantine Christianity.<sup>15</sup> As both Orthodoxy and imperial powers developed Rus’ into Russia, the aesthetics and cultural dynamics of Byzantium were appropriated to lend historical credibility to both church and state as the heirs to the power of the New Rome. In the 1490s, Tsar Ivan III, the Grand Prince of Moscow (r. 1462–1505), borrowed the Byzantine double-headed eagle insignia. This symbol would go on to be used by tsars, nationalist movements and the post-Soviet Russian Empire to support the link between the two Romes and to further pro-imperial Russian sentiment.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the Russia Duma noted in 2018, during the 25th anniversary of the newly redesigned doubled-headed eagle crest, that Ivan III used “the coat of arms of the Holy Roman Empire, declaring himself the heir to the eastern part of the disintegrating empire – Byzantium”.<sup>17</sup>

The MP, in positioning itself as the natural heir and successor to the Byzantine Empire, draws on esoteric ideas about the relationship between Russia and political authority – utilising the teachings of an obscure monk from St Eleazar Monastery. Elder Philospheus wrote about the state of Muscovy in 1523, contending that it represented a prophetic way forward for building a Christian empire in his contemporary context.<sup>18</sup> Earlier, in a 1510 letter addressed to Vasily III, the monk explained that the apostolic church of Christ was no longer linked to Rome or Constantinople but to Moscow.<sup>19</sup> This prophecy amplified the desire for Russian imperial domination, positioning both the state and the church as linked together in

a cosmic destiny of Christian power and rule. In the twenty-first century, the MP still holds to this vision while also being fearful of external forces reading the Third Rome ideology as a new “Slavic threat” in the post-Soviet period. To mitigate negative views, the MP interviewed Pavel Kuznekov a church historian who writes articles for the official patriarchate website. Kuznekov offered insight into the theological past of the Third Rome concept:

The elder Philopheus, who proposed this formula five hundred years ago, was simply stating a historical reality of the time: the disappearance from the map of the world of all the Orthodox countries apart from Muscovite Russia and the subjugation of all the autocephalous Churches (including the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople) to the authority of infidel rulers. But the most important thing of all is that the concept of the “Last Kingdom” neither then, nor subsequently ever meant Russia’s claim to either the inheritance of Byzantium or, all the more so, to dominating the entire world. Indeed, the opposite is true: the Third Rome is a mystical image of the “last country” of world history, the rulers of which would bear a lofty moral responsibility for the destinies of all humankind and who ought not to place their hope in the transient riches, power and glory of “this age”, but solely in God.<sup>20</sup>

In a similar fashion to the words uttered by Patriarch Kirill about the incursion into Ukraine because of metaphysical issues, the MP article focuses on the theological and religious dimensions of Moscow as the Third Rome. In doing so, the author draws out the larger moral responsibility of Russia to guide humankind to God.

Putin has skilfully drawn on the eschatological message of the Third Rome to help advance support for his rule, highlighting the unique civilisational heritage of Russia, starting with the mass conversions and baptisms to Orthodoxy under Prince Vladimir the Great (r. 978–1015).<sup>21</sup> In doing so, he positions himself and Russia as the advancers of ancient Christian power and authority for the contemporary moment. As Niels Drost and Beatrice De Graaf write

Putin not only reappropriated, teleologically, a history ... that equally counted as the prehistory to other states in the region, he also used this history to mobilize society, demonize enemies (everyone standing in the way of the new prince Vladimir, in the Russian “near abroad” as well as the west at large), and legitimize violent action.<sup>22</sup>

Putin uses Christian imperialism to advance his contemporary country:

When people speak about Holy Russia they mean the revival of traditions, of the moral foundations of our culture, which is based on Christian values. But it does not mean that the state should not be modern. It must be modern, effective and strong.<sup>23</sup>

This theological strongman positionality resonates with some ideologues on the American far right who are seeking a Caesar to end democracy.

### **The Byzantine Politics of the New Far Right**

Perhaps the most striking transmogrification of Byzantium in contemporary American politics is not the use of imperial imagery – although in my fieldwork with Reactive Orthodox Christians, both on- and offline, I have encountered crests, flags and images of



Byzantium in bulk – but rather the deployment of political ideas assumed to be associated with the empire. This emphasis on Byzantine systems of governance transcends ideological boundaries, providing a unifying imaginary for groups that might not otherwise be conversation partners. Art historian and theorist Roland Betancourt notes that in the conversations around far-right imagery that have become fashionable in recent years, there has been an exaggerated focus on the Middle Ages and Crusades to the deprivation of analysis on the importance of Byzantium in the political ecologies of far-right and conspiracy movements.<sup>24</sup>

Among the far right of Silicon Valley, largely removed from the theological considerations that concern my interlocutors, the focus is on a Red Caesar, with technocrats such as Curtis Yarvin (who went by the moniker Mencius Moldbug for years), a software developer and philosopher, and Peter Thiel, the former C.E.O. of PayPal and co-founder of the data analysis company Palantir, seeking to revive a society headed by a figure of their choosing. Yarvin's monarchic hopes are conceptualised in a business model where the United States is run by a "C.E.O." <sup>25</sup> Yarvin, who sat down for a podcast interview for the Claremont Institute with Michael Anton in 2021, argued that an American Caesar should come from Big Tech.<sup>26</sup> In some contrast, Peter Thiel was intellectually influenced by his professor Rene Girard, a philosopher who wrote about Constantianism – the notion of imperial leadership – negatively. Constantianism, for Girard, exemplifies the problem between Eastern and Western Christianity, where the latter had/has far more separation between church and state.<sup>27</sup> Thiel's reinterpretation of Girard focuses less on critique and more on possibility, drawing together libertarianism with moralising claims to prescribe a Christian strongman vision to avoid an American apocalypse.<sup>28</sup>

Until the early 2020s, Yarvin and Thiel's prescriptive monarchic visions for American society were at the fringes of political acceptability. However, during Donald Trump's second campaign and presidency, both men were crucial in philosophical and financial support of Trump and JD Vance, who would ultimately become Trump's second-term vice president.<sup>29</sup> The technocratic right-wing/far-right movement, often drawing on political philosopher Carl Schmitt, envisions a future that privileges tech, Christianity and monarchy over and against contemporary liberal democracy, planning out an authoritarian future mined from past empires.<sup>30</sup> These ideas resonate with the intellectual far right in the United States who are part of the broader Dark Enlightenment movement that draws on histories of philosophical thought, pseudoscience, capitalism and race sciences to build a reactive future removed from the constraints of neoliberalism.<sup>31</sup>

In a parallel theological move, Orthodox reactives also engage the political philosophies of Schmitt while drawing on a theo-political history of *symphonia* to further discussions about anti-democratic political futures. The American Right's own Rod Dreher, an Orthodox Christian who left the United States in favour of being part of a right-wing think tank in Viktor Orban's Hungary, positioned Donald Trump as a potential American Caesar, particularly in the wake of the assassination attempt on the president's life in July 2024. Dreher opined

The young man who tried to kill Trump might have thought he was going to save America from Caesar. It is entirely possible that in so doing, and failing, he will have delivered the country into the hands of one. And the revolting behavior [*sic*] of the American ruling class and its woke janissaries who spent the past 40 years marching through the institutions will have inclined most of us toward welcoming him.<sup>32</sup>

Other pundits and political figures, such as political strategist Steve Bannon, who served briefly as the White House's chief strategist during Donald Trump's first presidency, turn to Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin to help advance Third Rome ideology on the global political stage.<sup>33</sup> This emphasis on Russia as having the legacy of Byzantine monarchic authority is not only the purview of right-wing political figures but of everyday far-right Americans. In my own research on American converts to Russian Orthodoxy in Appalachia, Byzantium's presence looms large in their dedication to pre-revolutionary Russian political models that support a close, even unified relationship between a political leader and the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, Constantine, as both a saint and a Christian imperial leader, is of import to my interlocutors, but they were often far more interested in the last tsar and the current Russian president. In my fieldwork, the figure of Tsar Nicholas II (1894–1917) loomed large as an example of symphonic governance. My interlocutors praised the historical figure for his fatherliness, love of country and spiritual integrity, even going so far as to hang a flag with his image outside of the dining hall.

The last Russian tsar becomes an extension of ancient Byzantium, offering a modern example of a Caesar (tsar) in action.

One of my interlocutors was an American man in his 30s who converted to Orthodoxy and became a monk at a Russian Orthodox monastery in West Virginia, where I conducted fieldwork in the late 2010s. The monk, who was a high-ranking leader in the community, conveyed his feelings about why holiness and empire are linked together in a spiritualised vision of Russia that extends beyond geographical confines:

Holy Russia is not just for Russians. Holy Russia is not an ethnic identity. The idea is controversial that just as Constantinople was the new Rome, Moscow is the third Rome. After the fall of Constantinople, Russia became the outward protector of Orthodoxy, the continuation of the Roman Empire.<sup>35</sup>

Here Russia becomes Constantinople in both a spiritual and geo-political sense.

For my interlocutors, *symphonia* becomes less about cooperative work between church and state and far more about the use of governmental structures to expand religio-political agenda(s) in the public spheres. Putin, as the same monk noted, was an “echo” of the last tsar, noting that there might be a return of monarchism to Russia but that any talk of monarchy – at home or abroad – without God would fail. One of my virtual interlocutors – Michael Sisco – ran for the United States House of Representatives while decrying democracy and the constitution.<sup>36</sup> Sisco supported a contemporary reactive form of *symphonia* in the United States, writing,

It is accurate to say that I am a Monarchist. More accurately, I am a Byzantine idealist. I believe in symphonia between the Temporal State and the Orthodox Church. At the same time, I am not a subversive. As a Christian, I believe it's my duty to pursue the common good within the system that we have, which is our American Republic. I have pursued that, and [*sic*] sacrificed much for it.<sup>37</sup>

Among both far-right technocrats and Reactive Orthodox, I track both on- and off-line, Byzantium is stripped of its historical context, mined for ideological parts that can be easily coupled into the machine of right-wing world-building to offer alternatives to democracy.

## Conclusion

Within the context of contemporary far-right imaginaries, historical epochs, social movements and political systems are used in support of their political future craft. Byzantium plays a supporting role, reimagined for easy conversation with contemporary politics and plans for a future not burdened by the diversity of democracy.<sup>38</sup> In a sense, Byzantium functions among groups on the far-right largely as a “floating signifier”, borrowing from French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, that takes on cultural meaning dependent on the needs and sociality of the group.<sup>39</sup> For the technocrats such as Yarvin and Thiel, Byzantium is useful to support their critique of American society, providing historical strategies in what they see as a shifting political phase for the West. For Reactive Orthodox Christians, who are ready conversation partners with other far-right communities, Byzantium represents an orthodox approach to the relationship between church and state as expressed in Russia through the Third Rome philosophy, and a corrective to Western democracy. What is clear between both visions for society is that the Christianised empire of Byzantium contains the blueprints for their respective visions of America’s future.

## Notes

- 1 In my understanding of the far right, I am indebted to both political scientist Cas Mudde and sociologist Cynthia Miller-Idriss. See bibliography for more information.
- 2 [Betancourt 2021](#).
- 3 Donna Zuckerberg’s work on the manosphere shows how mythic symbols from antiquity and the early modern period have long been utilised in ideological projects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, while Adam J. Goldwyn points us to how Byzantine romance literature has been taken up by Men’s Rights Activists (MRA) and white nationalists to historically nuance their political discourse about gender rights and feminism. See [Zuckerberg 2018](#) and [Goldwyn 2022](#).
- 4 [Riccardi-Swartz 2022](#).
- 5 I use the term Reactive Orthodox to denote converts to Orthodox Christian churches who hold to or promote far-right, antidemocratic ideas about the relationship between church and state.
- 6 [Džalto 2021](#).
- 7 [Connolly 2019](#): 57.
- 8 [Connolly 2019](#): 57.
- 9 [Papanikolaou 2012](#): 30.
- 10 Interview with author 13 May 2018.
- 11 [Dubtsova 2023](#).
- 12 [Christou 2018](#).
- 13 [Putin 2003](#).
- 14 [Drost and De Graaf 2022](#).
- 15 [Meyendorff 1997](#).
- 16 [Hughes 2008](#).
- 17 Russian State Federation Duma 2018.
- 18 [Kuzenkov 2021](#).
- 19 [Ware 1963](#):103.
- 20 [Kuzenkov 2021](#).
- 21 [Plokhly 2017](#).
- 22 [Drost and De Graaf 2022](#): 39.
- 23 [Putin 2003](#).
- 24 [Betancourt 2021](#).
- 25 [Marchese 2025](#).
- 26 [Yarvin 2021](#).
- 27 [Girard 2009](#).
- 28 [Harrington 2022](#).

- 29 Breuninger 2024.
- 30 Beauchamp 2024.
- 31 McManus 2025; Simon 2025.
- 32 Dreher 2024.
- 33 Hawk 2019; Matthews 2017.
- 34 Models imply that not all tsars had the same relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. That is indeed the case. During the pre-revolutionary Russian context, the models for both Russian Orthodox Church governance and the relationship between the empire and the Church varied, with reforms during Peter the Great's reign seeing the Patriarch removed in favour of a governing council and a decline overall in church power. See Kenworthy 2018.
- 35 Interview with author 9 May 2018.
- 36 Sisco 2020.
- 37 Saints Edward Media 2020. Sisco's website is now defunct but his content is still accessible thanks to the Wayback Machine.
- 38 Riccardi-Swartz 2021.
- 39 Lévi-Strauss 1987.

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## PART IV

# Architecture





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# 16

## BYZANTINE REVIVAL ARCHITECTURE

### A History

*Robert S. Nelson*

Archbishop Demetrios of America's in his brief for Santiago Calatrava's church of St Nicholas in New York of 2022 stipulated that "The design for the church must respect the traditions and liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church, but at the same time must reflect the fact that we are living in the 21st century".<sup>1</sup> It thus introduces the role of tradition that is fundamental for the revival of Byzantine architecture. From the nineteenth century to the present, religious and political authorities employed Byzantine architecture to make statements about the present by means of the past. While the buildings share common motifs and typologies, the motivations and significances of this revival and its appeal to tradition have varied greatly. As with the earlier but parallel revival of Gothic architecture in England and Continental Europe, the survival of medieval forms must be distinguished from their revival. Just as the Gothic style lingered in provincial centres until its revival in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Orthodox churches continued to be built in some version of the Byzantine manner over the centuries after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

What distinguishes the revivals of both styles is a change in prototypes, patronage and purpose. Thus, the mid-nineteenth-century Gothic Houses of Parliament in London promoted an indigenous medieval style to enhance national identity while inventing new traditions.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Russian Tsars in the second half of the nineteenth century financed the erection of Byzantine-style churches across their vast empire for political as well as religious purposes, while Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish communities embraced Byzantine architecture for their own reasons. The significances of this multivalent style thus depended upon context. The complex history of the Byzantine revival preceding Calatrava's modernist triumph in New York has attracted little attention in the past. Older surveys of nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture ignored the Byzantine revival,<sup>3</sup> and consequently, the surveys by J. B. Bullen, Yuri R. Saveliev and others in recent decades are welcomed.<sup>4</sup>

The reuse and adaptation of Byzantine architecture began even before the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, when Byzantine elements were incorporated into the design of Anatolian mosques and madrasas,<sup>5</sup> but the conversion of Hagia Sophia to a mosque represented something new. While earlier Ottoman architects had experimented with domed spaces, after the conquest they focused on adapting what the Byzantines called the

Great Church for Muslim use. Instead of a hierarchy of spaces from the narthex and side aisles to the bema and altar of the Byzantine cathedral, a grand imperial mosque like the Süleymaniye (1551–57) created a broad neutral space across its prayer hall.<sup>6</sup> The tradition thus established continued in later Ottoman architecture in Istanbul and the provinces, as seen in the Ottoman-inspired Hurva Synagogue (1864) in Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

The Ottoman adaptation of Hagia Sophia proclaimed the triumph of a new empire over the old. That process continues in its recent return to a mosque after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) had secularised the building and turned it into a museum a century ago. In contrast, Byzantine revival architecture functions differently. Instead of denying or subverting Byzantium, revival buildings celebrate that past and create linkages with pasts that may or may not be what Archbishop Demetrios had sought for the new St Nicholas. This revivalism also can be distinguished from the appreciation of travellers to Constantinople in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who made studies of its Byzantine buildings, especially Hagia Sophia.<sup>8</sup> Then architects occasionally made use of this knowledge,<sup>9</sup> but the concept of revival buildings belongs to later European Romanticism and Nationalism.<sup>10</sup>

The Byzantine revival may be said to have begun with the crown prince of Bavaria, the future King Ludwig I (1825–48). In 1823, he attended a Christmas liturgy at the Cappella Palatina in Palermo (twelfth century). Transfixed by its glittering gold-ground Byzantine mosaics, he resolved to make a similar chapel.<sup>11</sup> The result was the Allerheiligen-Hofkirche (1826–37) in Munich. Its architect Leo von Klenze (1784–1864) based the interior on the Cappella Palatina in Palermo and San Marco in Venice (consecrated 1063). The king had wanted his court chapel to be decorated with mosaics, but when they proved to be too expensive, he settled for frescoes with yellow grounds in the manner of the Nazarene painters, who had been inspired by the art of early medieval Rome.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently the king commissioned the basilical church of St Boniface in Munich (founded 1835) in what was regarded as a Byzantine style. At that time, the present terms of Romanesque (German *Rundbogenstil*) and Byzantine were interchangeable with the French “Neo-Grec”.<sup>13</sup> The Bavarian interest in Byzantine architecture peaked during the reign of Ludwig II (1864–86), when his palace of Lindenhof was modelled on the Great Palace in Constantinople and his castle of Neuschwanstein had a heavily gilded Throne Room in the Byzantine manner.<sup>14</sup>

In Berlin, the central figure was the “Romantic on the throne”, the brother-in-law of King Ludwig, the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795–1861).<sup>15</sup> He sent state officials to study churches in Ravenna and Constantinople, resulting in books of 1842 and 1854.<sup>16</sup> This new knowledge was soon employed in the design of Protestant churches. For example, in 1848 F. A. Stüler (1800–65) based the now destroyed Markuskirche in Berlin (Figure 16.1) on the sixth-century church of San Vitale in Ravenna (founded 532) but gave it a different dome and campanile.<sup>17</sup> Since the king had a greater preference for basilicas, Stüler based the Jakobskirche of 1844/45 on early churches in Ravenna and Rome.<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm himself sketched the church that he wanted for his palace complex in Potsdam, his court architect Ludwig Persius (1803–45) then turned the sketch into the Friedenskirche, and finally the king had a medieval mosaic from Murano installed in its apse.<sup>19</sup> Byzantine style mosaics remained important to the court. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941) sponsored the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche in honour of his grandfather, Wilhelm I, the brother of Friedrich Wilhelm. Although the church was mostly destroyed during World War II, a fragment survives with mosaics that depict the Prussian royalty against a background based on the mosaics of the Orthodox Baptistry in Ravenna (fifth century).<sup>20</sup>



Figure 16.1 F. A. Stüler, Berlin, Markuskirche, 1848 (destroyed), steel engraving by Johann Gabriel Friedrich Poppel, 1852. British Library, via Flickr Commons. No known copyright restrictions.

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century in France, a similar movement developed for the study and replication of Byzantine architecture aided by the travels and publications of French architects.<sup>21</sup> For example, Jacques Ignace Hittorff (1792–1867) published his *Architecture moderne de la Sicile* (Modern architecture of Sicily) in 1835 that included plans and sections of the Sicilian churches with Byzantine mosaics. He then gave the Parisian church of Saint-Vincent de Paul of 1844 an open truss roof like those he drew in Sicily.<sup>22</sup> Intrigued by the church, Friedrich Wilhelm IV had Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), a friend of Hittorff, bring its plans to Berlin.<sup>23</sup> Its decoration also has a Byzantine character with friezes of figures on the side walls of the nave like the mosaics of Sant’ Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (consecrated 504) and an apse with figures on a yellow ground.<sup>24</sup> But the greatest of the Neo-Grec churches in the period was Léon Vaudoyer’s (1803–72) cathedral of Sainte-Marie-Majeure at the port of Marseilles. Begun in 1856 but completed only at the end of the century, it combines Roman and Byzantine elements,<sup>25</sup> and its mosaic decoration employs motifs from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (425–50).<sup>26</sup>

In Greece, the neo-classical style predominated from the middle years of the nineteenth century to unite with Greece’s classical past and in accordance with the philhellene tastes of



Figure 16.2 Christian Hansen, Athens, Eye Hospital, 1852, photograph. © The author.

King Otto (1832–62), a former Bavarian prince, whom the European powers had chosen to be king, as. The new kingdom maintained close political and cultural connections with Bavaria. The finest example of the classical style in Athens is what is known as the Athenian Trilogy, the buildings for the University (1839–64), the National Library (1884–1902) and the Academy of Athens (1859–85). Designed by two Danish brothers, Christian and Theophil Hansen (1803–83 and 1813–91), this powerful grouping occupies an entire block on Panepistimiou or Venizelos Avenue. Christian and Theophil spent considerable time in Athens and later had careers in Copenhagen and Vienna, respectively.<sup>27</sup>

While the classical was favoured in nineteenth-century Athens, some Byzantine revival structures were built in response to European Byzantinism and as part of the creation of Greek national identity.<sup>28</sup> In the city block next to the Athenian Trilogy, Christian Hansen designed the two-storied Eye Hospital (1854) in a Byzantine manner (Figure 16.2). Its later upper story continues the original design.<sup>29</sup> The façade utilises Byzantine cloisonné masonry, a regional technique not found in Constantinople, consisting of stone blocks outlined by thin bricks.<sup>30</sup> Also Byzantine are the double arched windows, framed in a radiating pattern of bricks and outlined by a band of bricks turned 45° so that their corners protrude in what is known as the dog-tooth pattern.

Such masonry is seen in medieval structures from the more distant Hosios Loukas, in Boeotia (mid-tenth century) to local Athenian churches, such as the Soterira Lykodemou (eleventh century), but the closest analogy is the monastic church of Daphni (Figure 16.3). The façade of the Eye Hospital is a literal translation of the masonry and fenestration of the east end of the church. At the sides of both buildings are double windows framed by a dog-tooth frieze with triple arched windows in the centre. Two watercolours by Hansen



*Figure 16.3* Daphni, Greece, Monastic Church, east end, c. 1100, photograph. © The author.

confirm his interest in Byzantine masonry.<sup>31</sup> The first simply labelled “Athens” depicts a double window surrounded by bricks and the dog-tooth pattern like the hospital.<sup>32</sup> The second is titled “from the monastery of Daphne on the road from Athens to Eleusis” and shows a lateral side of the late eleventh-century church with an entrance at the bottom and the hospital’s three-arched windows above.<sup>33</sup> This fenestration appears on both the north and south sides of the church, but Hansen’s drawing probably is of the south side. Later he repeated the triple windows on the façade of the Municipal Hospital in Copenhagen (opened 1863), and his younger brother Theophil adapted the Daphni windows for his Orthodox Church of the Trinity in Vienna (inaugurated 1858).

In general, Byzantine revival architecture in Germany and France during the nineteenth century adapted Italian models, while Greek architecture relied on local medieval churches, but Russian architecture looked to Constantinople/Istanbul and especially Hagia Sophia that had been a long-standing interest of Russian artists.<sup>34</sup> The Great Church acquired added political significance in the reign of Catherine the Great (1762–96). As a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–74, Russia controlled the Black Sea, and a decade later it annexed Crimea, events celebrated at Catherine’s estate at Tsarskoye Selo near Saint Petersburg. Designed by her British architect, Charles Cameron (1745–1812), the palace included the Cameron Gallery, a high platform for viewing the palace grounds and its large pond that allegorically was the Black Sea. Beyond was the village of Sophia, also known as “Constantinogorod”, according to an English diplomat.<sup>35</sup>

There Cameron built many buildings, including the village’s cathedral from 1782 to 1788 that was regarded as a version of Hagia Sophia, although Cameron had only a vague sense of the Byzantine church and worked in a neo-classical manner. The result was a Palladian Hagia Sophia ([Figure 16.4](#)). The only point of resemblance with building in Istanbul was the large windows in the drum of the central dome ([Figure 16.6](#)).<sup>36</sup> This church, however, was not the only way in which Catherine stressed the continuity between Byzantium and Russia.<sup>37</sup>

The village of Sophia was part of what is known as Catherine’s Greek Project, an ambitious plan to conquer the Ottoman Empire with the aid of the Hapsburgs in Vienna, a traditional enemy of the Ottomans. The proposed policy, developed about 1779, entailed the Hapsburgs absorbing the Ottoman provinces in Europe, while Russia took the coastal areas west of the Black Sea and put its own ruler on the throne of Constantinople.<sup>38</sup> That ruler was to be Catherine’s grandson, named Constantine, after Constantine the Great, the founder of Constantinople. After Constantine was born (1779), he was given a Greek wet nurse, who was named Helen after Constantine the Great’s mother of that name. As a





Figure 16.4 Charles Cameron, Pushkin, Russia, Church of Ascension, West side, 1782, photograph. © The author.

result, the small boy learned Greek before Russian. Catherine settled Greeks in the village of Sophia, so Constantine would become used to the Greek people that he would rule one day. After she had annexed Crimea, Catherine made a triumphal journey there and passed beneath a temporary triumphal arch inscribed, “the route to Byzantium”. The international diplomacy supporting the Greek Project ultimately failed, due to the cataclysmic events later in the 1780s, but this does not mean that Russia forgot about Hagia Sophia or its role as the protector of the Greek people, because utopian symbols never die, and this one survived in Russia until the Revolution.<sup>39</sup>

More faithful replications of Hagia Sophia began to be built in Russia after the middle of the nineteenth century. Russian architects borrowed the broad dome on pendentives from the sixth-century church but set it atop a taller and narrower body, thus continuing the proportions of medieval and early modern Russian churches. At the church of St Alexander Nevsky in Tbilisi, the architect D. I. Grimm (1823–98) added apsidioles to the north and south sides of churches, thereby transforming the Byzantine domed basilica into a domed tetraconch. Built from 1871 to 1897, the building had a tall dome 40 m in height and 13 m in diameter, considerable dimensions but not equal to Hagia Sophia’s dome with a height of 55 m and a diameter of 31 m.<sup>40</sup> Subsequent architects erected variations on Grimm’s design across the Russian Empire. One in St Petersburg is the tall church with semi-domes on its four sides dedicated to the Icon of Our Lady the Merciful and designed by Vasily Kosyakov (1888–98), a pupil of Grimm.<sup>41</sup> Because of their height, such churches dominated





*Figure 16.5* Aleksandr Pomerantsev, Sofia, Bulgaria, Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, east end, 1912, photograph. © The author.

their surroundings and constituted a form of symbolic conquest across the Russian Empire and beyond.<sup>42</sup>

The political valences of some churches were not subtle. For example, the Tbilisi church commemorated Russian victory in its long campaigns in the Caucasus, and the Byzantine revival cathedral of Alesander Nevsky in Sofia, Bulgaria ([Figure 16.5](#)) of 1912 honoured Russian soldiers who died in the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–78 that resulted in the independence of Bulgaria from the Ottomans. The Russian architect of the Sofia church was Alesander Pomerantsev (1849–1918), who also designed the famed GUM department on Red Square in Moscow.<sup>43</sup> Seen from the rear, the church of Alexander Nevsky presents a multitude of round-headed windows and a cascade of semi-domes.

The whole builds upon Hagia Sophia ([Figure 16.6](#)) as seen in a photograph of its east end taken from the Sea of Marmara. Saveliev's book from 2005 illustrates many similar examples of Slavic Byzantine revival architecture, and other studies document how Hagia Sophia served as a model for churches in Serbia.<sup>44</sup>

In Russia, the series culminates with the Naval Cathedral of Kronstadt, also designed by Kosyakov and built between 1903 and 1913 ([Figure 16.7](#)).<sup>45</sup> Kronstadt was an important port west of Saint Petersburg and the base for the Russian Baltic Fleet. Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) intervened in the design of the church as did the admiral in charge of the naval base at Kronstadt. After a failed competition that featured Neo-Russian proposals,<sup>46</sup> Kosyakov was chosen to design the cathedral, his work having been known to the authorities



*Figure 16.6* Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles, Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, east end, 532–37, photograph. © The author.

from his church in Saint Petersburg. However, the Kronstadt church was to be something different, for it had to accommodate many sailors. In his design, Kosyakov did not follow the Russian revival style of the nearby church of Peter and Paul at the Peterhof (opened 1905), where he supervised the construction for another teacher of his, Nikolai Sultanov (1850–1908). Instead, he imitated the expansive proportions of the Great Church in Constantinople for practical and symbolic reasons.

In preparation for the Kronstadt commission, Kosyakov travelled to Constantinople and studied Hagia Sophia,<sup>47</sup> but he then gave the new church a non-traditional façade with flanking towers. Not seen in Byzantine or Russian churches, such towers had been a constant in western architecture since the Carolingian period. The cathedral's interior (Figure 16.7), however, demonstrates that Kosyakov put his travels to good use, for it is a close copy of Hagia Sophia (Figure 16.8). With a height of 52 m and diameter of 27 m, the dome nearly matches the sixth-century building. The nave arcades and the apsidioles beside the main apse follow the Byzantine model, but Kosyakov added more windows. His apse has nine windows versus the five of Hagia Sophia. He also inserted large rose windows in the north and south tympana of the nave, although the photograph (Figure 16.7) makes them appear semi-circular, and he added a broad arched window to the west façade. Consequently, the interior luminosity of Kronstadt surpasses Hagia Sophia and even more so Sultanov's Peterhof church and its medieval Russian models. The contemporary cathedral of Poti in Georgia from 1906 to 1907 is also a version of Hagia Sophia and has a comparable monumentality to the Naval Cathedral.<sup>48</sup>

Because state patronage favoured the Gothic, England built few Byzantine revival buildings compared to Russia. San Marco was the favourite model, although the church of St Nicholas



*Figure 16.7* Vasiliy Kosyakov, Kronstadt, Russia, Naval Cathedral, view to altar, 1913, photograph.  
© The author.



Figure 16.8 Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles, Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, view to altar, 532–37, photograph. © Photographed by Walter Denny.

in Liverpool replicated a former Byzantine church in Istanbul. John Ruskin's book *The Stones of Venice* from 1851 to 1853 had a significant impact. Contrasting an English Gothic cathedral with San Marco, Ruskin asks the reader to imagine an English cathedral with:

[a]great mouldering wall ... grisly with heads of dragons and mocking fiends ... [and a] crowd of restless birds that fill the whole square with that strange clangour of theirs ... [Versus San Marco] On each side [are] the countless arches ... with goodly sculpture, and fluted shafts of delicate stone ..., a multitude of pillars and white domes ... partly of gold, and partly of opal and mother-of-pearl ... [and] five great vaulted porches, ceiled with fair mosaic, and beset with sculpture of alabaster, clear as amber and delicate as ivory ... [as well as] pillars of variegated stones, jasper and porphyry, and deep-green serpentine spotted with flakes of snow ... Instead of the

restless crowd, hoarse-voiced and sable-winged, drifting on the bleak upper air [at the English cathedral], the St. Mark's porches are full of doves, that nestle among the marble foliage, and mingle the soft iridescence of their living plumes ... with the tints, hardly less lovely, that have stood unchanged for seven hundred years.<sup>49</sup>

In sum, English medieval churches are dark and grisly, whereas San Marco presents a stunning array of arches and pillars made of multi-coloured precious stones and mosaics of gold, opal and mother of pearl. Instead of the raucous crows congregating around English churches, San Marco hosts gentle, cooing doves or pigeons with iridescent plumage displaying “tints hardly less lovely [than those] that have stood unchanged for seven hundred years”. Victorian polychromatic architecture followed the aesthetics of San Marco as well as other sources,<sup>50</sup> and Byzantium was seen through the filter of Venice. Thus, when John Francis Bentley (1839–1902) designed in a Byzantine style the new Catholic cathedral of London at Westminster of 1907 (Figure 16.9), he worked from what he learned on his Italian travels that included Ravenna and concluded at Venice. From those buildings and a recently published book on Hagia Sophia and another on San Marco, he felt that he understood Byzantine architecture, and indeed he did according to the prevailing Arts and Crafts sense of it.<sup>51</sup> The cathedral's multi-domed interior repeats the plan of San Marco, but its dark, austere vaults devoid of mosaics will never be mistaken for their model, even if the cathedral's nave vaults are one day covered with mosaics.

In the half century between the publication of *Stones of Venice* and Westminster Cathedral, Byzantine revival buildings occasionally appeared across England. One of the more important was the church of St Sophia in London of 1874, designed by John Oldrid Scott (1841–1913), the son of Gilbert Scott, who was renowned for his neo-Gothic buildings.<sup>52</sup> The polychrome effects of San Marco had a greater impact on secular architecture in Bristol, especially the Granary of 1869 with its arches of red, white and blue/black bricks. The style of it and other buildings with Venetian elements in the city have been called Bristol Byzantine. In Dublin, John Hungerford Pollen's University Church (1855–56) for Cardinal John Henry Newman incorporated aspects of Byzantine architecture and decoration to distinguish this Catholic church from the Anglican Gothic and thereby constituted a precedent for Bentley's Westminster Cathedral a half century later.

The contemporary Orthodox church of St Nicholas built by Henry Sumners (1826–95) opened in Liverpool in 1870 (Figures 16.10 and 16.12). It is more properly Byzantine than any of these revival structures, because it is based on the Vefa Kilise a church in Constantinople (founded in eleventh-twelfth centuries) that was later converted into a small mosque, Camii, located just west of the vast complex of the Süleymaniye.<sup>53</sup> Comparing the satellite views of the two buildings on *Google Earth* shows the precise correspondence of the silhouettes and domes of the church and the mosque. To date only scant notices about the St Nicholas have appeared,<sup>54</sup> but two reviews of the building written shortly after its inauguration are informative. The first in *The London Illustrated News* from 29 January 1870 describes that ceremony and includes, as expected, a useful engraving of the exterior of the church. While commenting on the church and its furnishing, it mentions a “beautiful curtain of plum-colored velvet ... made in Constantinople” and acknowledges that St Nicholas was modelled on the church of the Theotocos [sic] in Constantinople.<sup>55</sup>

Appearing a few days later, the second review in *The Builder* offers more sustained analysis and criticism.<sup>56</sup> It declares that St Nicholas is a “premeditated copy” of the church of the “Theotokos” that James Fergusson (1808–86) illustrated in his *Handbook of Architecture*



*Figure 16.9* John Francis Bentley, London, Westminster Cathedral, view to altar, 1907, photograph.  
© The author.





Figure 16.10 Henry Sumners, Liverpool St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, west façade, 1870, photograph. © The author.

with engravings of its ground plan and façade (Figure 16.11).<sup>57</sup> Fergusson acknowledges that the source for his façade illustration was *Architecture monastique* of 1852 by Albert Lenoir (1801–91), one of the French scholar architects in the period of the Neo-Grec.<sup>58</sup> In 1912 Alexander van Millingen (1840–1915) renamed it the church of St Theodore,<sup>59</sup> an attribution repeated in architectural guides of Liverpool,<sup>60</sup> but according to recent authorities, the original dedication of the Vefa Kilise Camii is unknown.<sup>61</sup> Noting that the Liverpool church was 50% larger than its model, the review in *The Builder* struggles to make positive remarks, and its general judgement is negative. The interior is disappointing, its white marble columns “an expensive mistake”, the dome unsatisfactory and the enlargement of model unsuccessful. While *The Illustrated London News* found the church “majestic and commanding”, *The Builder* concludes that the “whole assumes a somewhat scattered and purposeless expression ... Placed in a modern English town, a building like this appears ... very much of an architectural deformity”,<sup>62</sup> evidence that the Byzantine architectural revival was not universally admired.

Like its model, St Nicholas has a two-story western façade set before a smaller church behind. The portico has three domes; a fourth and taller one is over the crossing in the nave. For an orthodox church, the interior is austere painted in white and blue. The marble columns so despised by *The Builder* have imitation Byzantine impost capitals and support the vaults of this cross-in-square plan. It generally follows the Constantinopolitan model and the plan that Fergusson published. The columns and capitals in the Liverpool church





Figure 16.11 Istanbul, “Church of Theotocos”. © Fair Use: from James Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture*, London, 1855, fig. 789.

are roughly appropriate for a Byzantine church, but Vefa Kilise Camii was of no help here, because its columns were long ago taken by the Ottomans for other buildings and replaced by graceless pillars.

The Constantinopolitan church joins a façade block from the fourteenth century to a smaller eleventh-century church. The Liverpool version is similar in that its façade is also wider than the church behind. At present the front of the Istanbul building has a flat roof line, but Fergusson (Figure 16.11) and Lenoir show that the roof then was scalloped above each of the four major arches, as repeated in Liverpool. Similarly, the later restoration of the Vefa Kilise Camii flattened the roof lines of all three domes, whereas Lenoir and Fergusson show a flat line for the central dome and scalloped ones for the flanking domes. The alternation of red brick and white at St Nicholas also copies the original, while also following at the same time the Victorian taste for polychromy.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the rear of the church (Figure 16.12) replicates the former state of the Constantinopolitan church, including the three high, narrow arched windows separated by columns and capitals. At the sides of these stilted arches are blind arches of the same dimensions. The engraving that Lenoir published in the mid-nineteenth century matches St Nicholas.<sup>64</sup> In the Vefa Kilise Camii today, all but the central window has been blocked and an opening inserted into one of the blind arches. Moreover, Lenoir’s engraving and the Liverpool church have a gabled roof above the apse that is not present at Vefa Kilise Camii. These



Figure 16.12 Henry Sumners, Liverpool, St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, east end, 1870, photograph. © The author.

alterations to the mosque find parallels in the better studied Kariye Camii.<sup>65</sup> In sum, St Nicholas constitutes three-dimensional documentation of the state of the Vefa Kilise Camii before 1870.

Because of its fidelity to the Istanbul model, the design of St Nicholas could not have been based solely on the engravings of Fergusson or Lenoir. A closer look at the patronage of the church suggests other possibilities. Besides listing the cost of the building, the report in *The Illustrated London News* stated that the group funding the church was led by C.M. Papayanni, a misprint for G(eorge) M(ichael) Papayannis. He and his brother Basilios were from Smyrna and had founded a shipping company with their Turkish partner Pierre Mussabini.<sup>66</sup> In 1844 George Papayannis moved from London to Liverpool to aid his Mediterranean trade. In the 1860s that trade increased because the importation of American cotton ceased due to its Civil War. To compensate, the firm of Papayanni and Mussabini developed trade in Egyptian cotton from 1861.<sup>67</sup> Since 1857 the firm had run steam ships to Constantinople and Smyrna, so that its connections with that region were frequent and well established.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to George Papayannis, other important contributors to the church included his brother Basilios and Demetrios Theodore Rallis, who presumably was a member of the Rallis family, the wealthiest Greek merchants in Victorian England. Thus, mercantile wealth supported the church, and that business probably led to the dedication to St Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors. Moreover, the Liverpool merchants would have had

no difficulty obtaining the Constantinopolitan textile for the Royal Door of the iconostasis of St Nicholas, as well as needed information about the Vefa Kilise Camii, which was not far from the Grand Bazaar and the port facilities on the Golden Horn. Perhaps even the name Kilise Camii, Church Mosque, alerted traders that it was a former Byzantine church, drawing them to it.

In America, interest in Byzantium and its architecture developed later than in Europe. From the early twentieth century, American clerics began to take an interest in Byzantine revival architecture for churches and synagogues. For over a century, the point of reference was Hagia Sophia, which had come into general prominence in the Anglo-American world through the first book on the building by Lethaby and Swainson of 1894 and due to an interest in centralised architecture by different religions.<sup>69</sup> One of the earliest Byzantine revival buildings in the western Hemisphere is not in the United States but in Kingston, Jamaica. Its American bishop commissioned a new cathedral from Raymond F. Almirall (1869–1939), an architect from Brooklyn, New York. The resulting church of the Holy Trinity, 1908–11, has gabled facades on three sides and a protruding apse to the east. A broad dome from Hagia Sophia anchors the whole.<sup>70</sup> The New York church of St Anselm of 1916–17 goes the furthest in imitating Hagia Sophia on the exterior and interior. The churches of Holy Trinity in New York City from 1910 to 1912 by Joseph H. McGuire (1866–1947) and St Francis de Salles in Philadelphia begun in 1907 by Henry D. Dagit (1865–1929) also have oversailing domes and lateral walls that resemble the nave of the Great Church. Instead of the latter's heavy masonry dome that required massive buttressing, the latter two Catholic churches are vaulted with Guastavino tiles, consisting of a thin skin of terracotta tiles and mortar that is cantilevered across an opening. On the interior, the vault surface often resembles wickerwork and can incorporate abstract designs. For example, around the circumference of the dome of the Philadelphia church are circles with medallions that have overlapping triangles with a cross inside. The use of the Byzantine style for American Catholic Churches is not well studied but may be a consequence of the prestige of Westminster Cathedral in Catholic circles.

However, Byzantine architecture was not tied to specific religious groups, and it came to be adopted after World War I by American and English Jewish congregations for their own purposes unrelated to the motivations of Christian communities. For example, the summit of the Guastavino dome in the Isaiah Temple (Figure 16.13) in Chicago has the same overlapping triangles of St Francis de Salles but without a cross so that they form the Star of David. The latter device also appears in the spandril of arches around the sanctuary.<sup>71</sup> Completed in 1924, the building was designed by the prolific Chicago architect Alfred Alschuler (1876–1940).<sup>72</sup> It is one of several synagogues built on Byzantine models in Britain,<sup>73</sup> as well as America from the 1920s until the Great Depression curtailed building in the next decade. Initially Alschuler designed a large building modelled on Hagia Sophia,<sup>74</sup> but when the congregation could not raise sufficient funds for this design, he halved the cost with a building based on the sixth-century church of San Vitale in Ravenna, the same church that Stüler copied for the Markuskirche of 1848 in Berlin (Figure 16.1).

However, there are differences between the two versions of San Vitale. While both buildings are modified octagons, the German church lacks the narthex or foyer and the two low stair towers of the model. The synagogue has both (Figure 16.13), although it puts the foyer flush against the side of the octagon opposite the bimah and torah shrine. On the other hand, the earlier church repeats the inner octagon of San Vitale but sets a tall cupola that is



*Figure 16.13* Alfred Alschuler, Chicago, Isaiah Temple, now KAM Isaiah Israel Synagogue, 1924, photograph. © Courtesy of Chicago History Museum.

different from the low roof of San Vitale. In contrast, the synagogue has a low dome spanning the full width of the sanctuary, a feature taken from Alschuler's earlier proposal based on Hagia Sophia. The result is a unified space uninterrupted by supporting columns. After the Isaiah Temple opened in 1924, it was replicated in 1929 at Temple Beth-El in Ithaca, New York, designed by Eli Goldsmith.

The relief ornament on the interior and exterior of the Chicago synagogue has a late antique quality because it copies reliefs of that date found in the excavation of a Palestinian synagogue at Hammat Tiberias, but not the better-known synagogue there with a Zodiac floor mosaic (fourth century).<sup>75</sup> The Isaiah Temple thereby associates itself with Palestine and the recent Jewish immigration there under the British Mandate. In England, synagogues of the 1920s also made references to Hagia Sophia and mosque architecture to express the "oriental" origin of Judaism, but few went as far as the Isaiah Temple in Chicago. Alschuler even designed the building's smokestack as a minaret in imitation of the sole brick minaret at Hagia Sophia.

The Great Church and Palestine played different roles in the yet grander Tifereth Israel synagogue in Cleveland ([Figures 16.14](#) and [16.15](#)).<sup>76</sup> Completed the same year as the Isaiah Temple, it is several times larger and cost ten times more. It too is a Byzantine revival building, but its architect Charles Greco (1873–1963) adapted rather than copied earlier architecture due to the strictures of its triangular site at the juncture of two roads. Instead of the octagonal plan of San Vitale and the Isaiah Temple, Greco devised a seven-sided structure





*Figure 16.14* Charles Greco, Cleveland, Tifereth Israel Temple, view to bimah, 1924, photograph. © Congregation Mishkan or Archives, Beachwood, Ohio.

with a grand façade facing the apex of the triangle and side entrances on the two roads. On the interior, the bimah and Ark made of well-crafted walnut ([Figure 16.14](#)) occupy one side of the heptagon.

The side walls, converging on the bimah, resemble the exaggerated perspective of photographs of Hagia Sophia taken with a modern wide-angle lens ([Figure 16.8](#)). The photographic distortion is necessary to capture a space that is too broad to be photographed with a normal lens. Greco may have seen similar early photographs of the Great Church but made differently. For example, the often-reproduced photograph by the Ottoman photographer Pascal Sébah has a similar breadth, but only because it was a composite of multiple single views.<sup>77</sup> At Tifereth Israel, two registers of mostly blind arches fill the side walls in reference to three levels of the lateral sides of Hagia Sophia. Greco deleted the central register of the latter and filled the tympana with narrow arches.

On the exterior, two towers stand beside arcades within a centring arch ([Figure 16.15](#)). The capitals of the arches imitate those in the nave of Hagia Sophia. The dome buttress directly above points toward the end of the triangular plot. Though difficult to see in this distant view, the stone masonry of the synagogue alternates bands of smooth and textured stone in imitation of the stripes painted on Hagia Sophia during its nineteenth-century restoration and seen in old photographs. The broad dome of Tifereth Israel dominates



*Figure 16.15* Charles Greco, Cleveland, Tifereth Israel Temple, main entrance, 1924, photograph. Now Maltz Performing Arts Center, photograph. © The author.

the surrounding neighbourhoods as much as one of the grand Byzantine revival churches in Russia or the imperial Ottoman mosques in Istanbul, but the intended reference was more likely to have been the nineteenth-century Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem that was modelled on Ottoman mosques after Hagia Sophia by the Sultan's principal architect Assad Effendi. Consequently, the Hurva Synagogue itself has been called a work of Byzantine Revival architecture, the whole becoming like a nested Russian doll.<sup>78</sup>

Elsewhere in the Americas, Anat Falbel has proposed that the Temple Beth-El in São Paulo, Brazil, completed in 1928, may also have referenced the Hurva Synagogue.<sup>79</sup> Its Russian architect, Samuel Order (1882–1957), had worked with English architects and evidently knew English. He proposed a Byzantine style for this major synagogue and stated that he borrowed from Hagia Sophia. Falbel also showed that Roder knew both the Isaiah Temple and Tifereth Israel from architectural periodicals available in Brazil, and the resemblances are undeniable, but the architectural associations with Palestine may have been more important for the congregation and its major patrons.

The massive Tifereth Israel synagogue was only the beginning of Greco's work for Jewish congregations. He gave his second synagogue in Cleveland Heights of 1926 the 12-sided dome of the main church of the monastery of Hosios Loukas, which he probably knew from the book of the British Arts and Crafts architects Robert Weir Schultz (1860–1951) and Sidney Barnsley (1865–1926).<sup>80</sup> His third and fourth synagogues in Hartford, Connecticut,



*Figure 16.16* Paul Tournon, Paris, Saint-Esprit, view to altar, 1928–35, photograph. © The author.

and Miami Beach, Florida, were completed in 1936 and 1948, respectively. Both were smaller versions of his earlier synagogues. Alschuler and Greco were not the only architects building centralised plan synagogues, for the fashion of Byzantine synagogues spread to San Francisco,<sup>81</sup> Portland, Los Angeles and other American cities. The innovative style of these Byzantine inspired synagogues was largely abandoned after World War II in the rush to embrace modernist architecture.<sup>82</sup>

During the period that Byzantine synagogues were being built, French architects played with historicist references for churches, as a continuation of nineteenth-century historicism but tempered by the use of contemporary materials and tinged with aspects of the emerging modernism. The principal example is the Parisian church of Saint-Esprit built from 1928 to 1935 by Paul Tournon (1881–1964), professor of architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts*.<sup>83</sup> He made impressive structures for the church of Sainte-Thérèse in Élisabethville, France, of 1928 and Sacré-Coeur, the cathedral of Casablanca, in 1930.

For Saint-Esprit, Tournon created a typical façade of the period and added a tall campanile to call attention to the church. Inside he fashioned a miniature Hagia Sophia in reinforced concrete (*Figure 16.16*).<sup>84</sup> In the nave, he repeated the two arcades of the Byzantine church but omitted the tympanum above and added an apse behind the arcades so that they become a screen like the nave arcade at San Marco in Venice. The altar end of the church replicates Hagia Sophia, but by shrinking the model, the result is fussy, pedantic detail.

A second French church in reinforced concrete, Sainte-Odile in Paris (*Figure 16.17*), should also be counted among the inter-war examples of Byzantine revival architecture.<sup>85</sup> The architect was Jacques Barge (1904–79), a former student of Paul Tournon.<sup>86</sup> More creative than his teacher, Barge adapted Byzantine forms for the church constructed from 1935 to 1939. Built of bricks of two colours laid in bands, the church has a tall campanile like Saint-Esprit and a façade filled with relief sculpture. While the exterior has no Byzantine elements, the nave is modelled on San Marco or the Byzantine/Venetian tradition in French architecture, exemplified by Saint-Front de Périgueux. The three bays of the nave are capped with domes encircled by windows reminiscent of Hagia Sophia. On the left or south side of





*Figure 16.17* Jacques Barge, Paris, Sainte-Odile, view to altar, 1935–39, photograph. © Public Domain, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.

the nave are three apsidal chapels framed by tall arches. The same arches on the opposite side of the nave frame large windows subdivided into seven stilted arches akin to the blind arches on sides of the synagogue of Tifereth Israel ([Figure 16.14](#)). In contrast to the latter, the right side of Sainte-Odile is filled with stained glass, creating a wall of colour up to the apse, which has yet more stained glass. The combination of architecture, light and colour makes Sainte-Odile one of the finest modern churches in Paris.

After World War II, historicist churches and synagogues begin to give way to modernism which favoured the clear articulation of the volumes and underlying structure of the building and eschewed ornamentation and historical references. While the 1950s were the period of transition, a few historicist churches continued to be built. Perhaps the finest is the Orthodox Cathedral of São Paulo, Brazil. Began in 1942, it was designed by Francisca Galvão Bueno and Igor Sresnewsky and completed in 1954. This massive building has the dome of Hagia Sophia and the lateral apses of Russian churches that the second architect would have known. The façade's twin towers frame a tympanum taken from the lateral sides of Hagia Sophia, and the nave replicates the arcades of Hagia Sophia. However, the presence of the side apses turns the arcades into screens as at Tournon's Saint-Esprit.

Much smaller but from the same period is the church of Ss Constantine and Helena in Chicago designed by Christopher Chamales (1907–93) in 1946 but only completed in the 1960s.<sup>87</sup> While the abstract massing of forms on the exterior is modern, historical references are nonetheless present. The church has a Hagia Sophia dome and the banded masonry also seen at Tifereth Israel. The nave's sequence of lower domes follows the examples of San Marco, Westminster Cathedral and Sainte-Odile. Finally, the Chicago church follows Hagia Sophia in one more respect that was hardly foreseen by Chamales. As the surrounding



*Figure 16.18* Robert Lowell, Oakland, Calif., Greek Orthodox Church of the Ascension, southwest side, 1960, photograph. © The author.

neighbourhood changed, the Greek Orthodox congregation moved to the suburbs and sold their building to a Muslim group, thereby replicating the transformation of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

American synagogues of the 1950s also transitioned to modernism.<sup>88</sup> At first, the big dome continues as seen in the Park Synagogue in Cleveland Heights of 1950 by the German émigré architect Eric Mendelsohn (1887–1953)<sup>89</sup> or Temple Beth Shalom in Miami Beach by Percival Goodman from 1953 to 1954.<sup>90</sup> Mendelsohn is better known for his expressionist Einstein Tower in Potsdam, completed in 1924 with the aid of Richard Neutra (1892–1970), who also immigrated to America. Mendelsohn died a few years after completing the Park Synagogue in 1950, so that the principal architect of modernist synagogues in America from the 1950s was Percival Goodman, who taught at Columbia University. After the Miami Beach synagogue, he favoured sharply pitched roofs without a hint of historical reference.<sup>91</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century, only Greek Orthodox churches retain some connection with the Byzantine past, but it was now filtered through the abstracting prism of modernism. Like American synagogues, the large dome of Hagia Sophia became the focus in the case of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Ascension in Oakland, California (*Figure 16.18*), designed by Robert Lowell (1917–2016) from the firm of Reid & Tarics Associates.<sup>92</sup> Completed in 1960, the building consists of a dome that is punctured by four short tunnel vaults for the three entrances and the bema. The dome rests on a wall of windows that provides natural light. The simple symmetrical plan, a circle with the four openings, is curiously like the Palladian church of Charles Cameron (1745–1812) in Russia (*Figure 16.4*) or the church of the Holy Trinity in Jamaica.

The circular chandeliers of the Oakland church recall the *choros* of later Byzantine monasteries or the Ottoman lights of Hagia Sophia that replaced similar ones from the Byzantine era (*Figure 16.19*). Anodised aluminium plates dyed yellow cover the ceiling that was then painted with the programme of a Byzantine dome: thus, Christ Pantocrator in the centre surrounded by prophets. While the iconography is traditional, its visual manifestation is the original creation of the local artist Brian Tivel (d. 2020), who was only twenty at the time. Two other artists, Cedric Bouboulis and Andrew Saffas, transferred his sketches



*Figure 16.19* Brian Tivel, Pantocrator, Greek Orthodox Church of the Ascension, Oakland, Calif., photograph. © The author.

to the ceiling. Tivel's tall slender prophets around the Pantocrator suggest the mosaics of San Marco, but the articulation of figures with gold lines is from the cloisonné enamels of its Pala d'Oro at San Marco. The latter's central enthroned Christ with a halo of pearls and jewels was the basis for the Pantocrator at the summit of the dazzling vault ([Figure 16.20](#)) in Oakland.<sup>93</sup> The artist even imitated that hallmark of the Pala d'Oro enamels, a spiral of drapery lines. One appears beneath Christ's right hand. However, the stern, dark face of Jesus with radiating light rays in his hair and beard is due to the imagination of the artist. The vault's aluminium plates scatter light like mosaics, an effect enhanced by the circular setting of those plates around Christ's head, a common technique of Byzantine mosaicists.

Among the other modernist Orthodox churches in the transition period of the 1950s and 1960s, the best known is Frank Lloyd Wright's church of the Annunciation in Wauwatosa,



*Figure 16.20* Santiago Calatrava, New York, St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, 2022, photograph. © The author.

Wisconsin, designed in the year of his death in 1959 and completed afterwards in 1961.<sup>94</sup> Wright called it “a little Sophia”.<sup>95</sup> Like the Oakland church, the Annunciation has a monumental dome. Its elevation on four buttresses recalls Hagia Sophia, as does the band of windows at the base of the dome. Wright marked the church’s entrance with a low arch. Other churches with similar designs include the new cathedral of Our Lady of Zion in Axum, Ethiopia, from 1965. Its oversailing dome also has a lower band of windows. The barrel-vaulted entrance projects from the circular body of the church in a more emphatic but similar manner to the Oakland church. A second Orthodox church with a low dome is the 2012 Cathedral of the Resurrection in Tirana, Albania, by the New York architect Steven P. Papadatos. Once again, the dome is supported by four tall buttresses in the manner of the Annunciation church in Wisconsin and their common model, Hagia Sophia. The entrance is through an arch that is the façade. Inside that arch, a band of windows frames the inner wall and the bronze door so that they appear to have no support.

In view of the foregoing survey of Byzantine revival architecture from the 1840s to the present, how does Santiago Calatrava’s church of St Nicholas, completed in 2022 (Figures 16.20 and 16.21), engage with that tradition and with a site where thousands died on 11 September 2001? In a film made in 1999,<sup>96</sup> the architect explains that he took the



forms from nature, but it can be shown that his architecture also attends to earlier architecture, both his and others. Thus, curves like the entrance of St Nicholas appear frequently in his work, but it also resembles Wright's Wisconsin church. A film about St Nicholas on the architect's website implies that the form of the new church derived from two murals at Hagia Sophia, the apse mosaic of the Virgin and child and the model of the church that Justinian holds in the mosaic of the southwest vestibule. That model shows the south side of the church and its two piers joined by a shallow arch. That curve resembles the arch over the entrance to St Nicholas.

Moreover, as at Hagia Sophia, four pier towers support the dome (Figure 16.21) of the new church. According to Calatrava, he borrowed the idea of the pier's banded masonry from the church of the Chora in Constantinople, but Hagia Sophia itself is more likely the



*Figure 16.21* Santiago Calatrava, New York, St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church at night, 2022, photograph. © Alan Karchmer/OTTO.

source. In this respect, he was working from photographs of the mosque as restored in the mid-nineteenth century. The masonry of Tifereth Israel synagogue of 1924 and the church of Constantine and Helena from 1946 were also inspired by such images. Finally, the architect noted that he gave the dome of St Nicholas 40 windows and ribs like Hagia Sophia.<sup>97</sup> While the design of St Nicholas is new and inventive, it also belongs to the tradition of Byzantine revival architecture.

During the daytime, the church (Figure 16.20) appears restrained, elegant, even modest for a building that cost millions, but at night it turns into a radiant mass of soft warm light framed by the dark piers (Figure 16.21). Interior lighting passes easily through the glass of the façade (Figure 16.20), but the other three sides of the building and the dome also glow from within, because they are covered with a thin skin of translucent Pentelic marble. This non-load bearing stone is comparable to the ubiquitous glass curtain walls of the surrounding office towers (Figure 16.21). As a memorial to the thousands who lost their life on 9/11, the church rises next the dark area to the right of the dome of St Nicholas – two dark voids, where the Towers of the World Trade Center once stood. Elevated about 25 ft above the street level, the church at night is a “beacon of hope” in Calatrava’s words,<sup>98</sup> and always Wisdom’s House and Heaven’s Gate to borrow the title of a recent book.<sup>99</sup>

## Notes

- 1 \* Only a portion of the buildings mentioned in this essay could be illustrated, but adequate images of the others can usually be found on the internet. I wish to thank Fr. Stavros Kasinos for his aid in studying the Greek Orthodox Church of St Nicholas in Liverpool. Jodidio 2018: 577.
- 2 Cannadine 1983.
- 3 Hitchcock 1958; Mignot 1984.
- 4 Bullen 2003, 2021; Saveliev 2005. These accounts complement each other, since Saveliev focuses on Russia and the Slavic world not covered by Bullen, as he noted (Bullen 2003: 228). Both authors focus on the nineteenth century and pay little attention to more recent decades.
- 5 Ousterhout 1995.
- 6 Ahunbay 1992.
- 7 Morgenstern 2010.
- 8 Bender 2012: 1–28.
- 9 Connors 1996.
- 10 Lewis 2002: 36–80.
- 11 Haltrich 1983: 9.
- 12 The chapel was destroyed in World War II. For illustrations see Bullen 2003: figs. 6, 10.
- 13 Heideloff 1841; Curran 1988: 353; Kampouri-Vamvoukou 2003, Brownlee 1991.
- 14 Berger 2015; Bullen 2003: fig. 24; Spangenberg 1999. In general, see Berger 2016.
- 15 Zuchold 1987.
- 16 Quast 1842; Salzenberg 1854.
- 17 Börsch-Supan 1977: 131; Feustel 1999: 21–8. The church was destroyed in World War II.
- 18 Börsch-Supan 1977: 129.
- 19 Börsch-Supan 1977 128–9; Bullen 2003: fig. 12; Sørensen 2014.
- 20 Frowein-Ziroff 1982: 252; Sørensen 2016.
- 21 Lenoir 1836; Couchaud 1842; Texier 1864; Magouliotis 2020. In general, see Kampouri-Vamvoukou 2003.
- 22 Dumoulin 2008: 221–5.
- 23 Joest and Vaulchier 1986: 125.
- 24 Bullen 2003: figs. 48, 57.
- 25 Zanten 1987: 148–52; Bergdoll 1994: 237–8.
- 26 Coly 1983.

- 27 Bastéa 2000: 156–61; Loyer 2017: 143–50.
- 28 Biris and Kardamitsi-Adami 2004: 97, 227.
- 29 Kardamitsi-Adami 2003; Loyer 2017: 117; Papanicolaou-Christensen 1994: 150–1.
- 30 Ousterhout 1999: 173–4; Ousterhout 2019: 416.
- 31 Kardamitsi-Adami 2003: figs. 4–5.
- 32 Papanicolaou-Christensen 1994: fig. 99.
- 33 Papanicolaou-Christensen 1994: fig. 113.
- 34 Boeck 2022.
- 35 Harris 1844: 236.
- 36 Kirin 2012: 280–2; Shvidkovsky 1996: 108–12; Shvidkovsky 2003: 55–61.
- 37 Kirin 2012: 282–95.
- 38 Ragsdale 1988: 93–4; Zorin 2014: 24–60.
- 39 Zorin 2014: 27–8.
- 40 Saveliev 2005: 44–5; figs. 78–9, 124; Saveliev 2019: 120–1, fig. 2. The Soviets destroyed the church in 1930.
- 41 Saveliev 2005: 99–100 figs. 230a–e; Saveliev 2019: 122–3.
- 42 Wortman 2014: 227–31.
- 43 Saveliev 2005: 250–1.
- 44 Kadijević 2019.
- 45 On the church generally see Saveliev 2005: 173–9; Saveliev 2019: 127–8; and the well-informed article on the church in *Wikipedia*, ‘Kronstadt Naval Cathedral’.
- 46 Saveliev 2005: fig. 275–6.
- 47 Saveliev 2005: 175.
- 48 Saveliev 2005: figs. 319–20; Saveliev 2019: 129, fig. 7.
- 49 Cook and Wedderburn 1903: 79, 82–4.
- 50 Jackson 2000.
- 51 L’Hôpital 1919: 34–5; Doyle 1995; Bullen 2003: 173–8.
- 52 Nelson 2004: 107–8; Bullen 2003: 160–1.
- 53 Mathews 1976: 386–401; Ousterhout 2019: 354, 356–7, 361, 605; Hallensleben 1965; Mango 1993, no. XXII: 421–9. The building deserves further study.
- 54 Lewis 2001: 57; Sharples 2004: 245; Pollard 2006: 472.
- 55 Anonymous, *Illustrated London News* 1870.
- 56 Anonymous, *The Builder* 1870.
- 57 Fergusson 1855: vol. II, 956, figs. 788–99.
- 58 Lenoir 1852: vol. I, 269, no. 178, “eglise de Théotocos”.
- 59 Millingen 1912: 243–6.
- 60 Sharples 2004: 245; Pollard 2006: 472.
- 61 Ousterhout 2019: 605; Mango 1993.
- 62 *The Builder* 1870.
- 63 Important drawings of the former state of the Vefa Kilise Camii were made in 1833–35 by Charles Texier and published and analysed by Mango 1993: II, 323–30, figs. 10–9.
- 64 Lenoir 1852–56: vol. I, fig. 184.
- 65 Ousterhout 1987: 78–80.
- 66 Read and Stammers 1995: 145–6.
- 67 Read and Stammers 1995: 145; Cottrell 1992: 187.
- 68 Cottrell 1992: 201.
- 69 Lethaby and Swainson 1894.
- 70 Nelson 2004: 190–1, fig. 100.
- 71 Nelson 2018: fig. 2.
- 72 Nelson 2018.
- 73 Kadish 2011: 179–90.
- 74 Nelson 2018: fig. 12.
- 75 Talgam 2014: 265–81.
- 76 Nelson 2024.
- 77 Nelson 2004: 99–100, fig. 65.



- 78 Hurva Synagogue n.d..
- 79 Falbel 2009, 2012.
- 80 Schultz and Barnsley 1901.
- 81 Nelson 2004: 194, fig. 105.
- 82 Geva 2023.
- 83 Pigafetta and Mastroianni 2004.
- 84 Nelson 2015: 29–34; Dumoulin 2008: 319–21; Lemoine 1987: 242–3.
- 85 Dumoulin 2008: 319–21; Lemoine 1987: 58.
- 86 Édouard-Joseph 1936: vol. 1, 79.
- 87 Nelson 2004: 198–202.
- 88 Geva 2023.
- 89 Leedy 2022.
- 90 Elman and Giral 2001: figs. 97–101.
- 91 Elman and Giral 2001.
- 92 Cutler 1972: 44–6; Sakkis 2017: 48–53.
- 93 Sakkis 2017: 52; Monihan 1985: vol. 2, 371–4.
- 94 Nelson 2004: 203–9. Relevant here is my article, “Modernist Hagia Sophias”, forthcoming in *Modernism/modernity*.
- 95 Nelson 2004: 207.
- 96 Schaub 1999.
- 97 Calatrava (2012–22); Cotsonis (2026).
- 98 Pelley 2020.
- 99 Shawcross 2023.

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# EARLY BYZANTINISM IN THE BRITISH ISLES

## Newman University Church, Dublin

*Niamh Bhalla*

In June 1854, John Henry Newman (1801–90), leading figure in the Oxford Movement and subsequent convert from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism, was installed as the first rector of the Catholic University of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> The Romano-Byzantine church Newman built in Dublin (1855–56), his first declared objective for his tenure, embodied the ideal behind the university.<sup>2</sup> Newman described it as a “beautiful and imposing structure, built simply out of zeal for the University” which “had given it a sort of bodily presence in Dublin”.<sup>3</sup> Despite its significance, University Church has received surprisingly little scholarly attention, perhaps due to its location in an impoverished, Catholic-majority region of the United Kingdom, or its unusual Romano-Byzantine revival style, which sat uneasily within Victorian worldviews given its associations with the “Oriental East” and Orthodoxy. This study explores the deliberate deployment of this ambiguous and disruptive style for University Church as a means of proclaiming a new future for Catholics who were, in this period, achieving significant gains following centuries of post-Reformation persecution. The architectural and decorative decisions made in Dublin were intended as a physical manifestation of the impetus behind this unprecedented Catholic university – the articulation of an erudite Catholic alternative to post-Enlightenment secularism and Protestant hegemony through a style-based analogy to the early Church. Practical constraints, ideological motivations and individual capability converged to produce one of the earliest instances of Byzantine revival in ecclesiastical architecture within the British Isles.

This early expression of Byzantinism emerged as part of a basilican expression – the features of Roman and Byzantine basilicas were amalgamated and adapted in a response to “early Christian” architecture. The basilican and Byzantine traditions were conceptually differentiated, but seen as closely related, in early Victorian architectural histories.<sup>4</sup> They could not be so readily separated in practice, however, particularly because of the sixth-century churches of Ravenna, and this was reflected in the symbiotic emergence of these closely related revival styles. Accurate engagement with Byzantine architectural forms developed gradually as travel to former imperial territories and scholarly publications proliferated throughout the nineteenth century. Yet even as knowledge and familiarity grew, faithful replication of Byzantine forms and spatial concepts appeared only sporadically in western European architecture compared to regions where connections to the Byzantine

Empire and Orthodoxy remained more deeply embedded. In western Europe, a Byzantine style was frequently adopted as an alternative to prevailing architectural traditions to signal departure from convention, often shaped by budgetary constraints. The first manifestations of Byzantinism appeared in ambiguous basilican forms that merged with early Christian design, particularly within the revivalist round-arched style(s), or *Rundbogenstil*, of Bavaria and Prussia, which reached their zenith in the 1840s. Such expressions frequently embodied appeals to religious purity – motivated to varying degrees by political concerns – in response to rising secularism and the socio-political upheavals of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> University Church forms the first comparable expression of this early Byzantinism in the British Isles.

### **Newman and the Idea of a Catholic University Church**

Having graduated from the University of Oxford, Newman was ordained an Anglican priest in 1825 and took up position as vicar of St Mary's University Church, becoming a leader within the Oxford Movement which sought to re-incorporate ancient Christian traditions into the Anglican church. Newman became increasingly drawn to the teachings and practices of the early Church, re-evaluating apostolic succession and thus the authority of the present Roman Catholic Church. He eventually converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845 and was ordained as a Catholic priest. Newman's design for University Church was closely connected to his ecclesiological journey, built in response to its immediate function and environment.

Pope Pius IX (1792–1878) called for the establishment of a Catholic university in Ireland following the British Government's decision in 1845 to found secular "Queen's Colleges" in Galway, Cork and Belfast in response to concerns regarding higher education for Irish Catholics. Trinity College, Dublin, established in 1591, had formally admitted Catholics since 1794, yet few attended – many Irish Catholics lacked the financial means, while those who could afford it were discouraged by the institution's Protestant dominance. In many ways it was a surprising moment to establish the Catholic university given that the famine had just decimated the Irish population and the expanding middle classes were not yet numerous. Nonetheless, the university was established on 18 May 1854.

Artist and fellow convert John Hungerford Pollen (1820–1902), whom Newman appointed to the Chair of Fine Arts in 1855 and entrusted with the church's design, later reflected on how the church's form captured the essence of this first Catholic university in the British Isles:

It covered the garden in rear of the University House; a plain brick hall with an absidal end, timber ceiling etc. somewhat in the manner of the earlier Roman basilicas. He [Newman] felt a strong attachment to those ancient churches with rude exteriors but solemn and impressive within, *recalling the early history of the Church, as it gradually felt its way in the converted Empire, and took possession.*<sup>6</sup>

Confronting both a Protestant-dominated socio-political order and post-Enlightenment intellectual currents, the nascent Catholic university and its church were designed to embody the "union of Science and Religion" – a direct counter to these pressures and to the secular approach championed by the Queen's colleges.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a memorandum written by Newman in April 1854, claimed that a pillar of the university's mission was providing "a

series of sound and philosophical defences of Catholicity and Revelation, in answer to the infidel tenets and arguments, which threaten us at this time”.<sup>8</sup> The architecture and its decoration addressed both Protestant and secular contexts by invoking the authority of the early medieval Church, which had successfully prevailed over the analogous pagan-majority environment from which it emerged. As an adapted basilican form incorporating tributes to Christian art across the medieval period, this “beautiful and imposing” building embodied the enduring historical authority of the Catholic Church – an authority that legitimised the university’s mission to educate and produce erudite Catholic men as societal leaders.

Newman requested a church modelled on early Italian basilicas, which both he and Pollen saw as embodying Christianity’s triumph as a newly imperial religion through the conversion of pagan building types to Christian usage.<sup>9</sup> To express the essence of Ireland’s unprecedented Catholic university, they created a church that drew analogies with early Christian triumph through elements from Roman and Byzantine architecture.

### **The Affective Interior**

University Church is an elongated rectangle in plan (120 ft long, 36 ft wide and 40 ft high) determined by the garden behind number 87 St Stephen’s Green where it was built. The aisleless basilica’s impressive interior featured polychromatic Irish “marbles”, or polished limestones, on the lower parts of the walls, punctuated by painted pseudo-mosaics and originally surmounted by paintings modelled on the work of Raphael (1483–1520).<sup>10</sup> The dark antechapel, giving way to the bright, colourful nave, features striking monolithic columns of light and dark “marbles” from Armagh, Offaly and Kilkenny supporting a large gallery above (Figure 17.1). Eight slim columns with alternating black and brown shafts and carved alabaster capitals featuring Irish flora – such as oak leaves and clover – support seven tall “elliptical” arches framing the view toward the apse; the outermost columns engage the lateral walls. Victorian writers considered round-arched arcades on classicising columns definitive of early Christian and Byzantine architecture, with the stilted form particularly Byzantine.<sup>11</sup>

Preceding this row are four thicker freestanding columns, their alabaster capitals featuring sharply stylised foliage in the Byzantine manner (Figure 17.2). Victorian theorists considered the Byzantine capital the style’s crowning achievement: John Ruskin (1819–1900) devoted considerable attention in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53) to arches and their accompanying capitals as defining features of Byzantine architecture, characterising the capital by its cut-leaf design and superior celebration of nature over classical precedents.<sup>12</sup> The capital became a central element in Neo-Byzantine architecture influenced by Ruskin’s thought and, particularly, within the later Arts and Crafts movement. Clearly drawing on Ruskin’s ideas, Pollen described in his writings on the basilica – a building type he perceived as beginning in Rome and reaching perfection in Byzantium – the convex Byzantine cushion capital as having been based on the concave acanthus leaf capital of classical antiquity, differentiated from it by “a greater desire to appreciate its natural beauty, and with a certain delight in observing the fresh joyousness of living vegetation, blown by winds and clinging round the convex mass”.<sup>13</sup> Pollen considered the “Easterns” far superior to the West in capital design following classical decline, making Byzantine churches “the best field” for study of the capital. He particularly celebrated Ravenna and Constantinople’s capitals for their original character – “sharp, severely controlled but not wanting in vigour or grace” – having sketched and measured Ravenna’s Byzantine capitals during his 1847 visit.<sup>14</sup>





*Figure 17.1* John Hungerford Pollen, University Church, Dublin, Ireland, built for John Henry Newman, Interior showing the view from the antechapel towards the apse. 1855–56. Photograph: © Niamh Bhalla, 2022.



*Figure 17.2* John Hungerford Pollen, University Church, Dublin, Ireland, built for John Henry Newman, Capital in the antechapel. 1855–56. Photograph: ©Niamh Bhalla, 2022.

San Marco's celebrated west front, extolled so influentially by Ruskin, displayed an array of colourful marble columns crowned by varied lighter stone capitals, similar in concept to what appears in University Church. Ravenna's earlier basilicas and Hagia Sophia's interior likewise exhibited sumptuous pillars of diversely coloured marbles topped with pale stone capitals. Pollen regarded such pairings as a hallmark of the basilican tradition, seeing San Marco as a magnificent later embodiment of this type – "a wonderful exponent of their principles" – especially praising its "columns of marble in all colours, the archivolts being of sculptured white marble". This seems to have directly informed the design of University Church's shafts and capitals.<sup>15</sup>

The dim, forest-like antechapel created a poignant transition from Dublin's mundane streets into the nave's luminous realm of marble and pseudo-mosaic, further evoking the early Church's glories. Three registers of coloured marble inlay – executed, according to Pollen, "in the peculiar mode called by the ancients *opus musivum*", with "no raised paneling as in the Gothic or modern Italian method, only flat intarsiation without relief" – clad the nave walls to a height of 15 ft (Figure 17.3).<sup>16</sup> The church's marbles, sourced from across Ireland, were the biggest outlay within the modest budget. They were intended to connect University Church meaningfully to its context – "developing, as far as resources went, the natural capabilities of Ireland". The basilica was chosen in part because it would most effectively showcase "the various veins of marble so plentifully compacted under and over the soil".<sup>17</sup>

Following Ruskin's principle that architecture succeeds when rooted in its surrounding terrain, the applied coloured stone panels drew Ireland's deepest geological strata into the sacred space. The application method invested them with additional symbolic meaning,



Figure 17.3 John Hungerford Pollen, University Church, Dublin, Ireland, built for John Henry Newman, Wall of the nave. 1855–56. Photograph: ©Niamh Bhalla, 2022.

linking the Irish church to “early Christianity”. That these marbles were meant to evoke the primitive Church is clear from the Catholic University Gazette’s description: “To Irish productions we shall be indebted for a variety of colour and vein which might almost vie with St Mark’s at Venice, that mine of the most precious relics of antiquity”.<sup>18</sup> Style, craftsmanship and the apostolic heritage were inseparable.

The arcaded, aisled design of the basilica is simulated through the articulation of the lower register of each nave wall with five inlaid shafts of green Galway marble that emulate columns. These pseudo-columns divide the walls into 12 rectangular sections of darker rectangular panels of reds and browns arranged in a black grid, emulating the darkened aisle spaces beyond the arcade. Each arch of the pseudo-arcade frames a painted golden lunette executed on roughened slate by Pollen. The textured gold ground of each creates a play of light, and the inclusion of hatched lines and pieces of coloured glass imitates mosaic tesserae. At the centre of each lunette a standing saint is flanked by an angel on each side: the painting style clearly relates to the work of the Pre-Raphaelites to whom Pollen was connected. The conch of the apse is also filled with a painted pseudo-mosaic by Pollen of the seated Virgin surrounded by an inhabited vine modelled after the twelfth-century apse mosaic in San Clemente in Rome (opened in 1084), perceived at this date to be a Byzantine mosaic. Lord Lindsay (1812–80), credited with elevating the reputation of Byzantine art even prior to Ruskin in his *Sketches in the History of Christian Art* (1847), even goes so far as to say that the revival of art under the Byzantine Komnenian emperors of the eleventh century was first felt in the apse mosaic of San Clemente.<sup>19</sup>

The paintings above the marble inlay were modelled on the set of tapestries designed by Raphael in 1515 for the Sistine Chapel (opened in 1483), punctuated by copies of paintings

of the 12 apostles from the nave pillars in the abbey church of San Paolo alle Tre Fontane, Rome (opened 1599), thought at the time to be the work of Raphael or his school. These scenes once more connected the church to Rome and the early Church in depicting events from the lives of saints Peter and Paul, and the death of the proto-martyr St Stephen. They were commissioned in Rome by Newman from artists connected to the Nazarene movement, who sought to emulate the work of quattrocento masters as part of a call to a deeper Christian spirituality, in a manner that complemented the overall structure and form of the church.

The combination of an early Christian basilican structure, a Byzantinising hieratic pseudo mosaic in the apse and archaising paintings included over the nave arcade had already been found in Georg Friedrich Ziebland's basilica of St Boniface (1835–50) destroyed in the Second World War (Figure 17.4). Both Pollen and Newman had separately visited Munich in 1847 and been impressed by the church of St Boniface.<sup>20</sup> King Ludwig I of Bavaria established the Benedictine Abbey (founded 1835) to which the church belonged as part of his campaign to revitalise Catholic faith in Munich following early nineteenth-century secularism. The community received authority over the adjacent museum quarter to signal the interdependence of religion, arts and sciences within Ludwig's challenge to secularisation. This church, which like the Dublin church was informed by the basilicas of



*Figure 17.4* Georg Friedrich Ziebland, Basilica of St Boniface, Munich, Germany, Photomechanical print of the interior view towards the apse. 1835–50. Digital file taken from the original in Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC 20540 U.S.A. Downloaded from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.00070>. No known restrictions.

Ravenna and became an epitomic expression of the early Christian *Rundbogenstil*, holds similarities in form and conception with the Dublin church and must have informed its design.

Gold painted woodwork complements the marbles and pseudo mosaics in creating a Byzantinising interior. The screen of the choir gallery to the left of the apse emulates gilded latticework. Pollen said: “I introduced, something after the old Byzantine manner, pierced lattice in place of curtains ... and pierced work in the baldacchino of the altar and pulpit”.<sup>21</sup> Pollen’s deliberate use of Byzantine forms extended to the altar’s six tall candlesticks. Each base features a leaf motif mimicking cut metalwork, fashioned from gilded wood due to budgetary constraints. Pollen sketched the design onto the timber before Irish carpenters executed the carving. He welcomed the craftsmen’s engagement with unfamiliar forms, as the resulting lack of refinement was authentically Byzantine in achieving its “effects at the proper distance”.<sup>22</sup> The golden accented, marble-clad interior, with columns adorned with floriate alabaster capitals, and his holistic and sustained use of polychromy, was clearly indebted to churches in Constantinople and Italy that Pollen had visited.<sup>23</sup> Pollen sought not slavish replication of early Christian and Byzantine basilicas, but rather a building Romano-Byzantine in spirit: the sumptuous, animated setting of coloured marble surfaces, gilding, paintings and orchestrated light was designed, in authentic Byzantine tradition, as what Newman termed “a foretaste of heaven” on earth.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Authority of the Catholic Church**

The basilicas exhibit a system of internal architecture; now this decoration is less costly, and far easier, than that of exteriors.<sup>25</sup>

Pollen’s “Apologia” – the concluding lecture in his Dublin series on the basilica, delivered in 1855 while designing the church – reveals that University Church’s design was shaped by spatial and financial constraints. The exterior’s concealment from the street rendered expensive sculptural Neo-Gothic ornament pointless, whilst limited resources (Newman funded the project from personal means) made what Ruskin called the “confessed incrustation” of Byzantine style – cladding inexpensive structural materials like brick with precious marbles and mosaics – an apt solution. Yet ideological considerations equally informed the church’s aesthetic. Pollen articulated a clear continuity of Christian structure and form linking Rome and Byzantium in his Dublin lectures, and later, in an 1858 article for *Atlantis* – the science and literature journal published by the Catholic University of Ireland – traced the basilica’s evolution from Rome through Byzantine Ravenna’s new heights to its zenith at Hagia Sophia and San Marco.<sup>26</sup> For Pollen, Byzantine structures, even centralised domed churches, were a natural evolution of the early basilica, evidencing a continuum in early Christian architecture, expressed in the amalgamation of structure and form in the Dublin church.

University Church was not an eclectic mid-nineteenth-century fusion of round-arched styles, but rather a careful Romano-Byzantine design that embodied continuity in the face of claims of atrophy and decline concerning medieval Christianity by Enlightenment and Protestants alike, informed by the work of Enlightenment figurehead Edward Gibbon (1737–94) and his scathing appraisal of the late Roman empire in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88). Gibbon’s work in which he detailed “the triumph of barbarism and religion” had largely attributed the fall of the Romans to the rise of Christianity



and he held the eastern portion of the Roman empire which continued after the western half had fallen in particular contempt. Characterisations of the corruption of the medieval Catholic Church informed by Gibbon's work were used by both secularists and Protestants to undermine the present authority of the Roman church. Writing about the persecution of English Catholics and against such ideas, Newman underlined the foundational idea behind the denunciation of Catholicism:

... that Christianity was very pure in its beginning, was very corrupt in the middle age, and is very pure in England now, though still corrupt everywhere else: that in the middle age, a tyrannical institution, called the Church, arose and swallowed up Christianity, and that that Church is alive still, and has not yet disgorged its prey ... in the middle age there was no Christianity anywhere at all, but all was dark and horrible.<sup>27</sup>

Protestantism had ditched “a thousand years from the world's chronicle”, according to Newman, resulting in “its want of past history, and its want of fixed teaching”.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (1845), published the year of his conversion, Newman decried the “utter incongruity between Protestantism and historical Christianity” as being “plain fact”, arguing that historical continuity belonged to Catholics.<sup>29</sup>

At the heart of Newman's university was a profound defence of Catholicity based on his ideas of historical continuity and sacred development, articulated fully in *The Development*, a work met with a mixed reception, but which was definitive for Newman throughout his life concerning the cogency of a dynamically evolving religious tradition. To be Catholic was to accept that the truths of Christianity had evolved through history under the guardianship of Rome. Newman and Pollen's Romano-Byzantine church was a material affirmation of the continued authority of the Catholic Church through history as a developed basilican type. Visual analogy created a connection back to the early Church and the legitimacy it assumed following the Edict of Milan (313) when Christianity was legalised. The structure and style declared that just as the early Church asserted its place in the pagan Roman empire and continued into the Middle Ages, so too would the university's Catholics in their Post-Enlightenment context. University Church embodied sacred continuity and refuted notions of corruption and decline.

Whilst for others medieval revivalism often intertwined with emerging nationalisms, Newman concerned himself solely with Catholic identity. His deployment of the Romano-Byzantine style projected an erudite and venerable identity for marginalised British and Irish Catholics: it embodied the university's mission to restore persecuted Catholics in both England and Ireland to their rightful social standing, denied them since the Reformation. In his lectures delivered before the university's inauguration, Newman said:

Catholics in these islands have not been in a condition for centuries to attempt the sort of education which is necessary for the man of the world, the statesman, the landholder, or the opulent gentleman. Their legitimate stations, duties, employments, have been taken from them.<sup>30</sup>

Some of the most noteworthy Byzantine revival buildings in the British Isles were inherently connected to the assertion of non-Protestant identities because, as J.B. Bullen has argued, the style provided a visual means of differentiation from, and challenge to, the status quo.<sup>31</sup> The structure, forms and Irish materials were used to create something that

connected back to the ancient church, but which was entirely new in its impetus, built for the nineteenth-century needs of Catholics. Newman and Pollen's vision was for a better Catholic future: through their university they intended, according to Pollen "to smash modern Heathenism under the Communion and in the name of Peter".<sup>32</sup> Their Romano-Byzantine church offered a tangible expression of those utopian ambitions.

## Notes

- 1 The bibliographic material on Newman is vast. See [Aquino and King 2018](#).
- 2 The main journal article is still [Kane 1977](#).
- 3 Newman's cited works to be found at <https://www.newmanreader.org/works>. Newman 1896: I: 69–71.
- 4 [Freeman 1849](#): 154.
- 5 See in particular the early Christian Rundbogenstil in Bavaria and Prussia. For example, on Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia's interest in early Christian design, his desire to unify and reform Protestantism and the consolidation of imperial power, see Nelson, 2004: 40–4.
- 6 *The Month*, Sept 1906: 319.
- 7 [Newman 1896](#): I, 24.
- 8 [Newman 1961](#): 16: 557.
- 9 This view was found across the earliest Victorian architectural histories. See, for example, [Freeman 1849](#): 152.
- 10 Replaced by bright acrylic paintings in the early 2000s due to damage.
- 11 [Freeman 1849](#): 172.
- 12 Cook and Wedderburn 1903–12: X: 161.
- 13 [Pollen 1858](#): 134.
- 14 [Pollen 1858](#): 140–1.
- 15 [Pollen 1858](#): 142–3.
- 16 [Pollen 1912](#): 381.
- 17 [Pollen 1912](#): 379. The greens came from Galway, the reds from Cork, blacks from Kilkenny, and greys and browns from Laois and Armagh.
- 18 [Anon. 1856](#).
- 19 [Lindsay 1847](#): I, 276–7.
- 20 [Newman 1961](#): 12:135, 151.
- 21 [Pollen 1912](#): 381.
- 22 [Pollen 1912](#): 382.
- 23 Pollen measured and sketched the alabaster capitals in Ravenna's churches in detail. [Pollen 1912](#): 81.
- 24 Newman refers in his writings to the earthly service in this manner in Newman 1870: 488. The *topos* of the church as an experience of heaven on earth recurs in Byzantine literary sources.
- 25 [Pollen 1912](#): 379.
- 26 [Pollen 1912](#): 73, 1858.
- 27 [Newman 1851](#): 12–3.
- 28 [Newman 1851](#): 43; 58.
- 29 [Newman 1878](#): 8.
- 30 [Newman 1873](#): 7.
- 31 [Bullen 2003](#): 67.
- 32 Letter [to John Henry Newman] from John Hungerford Pollen, Worcester, 29 Sep 1855. MS. 17906/5, fols. 18–9. Bodleian Libraries, Pollen archive.

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## “ROME OF THE EAST”

### The Neo-Byzantine Style in the Architecture of the Russian Empire

*Yuri R. Saveliev*

The art and history of the eastern Roman Empire have a very special and fundamental significance for Russia. After the Christianisation of “Kievan Rus” in 988 CE and the marriage of the Byzantine princess Anna, daughter of Byzantine emperor Romanos II Porphyrogennetus (r. 959–63), to the Kievan prince Vladimir Svyatoslavich (r. 980–1015), various cultural traditions were transmitted from Byzantium to Russia in the period called the “Macedonian Renaissance”, and this was reflected in the art of “Kievan Rus”.<sup>1</sup> Byzantine influence continued to be observed in Russian art and architecture throughout the Middle Ages until the end of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>2</sup>

Following the marriage of Sofia Palaiologina, the daughter of Thomas Palaiologos (r. 1428–60) – Despot of Morea and brother of the last Byzantine emperor – to the Grand Duke of Moscow, Ivan III Vasilyevich (r. 1462–1505) in 1472, and continuing into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Russia legitimated itself as the successor of Byzantium and the world centre of Orthodoxy. The grand prince of Moscow and ruler of Russia Vasily III Ivanovich (r. 1505–33) was even called “emperor” in a message from the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (r. 1508–19) in 1514. The well-established tradition of attributing to Moscow the title of “the Third Rome”, as a successor of ancient Rome by means of Byzantium, also contributed to the transmission of Byzantine traditions in Russia. An image of Michael VIII Palaiologos (1224/5–82), founder of the eponymous dynasty, was placed in the royal pantheon – the Cathedral of the Archangel in the Moscow Kremlin (1505–08) – during the reign of Ivan IV the Terrible (r. 1533–84), and Ivan IV was crowned as “tsar” in the same manner as the emperors of Byzantium in 1547. Along with the prominent continuation of Byzantine imperial traditions, the Patriarchate was established in Russia in 1589 under the tsar Fyodor I. Ioannovich (r. 1584–98). Expensive gifts from the Moscow tsars can still be found in Orthodox monasteries and churches around the world today, particularly in the Christian East.

The established paradigm of the continuity of Byzantium in Muscovite Russia and later the Russian Empire was also reflected in Russian architecture. This was greatly encouraged through the emergence of Historicism in European culture in the last third of the eighteenth century, when historic styles became an important source of creativity in the reinvigoration of architecture until the mid-twentieth century. In Russia and the countries of eastern

Europe, the newly emerged Neo-Byzantine style played a significant role in the architecture and art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **The Origin of the Neo-Byzantine Style in Russian Architecture**

The Neo-Byzantine style can be considered as one of the “neo-styles” of Historicism, a significant movement in art and culture based on the study of history. In Russian architecture, the Neo-Byzantine style competed with the “Russian” style, a more historicist style based on Old Russian architecture of the eleventh to seventeenth centuries with some Byzantinising elements.<sup>3</sup> These were the two main styles of Russian church architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century: the Neo-Byzantine style was used only for churches and monasteries, but the majority of churches and public buildings were still built in the Russian style, especially between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The origin of the Neo-Byzantine style in Russia was closely connected to the European roots of the style, constituting strong proof of Russia’s integration into European cultural processes. The construction of the royal Allerheiligen-Hofkirche (Court Church of All Saints, 1827–37; destroyed 1944, rebuilt from 1986) in Munich by Ludwig I of Bavaria (r. 1825–48) in 1837 made a great impact on the then young diplomat, artist and future vice-president of the Academy of Arts, Prince Grigory Grigorievich Gagarin (1810–93), who eventually became a preeminent patron of this style in Russia.<sup>4</sup> Various mutual contacts and dynastic ties between the Prussian royal and Russian imperial courts contributed to the exchange of ideas in the field of architecture between Saint Petersburg, Munich and Berlin.

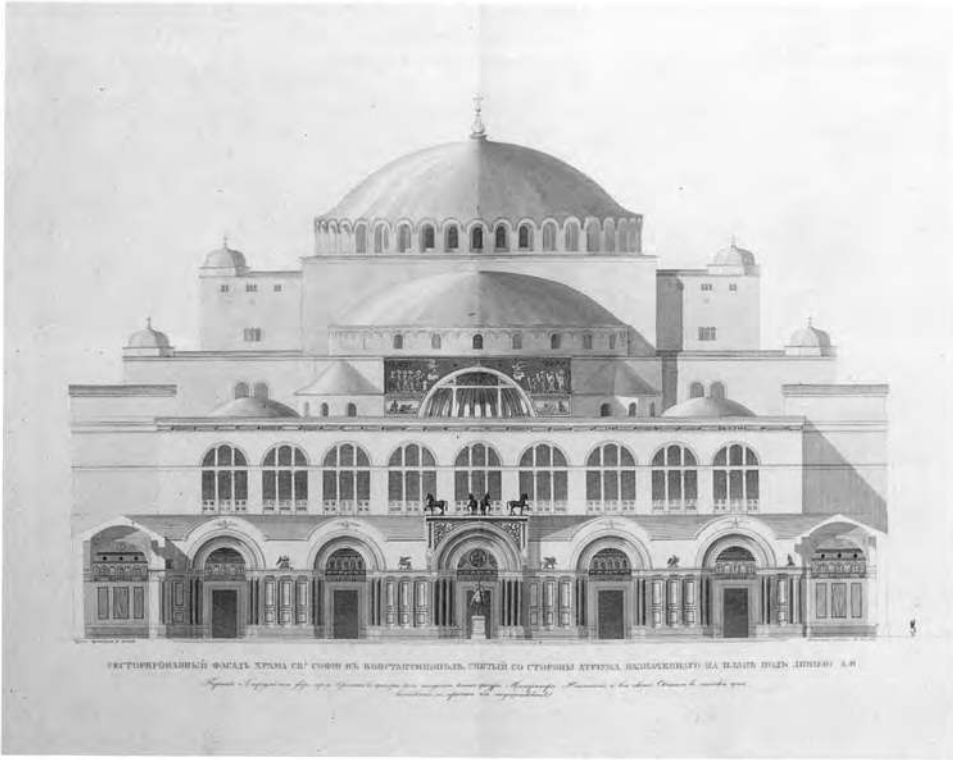
The study of Byzantine architectural heritage began in the 1840s and 1850s thanks to the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, founded in Moscow in 1757 by Empress Elizabeth I of Russia (r. 1741–62) and relocated to Saint Petersburg in the same year. Architects Ippolit A. Monighetti (1819–78) and Aleksey M. Gornostayev (1808–62) had studied the style in Italy, David I. Grimm (1823–98) and Prince Gagarin in Armenia and Georgia, Nikolay E. Efimov (1799–1851) with his study of the St Sophia cathedral in Constantinople ([Figure 18.1](#)) and Roman I. Kuzmin (1811–67) in Greece.

Soon after, from the late 1850s and 1860s, the first Neo-Byzantine churches were built, in areas such as the Crimea, the Caucasus and Kiev – areas that had already been influenced by Byzantine art and architecture. For example, young architect Ivan V. Shtrom (1823–88, one of the architects of the Neo-Byzantine Cathedral of Athens) presented his design for St Vladimir Cathedral, Kiev, to Emperor Nicholas I (r. 1825–55) in 1853. This cathedral became the first large building in the Neo-Byzantine style.<sup>5</sup>

However, the capital, Saint Petersburg, with its two main architectural schools, the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and the Institute of Civil Engineers, the latter founded in 1832 by Emperor Nicholas I, would become the undisputed centre for the formation of the Neo-Byzantine style.

### **The “Court Style” During the Reign of Emperor Alexander II (1855–81)**

The main patrons of the Neo-Byzantine style were a group of aristocrats from the Imperial Court with remarkable cultural erudition and education in the history of art, who were convinced that this style could embody and express Russia’s contribution to the continuation of the Byzantine tradition. Empress Maria Alexandrovna (1855–80) and the vice-president of the Academy of Arts, Prince Gagarin, were among the patrons of this style. Imperial orders for various architectural projects in this style influenced the architecture of



*Figure 18.1* Nikolay E. Efimov (1799–1851), architect, The “Restored” facade of the cathedral of St Sophia in Constantinople Drawn from the Side of Atrium, 1839–40, lithograph by I. Seleznev after the prototype by N.E. Efimov, watercolour colouring, 37.5 × 50.5 cm. From the album: “The Atlas of the Travel of Vladimir Davydov to the Ionian Islands, Greece, Asia Minor and Turkey in 1835”. Sections I and II. St Petersburg: Fisher’s printshop (cat.№ 130). © Fair Use, from: “Russian Travelers to the Greek World (XII – the first half of the XIX century)”. Exhibition catalogue. Russian State Library. Ed. “Indrik”. 1995. p. 83.

the lower levels of society, and the Neo-Byzantine style gradually became the accepted prototype for Russian church architecture. However, it was first witnessed in palace churches such as St Nicholas Church in the Mariinsky Palace (designed by Prince Gagarin, 1850s) and the church of St Alexander Nevsky in Anichkov Palace, Saint Petersburg (architects Monighetti and Ernest I. Zhiber (1823–1909), 1866). The Greek Embassy Church (designed by Kuzmin, 1861–65) was an outstanding model for the tetraconch church type. The monastic churches built in the Coastal Monastery of St Sergius, one of two main pantheons of the Saint Petersburg aristocracy, are other excellent examples: particularly the basilica of St Sergius (designed by Aleksey M. Gornostayev, 1854–59) and the basilica of the Resurrection of Christ (designed by Alfred A. Parland (1842–1919), 1871–84).

The construction of churches in Crimea followed the same style as the capital. Prominent examples include the two churches of the Livadia Palace by the architect Monighetti (1866) and his disciple Alfons G. Vincent (1872–76). Empress Maria Alexandrovna also sponsored the Cathedral of St Vladimir in Chersonesus Monastery (designed by Grimm,



*Figure 18.2* Viktor A. Schroeter (1839–1901) and Andrey L. Gun (1841–1924), architects, Project of the Cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky of the Caucasian Army in Tiflis. First prize at the 1866 contest, 1878. Magazine “Architect” (“Zodchiy”). Saint Petersburg. Folio № 46. “Concours public. Projet d’une cathédrale d’Armée Caucase a Tiflis. 1r Prix. Façade sur l’Est”. V. Schroter et H. Huhn. © Public Domain.

1859–91) to commemorate the baptism of Prince Vladimir in Crimea in 988. The church of St Vladimir in the town of Sevastopol (architect Aleksey A. Avdeev, 1862–88) was designed for the same purpose.

The 1860s was marked by the construction of grandiose Neo-Byzantine-style cathedrals in many cities of the empire and in the Holy Land such as the Trinity Cathedral in Jerusalem (designed by Martin I. Eppinger, 1860–72). The contest for the design of the Cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky for the Caucasian Army in Tiflis (1865) was of great importance for

the development of this style (Figure 18.2). The building was erected according to the project of the architect Grimm in 1866–97. The model for the project was the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

During this period different types of Neo-Byzantine churches were built for city cathedrals, monastic churches, parish churches and chapels and the churches of charitable institutions. They varied in their plan and compositional elements with basilicas, five-domed and tetraconch structures being developed. The significance of this foundational period lay in the creation of the professional and social conditions for the future development of this style. The Neo-Byzantine style quickly prevailed in architectural circles, due to its rational construction, the richness of its composition, its logical tectonic decoration and its greater economy compared to the “Russian style”. “Schools” of Neo-Byzantine architecture soon emerged at both the Academy of Arts and the Institute of Civil Engineers in Saint Petersburg. The graduates of the latter were often appointed as provincial chief engineers and architects and thanks to their professional activities, the Neo-Byzantine style continued to proliferate across the country.

The education of architects and the evolution of studies in the history of Byzantine art and architecture in Russia played a key role in the development of the style. A museum of Christian antiquities was established at the Academy of Arts in 1856, where a collection of drawings, annotated architectural plans and watercolours of Byzantine monuments was housed and enriched with new material. Byzantine studies and the study of the history of Byzantine art began playing an increasingly important role in Russian culture. These disciplines were mainly represented by the work by academician Nikodim P. Kondakov (1844–1925) and his school (Dimitri V. Ainalov (1862–1939), Egor K. Redin (1863–1908), Nikolay L. Okunev (1863–1908) and others).<sup>6</sup> The history of the Byzantine Church was soon added to the curriculum of the theological academies as one of the main disciplines by figures such as Aleksey P. Lebedev, Professor of Moscow Theological Academy from 1870 to 1895. The research carried out by the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople (1894–1917) played an equally important role in the study of Byzantine art.

The liberal reforms of Emperor Alexander II contributed to the rapid development of provincial architecture and the construction of a large number of churches across the country. The bourgeoisie, who were gaining strength in those years, turned to the Neo-Byzantine style: world-renowned merchants, manufacturers and industrialists such as the Eliseevs, the Gubonins, the Tereshchenko, the Shuvalovs and many others, sponsored churches and constructed their family funerary monuments in this style. The Neo-Byzantine style was also used under the continued patronage of the authorities of the Orthodox Church, seen clearly in the construction of monasteries in the capital and various regions. The roots for the creation of an image of Russia as the “New Byzantium” are to be found in Russian architecture from the 1850s to the 1870s, most broadly expressed in the domed compositions of the Neo-Byzantine style.

### **Authority and the Neo-Byzantine Style in the Early 1880s**

The official attitude towards the Neo-Byzantine style drastically shifted with the change of Russian monarch. New Emperor Alexander III (r. 1881–94) preferred the Russian style, which he considered to be more representative of his reign, and so the Neo-Byzantine style was employed solely in the construction of churches and monasteries. The beginning of these changes was reflected in the competition for the design of the Church of the Resurrection

of Christ, which was intended to be built at the very place where Emperor Alexander II was mortally wounded during his assassination on 1 March of 1881 in Saint Petersburg. Almost all the projects during the first stage of the contest for this church in 1882 followed the Neo-Byzantine style. However, at the behest of the new emperor, a couple of projects in the Russian style were also accepted for the second stage of the contest two years later. It was one of the latter that won the competition, and the church was built in this style.

However, the preferences of the architectural community did not change, and the Neo-Byzantine style continued to develop in the following decades. At the time of the architectural contest of 1882, an exhibition of the submitted portfolio was organised in the front lobby of the Institute of Civil Engineers, which would become the chief architectural school of this style between the last quarter of the century and the early twentieth century.

### **The Neo-Byzantine Style in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century**

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a rapid increase in the number of churches being built in all provinces of the Russian Empire. The geographic scope of the construction was vast: most were built in the Russian style but more than 200 Neo-Byzantine churches were erected from the Kingdom of Poland to the Pacific Ocean and from Saint Petersburg to Tashkent, Uzbekistan with variations in typology, size, composition, style and specific features of the decoration. The most characteristic examples of the style were the city cathedrals, built in the provincial capitals: for example, the Cathedral in Irkutsk (1875–94). As a rule, these buildings were five-domed churches of impressive size, which occupied a central place in the low-rise urban panorama.

Monastic churches in the Neo-Byzantine style occupied a significant place in the architecture of many cities. The Ioannovsky Monastery in Saint Petersburg by architect Nikolay N. Nikonov (1849–1918), built between 1899 and 1911, is renowned for the quality of its architecture (Figure 18.3). The architect evoked Constantinopolitan churches of the Komnenian period. Nikonov was also the architect of the entire complex of the New Athos Monastery in the Caucasus, constructed between 1888 and 1900.

The largest group of buildings in the Neo-Byzantine style consisted of parish churches, which were relatively small, crowned with a dome and diverse in their architectural arrangements. The most common architectural type for such buildings was the tetraconch. This composition made it possible to highlight the central dome and create an expressive outline for the entire building, usually small in dimensions. A lesser group, but one which was important for the development of the style, comprised the churches erected at large factories in both capitals and in the Urals. Some had quite significant dimensions, as in the case of the five-domed church of the Holy Trinity at the Lysvensky factories of Count Pavel P. Shuvalov (1847–1902) in the Urals [designed by Alexander B. Turchevich (1855–1909), 1891–98].

Despite the variety in the scale and composition of the churches built in the Neo-Byzantine style, several typological groups may be discerned: the five-domed church, the single-domed church – often in the form of a tetraconch or triconch – and more complicated compositions that combined two or more compositional types. Basilicas, unlike the early period, almost ceased to be created. Sometimes, belfries or bell towers were constructed above the main western entrance to the church. At the end of the nineteenth century, many of them were influenced by the Art Nouveau style, which became rather standard for their exterior and interior decoration in the early twentieth century.





*Figure 18.3* Nikolay N. Nikonov (1841–1924), architect, Monastery of St John Rylsky in St Petersburg, 1899–1911, photograph. © Photographed by the author, 2016.

### **Art Nouveau and the Neo-Byzantine Style in the Early Twentieth Century**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the evolution of the Neo-Byzantine style took a new “innovative” path, employing some features of the Art Nouveau. This trend was most attractive from an artistic point of view, and it emerged in the works of a new generation of architects. The most famous master of the Russian Art Nouveau was Fyodor O. Shekhtel (1859–1926) who built the Church of the Saviour in Ivanovo-Voznesensk (1898–1903), one of the first examples of the influence of Art Nouveau on the Neo-Byzantine style.

The small Church of the Sign of the Most Holy Theotokos in Moscow [designed by Sergey U. Solovyov (1859–1912), 1908–13] which espouses Art Nouveau principles is distinguished at the same time by its close resemblance to the style of churches from Justinian’s Ravenna. The Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God of the Novodevichy Monastery in Saint Petersburg [designed by Vasily A. Kosyakov (1862–1921), 1907–14] is a church characterised by a certain peculiarity because of its combination of the Neo-Byzantine style with the aesthetics of modernity. Its five-dome architectural plan with the grandiose central dome meets the traditions of Russian church building, while the interior is influenced by the imperial church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople. Most of all, details of the façade, the wall-paintings and its decorative elements/ornamental units, which have been restored recently, seem to follow the Art Nouveau.

## Two Cathedrals: The Stylistic Evolution of the Early Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, interest in the history of Byzantium and its art and architecture grew significantly in Russian society. Thanks to the development of Byzantine studies, the teaching of Byzantine history in secular and ecclesiastical educational institutions, the publication of literary works with a focus on Byzantium, the translation of Byzantine literature and the influence of the existing Neo-Byzantine churches, interest in the Byzantine heritage of Russia grew steadily. The period was marked by the construction of Neo-Byzantine churches at a much larger scale than before. At this time, two cathedrals, which were the result of the evolution of the Neo-Byzantine style for more than half a century, were erected: the Cathedral of St Nicholas the Wonderworker in Kronstadt by the architects Vasily and Georgy Kosyakov, in 1901–13, and the cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky in Sofia (architect Alexander N. Pomerantsev, 1898–1912). They represented the two main architectural schools that promoted this style: the Institute of Civil Engineers and the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. They are also the most significant works in this style in its entire history.

A domed structure and an emphasis on interior space, as modelled by Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, were adopted as the basic prototype for both cathedrals (Figure 18.4).

Built simultaneously, the two cathedrals differ from each other in their design. The Cathedral of St Nicholas is a more centralised building. Its dominant structure is the dome and it has two belfries constructed on its western side. In keeping with European traditions of the nineteenth century, Neo-Romanesque features are also present in the structure of the



*Figure 18.4* Vasily A. Kosyakov (1862–1921) and Georgiy A. Kosyakov (1872–1925), architects, Interior of the Cathedral of St Nicholas the Wonderworker in Kronstadt, 1901–13, photograph. After the restoration of 2002–13. © Photographed by the author, 2014.



Figure 18.5 Aleksandr N. Pomerantsev (1849–1918), architect, St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia, 1898–1912, photograph. © Photographed by the author, 2021.

façades alongside the Neo-Byzantine motifs. In contrast, the composition of the Cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky resembles that of the basilica due to its elongated western part. The bell tower rises above the main entrance and the smooth lines of the domes, arches and windows dominate the structure of the façades (Figure 18.5). However, the influence of Art Nouveau is predominant in the style of the wall painting of St Nicholas.

Following its emergence in Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Neo-Byzantine style employed artistic and structural patterns similar to those in other European countries (among the countries of western Europe, it was most comparable to the Neo-Byzantine in French architecture). In the countries of eastern Europe (Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania), as in Russia, the Neo-Byzantine style was perceived as a “national style” in architecture. However, in Russia, the scale of church construction in this style was much larger than in any other European country with more than 200 ecclesiastical buildings erected. The Neo-Byzantine became the most important style (with the Russian one) of Historicist architecture in Russia, and its evolution embodied the highest form of cultural output, especially during the first half of the twentieth century.

### **The Neo-Byzantine Style of the Churches Built by Russian Émigrés**

The catastrophe of 1917 interrupted the development of church architecture in Russia for a long time. It immediately affected church construction and the development of Byzantine studies. The Neo-Byzantine style became possible only in the architecture of Russian architects outside Russia. Thanks to the patronage of the King of Yugoslavia, Alexander I Karageorgevich

(r. 1921–34), in the 1920s and 1930s, many churches in Yugoslavia (Belgrade, Chukarica, Lazarevac, Leskovac, Pozhega, Skopje and other cities) were built on the designs of architects such as Vasily M. Androsov (1873–1944) (50 of more than 100 proposed projects were realised), Viktor V. Lukomsky (1884–1947) and many others. Some of them were graduates of the Nicholas the First Engineering Academy. The style of these relatively small buildings followed both the Byzantine and medieval Serbian traditions of church building.<sup>7</sup> Another centre of Neo-Byzantine Russian architecture was formed in Harbin (China). There, several churches were built in the 1930s following the design of graduates of the Institute of Civil Engineers.<sup>8</sup>

In modern Russia, the history and culture of Byzantium still attracts as much attention as it did at the beginning of the last century, seen clearly in the renovation of the St Nicholas Naval Cathedral in Kronstadt, which was carried out in 2013, exactly 100 years after its construction. Architects and priests often choose the Neo-Byzantine style for the construction of modern churches. The difference between current architectural projects and those of the past lies in the frequent adoption today of existing forms and famous compositions which are closely emulated by the new projects. The creation of a Neo-Byzantine church is now a challenge in the need to balance the preservation of the unshakable principles of Byzantine architecture, the employment of modern forms and the reflection of a new spirituality, while, at the same time, trying to fulfil the desire to create something as beautiful as its outstanding predecessors.

### Notes

- 1 The “Macedonian Renaissance” is named after the dynasty which ruled from 867 to 1056. It represents one of the most striking periods of Byzantine culture, art and architecture. The influence of Byzantine art in Kievan Rus’ particularly manifested in architecture, icon painting and mosaics from the end of the ninth to the beginning of the eleventh century.
- 2 The Byzantine influence prevailed in the assimilation of the typology and iconography of Byzantine art, in church architecture, monumental painting and icon painting, and in jewellery.
- 3 “Russian style” appeared in Russian architecture earlier than the Neo-Byzantine style. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the term “Russian-Byzantine style” can be found in works on the history of architecture. This term referred only to the forms of the Russian style, which were based on Byzantine origins. No more than that. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, there was no Neo-Byzantine style in Russia. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, all architects and their customers have been well aware of the difference between Neo-Byzantine and Russian styles. The term “neo-Russian style” appeared in Russia only at the beginning of the twentieth century to denote a new style inside Russia associated with the influence of Art Nouveau style.
- 4 Bullen 2003: 18–23; Saveliev 2019: 119.
- 5 Saveliev 2005: 28–9.
- 6 See chapter in this volume on Kondakov.
- 7 Kadijevic 1997: 105–12; 158–66.
- 8 Kradin 2010: 212–1; 224–9.

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# 19

## AUTHENTICITY AND EXUBERANCE

### Reflections of Byzantium in German Mausolea, 1860–1920

*Thomas Kaffenberger*

#### **Funerary Architecture as an Understudied Field**

Germany's role in the revival of Byzantine art and architecture, seen often in structures combining a relatively faithful imitation of "Byzantine" spatial distribution with the revived art of mosaic decoration, has long been recognised.<sup>1</sup> The latter's success, in particular at the Wilhelminian court of Prussia (1888–1918), has been acknowledged, particularly in relation to the work of large companies such as Puhl & Wagner who were responsible for the creation of mosaics in public and private buildings. However, Neo-Byzantine tendencies in German architecture remain relatively understudied.

A particularly interesting group of monuments is that of mausolea and memorial chapels, which have been side-lined because funerary architecture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in general often falls outside the focus of scholarship.<sup>2</sup> However, funerary buildings give us a glimpse into the commissioning person's self-perception, while simultaneously displaying their wishes for representation and the staging of a personal memorial. Thus, mausolea often reveal connections between specific roles within a society and the commissioning person's choice of artistic expression. Mausolea that make use of architectural models from Late Antiquity or Byzantium remain the exception in an art form that draws mainly upon Hellenistic and Renaissance models, as well as the Neo-Gothic style.<sup>3</sup> This increases the distinctiveness of the individual buildings that do employ these lesser-used styles, often underlining intentionality behind the aesthetic choices of the building's owners. This study gathers important examples of a "Byzantine revival", broadly defined, in the funerary art of Germany. The selected buildings will be discussed with regard to their forms of potentially Byzantine inspiration, the time frame of their creation and, if known, the involved artists. The social backgrounds of their protagonists – commissioning persons as much as those buried within – will be elucidated as much as possible for this category of semi-private monuments.

### **The “New-Greek” in German Architecture 1820–80: Remarks on Origins and Sources**

The roots of German architects’ interest in the Byzantine seemingly date back to the early nineteenth century. Art historian Sulpiz Boisserée (1783–1854) characterised the Romanesque architecture of his native Rhineland as having roots in Rome and the East alike, leading to their characterisation as “neugriechisch” (new Greek) in private correspondence with erudite friends (including Goethe).<sup>4</sup> This lack of distinction between Romanesque and Byzantine remains present in many later building projects, where elements from both artistic realms are mixed relatively indiscriminately – e.g. Leo Klenze’s (1784–1864) court church of All Saints for Ludwig I of Bavaria (r. 1825–48), whose passion for the late antique and medieval churches of Italy made him a driving power in the transition towards late antique and Byzantine art and architecture. In Rome, the ruler had met with the Prussian diplomat Christian von Bunsen (1791–1860) during the early 1820s, who would go on to publish *Die Basiliken des christlichen Roms* (The basilicas of Christian Rome) in 1842–43 as a product of decades-long research. The work was based on a voluminous apparatus of lithographs compiled in 1822–27 by the Bavarian “Hofbauconducteur” Johann Gottfried Gutensohn (1792–1851) and the court architect from Württemberg, Johann Michael Knapp (1791–1861), a volume which would remain an important inspiration for architects in the following decades.<sup>5</sup>

An important role in the dispersion of Byzantine architectural ideas was played by Wilhelm Salzenberg’s *Alt-christliche Baudenkmale von Constantinopel vom V. bis XII. Jahrhundert* (Old Christian monuments of Constantinople from the fifth to twelfth centuries) of 1854, a book on “late antique” monuments of the capital of Byzantium which came with opulent colour lithographs of the Hagia Sophia (restored by the Fossati brothers only five years before), the Hebdomon palace (fourth century) and the Chora Monastery (fourteenth century), among others. This book was the product of another ruler’s profound identification with late antique ideals, Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia (r. 1840–61).<sup>6</sup> As a devout protestant, he felt the strong traditions of the Eastern Church, considered closer to late antique origins, were ideal to convey the authenticity of the protestant faith. The king’s ideas led to “Early Christian revival” buildings such as the Church of Peace in Potsdam (1843–48) by Ludwig Persius (1803–45), which was further “authenticated” by the installation of the thirteenth-century mosaic taken out of the demolished church of San Cipriano in Murano (consecrated 1111). The blending of Italian Romanesque with late antique elements had already emerged in the works of Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841): his St John in Moabit and Nazareth-Church in Wedding, Berlin, both inaugurated in 1835, were originally single-nave aula-like buildings fully made of brick, which evoked northern Italian late antique and Romanesque structures alike. They served as inspiration for mid-nineteenth-century mausolea such as the funerary chapel of Battinsthal (between Prenzlau and Szczecin) for the Prussian noble family Von Schuckmann, where the use of red brick with black horizontal incrustation stripes, decorated with round-arched windows and portal, might be likened to the reproductions of Byzantine palaces in Salzenberg’s book.<sup>7</sup>

### **Mausolea with Byzantine-Inspired Elements, Late Nineteenth Century**

Pronounced appropriations of Byzantine architecture (notably the buildings of Ravenna) only seem to appear in funerary architecture from the 1860s onwards.



**1865–76: Mausoleum Cirksena, Aurich**

The Cirksena Mausoleum in Aurich, built 1875–76 in red brick according to plans made by Ernst Heinrich Blohm (1794–1869) in 1865, is a hexagonal double-storey construction with a tower-like domed drum, which evokes the model of San Vitale in Ravenna (sixth century), a link underlined by the austerity of the stepped capital-less round-arched windows and portals. The monuments of Ravenna had already been amply presented in German by architect Ferdinand von Quast (1807–77) in *Die alt-christlichen Bauwerke von Ravenna vom fünften bis zum neunten Jahrhundert* (The early Christian buildings of Ravenna from the fifth to the ninth century) in 1842 and then again in 1869 by Swiss church-historian Johann R. Rahn (1841–1912), under the title *Ravenna. Eine kunstgeschichtliche Studie* (Ravenna. An art-historical study). The building evidently stands in a long tradition of centralised sepulchral monuments, and it is more than possible that additional inspiration was provided by Charlemagne's Palatine Chapel (consecrated 805), itself modelled on San Vitale and undergoing an immense restoration since the 1840s. The interior of the Cirksena Mausoleum shows ten monumental round-arched niches holding the inner shell of the central dome, which is drumless. The windows cut diagonally into its lower part are typical in the architecture of Justinian's era – and perhaps the first modern manifestation of this solution on German soil.

**1874: Mausoleum Ernst, Mainz**

The earliest mausoleum with direct references to Byzantine architecture in Germany appears to be the small chapel above the tomb vault of innkeeper Johan Baptist Ernst II in the old main cemetery of Mainz (Figure 19.1).<sup>8</sup> The astonishing building, erected in 1874, is cruciform in plan with an elongated western arm which covers the vault entrance. The crossing is surmounted by an octagonal dome drum with a seemingly monolithic dome rising above eight triangular gablets. Certain decorative details adhere to a Neo-Gothic vocabulary, but the alternance of red brick with grey stone elements adds to the “Byzantine” flair already evoked by the domed centralised plan. The interior is relatively simple, except for the painted dome decoration of a starry sky, greatly resembling late antique models.

The mausoleum was built for Ernst and his wife Josephine Katharina, who both died in 1873. Ernst's profession makes the choice of style – an outcast among the plethora of Neo-Baroque and Neo-Gothic surrounding façades – even more surprising. The otherwise unknown schoolteacher Konrad Hirtz submitted the permission request for the erection of a funerary monument in the year following their death. The architects were Alexander Linnemann (1839–1902) and Philipp Strigler (1842–93).<sup>9</sup> While the latter's best-known project, the church of St Bonifatius in Mainz (1893), was of the purest Neo-Gothic style, he seems nonetheless the most likely candidate to have come up with the shape of the mausoleum. An avid scholar of medieval architecture, he had studied the cathedrals of Mainz and Worms in detail, the latter of which employs centralised stone tower roofs. Furthermore, he would have known or owned books such as Quast's or Salzenberg's studies of Byzantine buildings in Ravenna and Constantinople. At the same time, the overall cubature of the building evokes that of the never-built Neo-Gothic domed memorial church of Karl-Friedrich Schinkel (1815), whose works were still used as inspiration later in the nineteenth century and who himself experimented with the decorative contrast between brick and hewn stone. While knowledge of Byzantine architecture was certainly necessary





Figure 19.1 Linnemann & Strigler, Mainz, Main Cemetery, Mausoleum Ernst and surrounding monuments, 1874, second half of the 19th c., photograph. © Thomas Kaffenberger, 2011.

for the creation of the unusual building, it seems it was the “petty bourgeois” social status of the family to be interred therein that created the requisite environment for choosing this eccentric design.

### *1887–89: Mausoleum Röder, Bad Honnef*

Mila Röder was a renowned soprano singer born in 1848 in Riga, Latvia, and adopted daughter of influential theatre director Ferdinand Röder (d. 1880).<sup>10</sup> After a career on the stages of Europe, where she socialised with celebrities such as Jacques Offenbach (1819–80) and Johan Strauss (1825–99), she died in June 1887 during an operation. In the same year, her mother applied for permission to erect a mausoleum in the municipal cemetery of their residential city, Bad Honnef. The building was completed in 1889; the architect remains unknown.

The building, situated in the old cemetery of Bad Honnef, is an almost square, tower-like, two-storey structure, with an externally polygonal apse to the south-west (Figure 19.2). It is surmounted by a round, domed drum. The exterior is richly decorated with blind arcades as well as round-arched and chessboard friezes. The choice of material enhances the picturesque quality: yellow and red limestone form horizontal bands. While the vocabulary of individual forms remains relatively close to the Romanesque



Figure 19.2 Unknown architect, Bad Honnef, Old Cemetery, Mausoleum Mila Röder, 1887, photograph. © Julia Olry, Stadt Bad Honnef

tradition of the Rhineland, the cubature of the dome-hall chapel in combination with the *opus listatum* (striped masonry) creates a strongly Byzantinising appeal. The latter was certainly intentional, and the chapel stands out as a rather eccentric folly. The interior is simple, decorated by four small columns in the corners of the single, domed bay. As in Aurich, the windows of the external drum translate into ones diagonally cut into a lower, inner dome shell. The paintings by Adolf Schmitz-Crolenburgh (1825–94) do not pick up on the “Byzantine” theme, with ornaments perhaps most reminiscent of the “Ottoman Baroque” in the vault.

### **Mausolea with Byzantine-Inspired Elements, Early Twentieth Century**

Around 1900, several movements that appeared as a revolt against the aesthetics of Historicism – perceived as empty, unfaithful striving for vain pageantry – had a deep impact on the art and architecture of the German Empire.<sup>11</sup> In particular the *Heimatschutzbewegung*, one of the movements striving to return the arts to their “origins” and “authenticity”, and the more pedagogically oriented cultural association *Dürerbund* were entangled with reform tendencies in funerary art and culture.<sup>12</sup> This attempt to break free from close copying of historic models to instead create new art and architecture, in the true spirit of the old, was not universally accepted. For Neo-Byzantine art and architecture, it presented both challenges and new possibilities. Subtle references to Byzantine architecture appeared now in a new stylistic idiom, the so-called *Zyklopenstil*, which increased the dimensions of buildings and architectural members coupled with a certain stereometric reduction of details.<sup>13</sup> More than Byzantine monuments, however, it was the mausoleum erected by the Ostrogoth king Theodoric (454–526) in the later Byzantine exarchate of Ravenna in 520, that most impacted this stream of early-twentieth-century architecture. The German interest in Theodoric’s mausoleum manifested in a heated debate between Josef Durm (1837–1919), Bruno Schulz (1865–1932) and Albrecht Haupt (1852–1932), with the latter’s *Das Grabmal Theoderichs des Grossen zu Ravenna* (The tomb of Theodoric the Great in Ravenna) in 1913 arguing for it being the origin of “national-Germanic art”. Naturally, rising nationalism and the identification of Germans with the “Germanic” ruler further fostered interest in the appropriation of the building as “truly German” and the archetype of a newly revived national architecture – a topic that cannot be developed thoroughly in the frame of this brief study.

#### **1904–14: Mausoleum Von Dörnberg, Regensburg**

The mausoleum built for philanthropist Ernst Graf von Dörnberg (1836–97) in the main cemetery of Regensburg, between 1904 and 1914, demonstrates the monumentalising tendencies of the *Zyklopenstil* (Figure 19.3).<sup>14</sup> It was designed by traditionalist architect German Bestelmeyer (1874–1942), later endorsed by the National Socialists. An early series of sketches from 1904 shows centralised domed buildings in historicist forms ranging from Neo-Baroque to Lombard-Romanesque. The executed building of 1911–14 has little in common with these. It is of austere monumentality, dominated by a conic stone dome featuring a row of windows with impost-like keystones: there is little doubt that Theodoric’s mausoleum was the inspiration. A glance at the section reveals that the architect had conceived a double-shell dome, and the inner, drumless dome follows the Hagia Sophia principle. The interior decoration – mosaics which culminate in a monumental cross in the dome – adds to the encounter of German monumentalism with Byzantium-inspired pictorial design.

#### **1904–09: Princely Mausoleum Hohenlohe-Langenburg**

Originally conceived as a memorial chapel to be surrounded by exterior tombs, this mausoleum was built from 1904 onwards in memory of Princess Leopoldine zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg (d. 1903) on behalf of her husband Hermann (Figure 19.4). The architect was a little-known member of the Prussian building administration, August Bode (1875–1960).

GRÄFLICH VON DÖRNBERG'SCHES MAUSOLEUM IN REGENSBURG

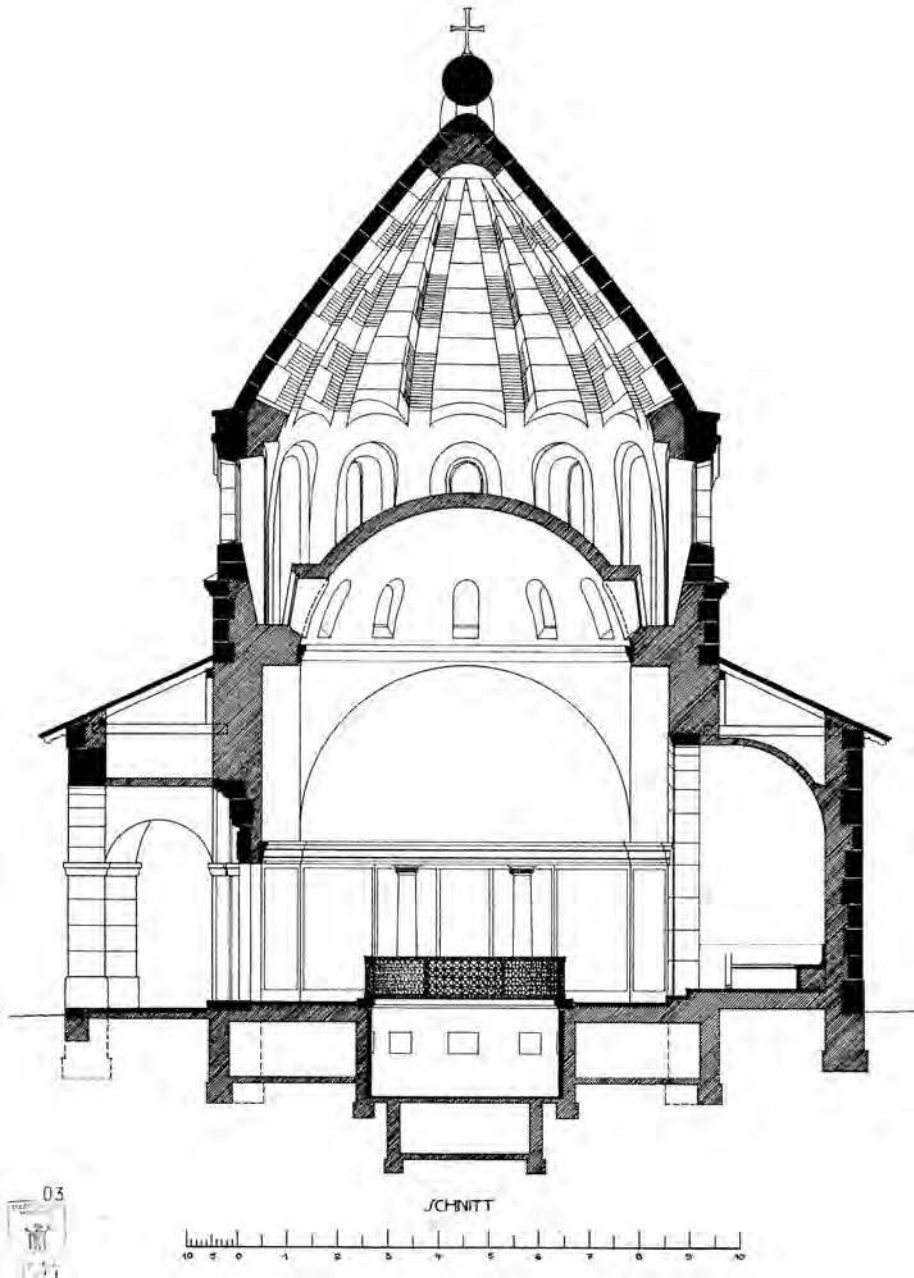


Figure 19.3 German Bestelmeyer, Regensburg, Protestant Central Cemetery, Mausoleum von Dörnberg, Section, Plan, 1904–14. Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst und Städtebau 3 (1918/1919): 46. © Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität München, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Figure 19.4 August Bode, Langenburg, Princely Mausoleum Hohenlohe-Langenburg, 1904–09, photograph. © User: Matthias Süßen, Wikimedia Commons, 2014, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Over a square plan rises a decagonal dome, surrounded by four slightly lower towers in the corners and two gables with “Diocletian windows” (round arched with two vertical posts). To the west, a tripartite porch on sturdy columns (with trapezoidal impost capitals) precedes the cubical nucleus of the building, which comes uniquely close to the stereometric properties of Byzantine cross-in-square churches. The element of four corner towers is inspired by the corner domes of churches such as the Cattedrale in Stilo (Calabria, ninth century), but here combined with a polygonal, high-rising drum more akin to that of San Vitale in Ravenna. The exterior stonework uses a strict alternance of yellow and red limestone in imitation of *opus listatum*. The interior presents the same stepped, tripartite structuring as the porch for the side walls of the square room: blind arches rest on groups of four columns – a recurring motif in Neo-Byzantine architecture. The polygonal exterior drum of the dome hides a lower, round and drumless dome with windows cut directly into it. The decoration of the interior was originally planned by painter Hermann Schaper (1853–1911), perhaps the period’s most famous creator of “Byzantinising” decorative programs (e.g. the dome mosaic in Aachen, after 1893). It is noteworthy that Prince Hermann explicitly desired it to be “inspired by the mosaics of Ravenna” and to draw upon the “Early Christian mindset”. Thus, we can assume that the choice of models for the extraordinary architecture was also made by the noble patron. The architect Bode does not hide, in his short account in the *Deutsche Bauzeitung* of 1907, that of two originally proposed designs, he would have preferred the one “standing closer to the German stylistic sentiment” but that he failed to influence

the decision in this sense.<sup>15</sup> Almost apologetically, he describes the executed project as “not contradicting the gaze familiar with the historic styles”, while not mentioning Byzantium or Ravenna explicitly – apparently aware that he had created a particularly astonishing monument that was, however, not to his personal liking.

*1905–10: New Mausoleum, Darmstadt*

The New Mausoleum situated in Darmstadt’s Rosenhöhe Park presents itself as a copy of the Galla Placidia Mausoleum in Ravenna (c. 425–30) (Figure 19.5). Like in Langenburg, it was commissioned by the nobility of the region; here, the famous last Grand Duke of Hessen-Darmstadt, Ernst Ludwig (d. 1937). A convinced patron of the arts, in particular of the reforming “total works of art” of the Art Nouveau, he was responsible for establishing the Mathildenhöhe artists’ colony in Darmstadt. The New Mausoleum was not built in connection with the particular death of a family member but rather to commemorate the duke’s parents (Ludwig IV, d. 1892, and Alice, d. 1878) and siblings (Friedrich, d. 1873, and Marie, d. 1878), who had died at a young age and were reinterred there after 1910. Despite close proximity to the Mathildenhöhe, Ernst Ludwig chose a more academically operating local architect, Karl Hofmann (1883–1951), who was best known for monumental projects in Neo-Romanesque forms. The latter’s contribution was the translation of



Figure 19.5 Karl Hofmann, Darmstadt, Park Rosenhöhe, New Mausoleum, 1905–10, photograph. © Thomas Kaffenberger, 2023.



the original building material of bricks into heavy, rusticated granite ashlar more in keeping with local building traditions. Otherwise, the small cruciform building with a square central tower and continuous blind arcades on the façades is a largely faithful copy of the late antique model. This was facilitated by the fact that von Quast had published detailed plans of the architecture and mosaics of the mausoleum on no less than five of the ten plates accompanying his 1842 book. The interior shows the original's division between a marble-clad lower zone and mosaic-covered vaults and lunettes, though the latter did not receive the model's figural decoration but ornaments and marble reliefs imitating spolia. The overall atmosphere is as close as possible to the late antique interior, an impression enhanced by the use of late antique types for two of the sarcophagi placed in the western cross arm. The main tomb monument is that of Duchess Alice holding her daughter Marie in her arms, carved by London medallist and sculptor Joseph E. Boehm (1834–90). It appears the archduke had seen the empress Galla Placidia (d. 450) as the archetype of a strong noblewoman imbued with motherly love, so he chose the model particularly in remembrance of his own mother Alice, who had died from diphtheria while taking care of her also-infected daughter, Marie.

#### ***1911–15: Mausoleum of the Schaumburg-Lippe, Bückeburg***

The princely Mausoleum of the Schaumburg-Lippe in Bückeburg, built 1911–15, is a massive, eclectic behemoth, imitating the Pantheon in Rome in its plan and stereometry but mainly decorated with Neo-Romanesque details, including a columned triumphal portal on the outside. The monumental interior contains several concrete references to Byzantine architecture, including the coupled trapezoidal column capitals of the galleries and the drumless dome with a wreath of windows. However, the main element of Byzantine inspiration is the non-figural gold mosaic covering the entire dome, culminating in a blue starry sky with a *crux gemmata* (jewelled cross indicating the promise of the Heavenly Jerusalem). It is an open question whether this interior was indeed thought to evoke the monuments of Byzantium, such as the Hagia Sophia, or whether it had already become a relatively universal marker of the nobility, splendour and glory of the last days of Wilhelm II's rule (abdication in 1918).

#### ***1917–21: Mausoleum Lemm, Berlin***

The last Neo-Byzantine mausoleum in Germany appears to have been the cruciform, domed chapel built by Max Werner (1896–1970) for industrialist Otto Lemm after 1917 in the Kaiser Wilhelm Cemetery in Berlin (Figure 19.6).<sup>16</sup> Once more a blend of Romanesque and Renaissance forms on the outside, it is mainly the overall shape and the presence of the dome that prepares us for the interior. There, however, the beholder faces all the splendour of a “Byzantinising” space one last time, with marble incrustations and mosaics executed by Puhl & Wagner, covering the apse, lunettes and dome with its wreath of round-arched windows. The themes of the mosaics – intimate portraits of the Lemm couple and their family, and an image of their family villa – show the profoundly private character of the space. It appears that instead of considerations of theology or representation, it was the intimately transcendental character of mosaic-clad, Byzantium-inspired spaces that prompted the choice of the mausoleum's aesthetics.





*Figure 19.6* Max Werner, Berlin, Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirchhof, Mausoleum Lemm, 1917–21, photograph. © Thomas Kaffenberger, 2013.

### Concluding Remarks

This brief survey of German mausolea inspired by late antique and Byzantine architecture is merely a first step in the investigation of a vastly understudied subject. A future, systematic survey will also include smaller-scale funerary monuments and all forms of artistic expression – mosaics, sculptures etc. – within the often stylistically eclectic complexes, as well as a parallel study of official cemetery infrastructures (chapels, funeral parlours).<sup>17</sup> This preliminary glance at key monuments reveals that Byzantinising mausolea were, unsurprisingly, not a mass phenomenon. Instead, each case occurred in a particular historic context and was connected to the personal ideals of the building's patron. Occasionally, architects seem to have played a distinctive role, yet in other cases, the choice was rather made against the architect's conviction.

Earlier examples were often built for families or individuals who had attained a certain wealth and standing but who were not classic members of the upper bourgeoisie: an innkeeper, a singer. Adolf Rosenberg's (1850–1906) *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Handbook of Art History) of 1902 reveals that the appreciation of Byzantine architecture was far from consensual: the introduction of domed architecture is characterised as Byzantium's "only merit for the development of [architecture] in general".<sup>18</sup> Late and post-Byzantine architecture is labelled as a "wantonly phantastic game [of] pointless splendour and boisterous exaggeration".<sup>19</sup> The situation changed in the early 1900s as a result of the appreciation of Byzantine art by the various rulers of the Hohenzollern family. The most prominent examples of Neo-Byzantine mausolea from this period were now commissions of the highest nobility. The faithful protestant Hohenlohe-Langenburg sought the authenticity of the late antique churches of Ravenna (in a replication of Friedrich Wilhelm IV). Meanwhile, Ernst-Ludwig of Hessen-Darmstadt chose to have a copy of Galla Placidia's last place of rest, built presumably out of private nostalgic reasons. In contrast to this, the Mausoleum of the Schaumburg-Lippe served as a monument to a princely family in the dying days of the German Empire, underlining the versatility of Byzantine art for its integration into artistic concepts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### Notes

- 1 Bullen 2003: 15–53.
- 2 For a summary, see Fischer 1996, esp. 60–74; the articles in Denk and Ziesmer 2007 and Happe 2010.
- 3 A formal, typological overview in Evers 1983.
- 4 Brownlee 1991.
- 5 Bullen 2003: 39–45.
- 6 Bullen 2003: 24–33.
- 7 Archive of the TU Berlin Architekturmuseum, Inv. No. 7097–7102.
- 8 For the sharing of archival materials, I thank Andrea Ludwig-Peters, Mainz.
- 9 On Strigler, mainly his obituaries in the *Deutsche Bauzeitung* 1893, 103–4; *Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung* 1893, 67–8.
- 10 The mausoleum is only described in unpublished documentation of 2016 by S. Tofahrn, containing various archival documents used here, which was shared with the author by the city of Bad Honnef building authorities.
- 11 On the reform tendencies in post-1900 architecture in Germany: Hofer 2005; Pehnt 2006: 13–90.
- 12 Fischer 1996: 75–82.
- 13 The term was introduced into scholarship by Wolfgang Pehnt (Pehnt 2006: 58–64).
- 14 Mainly Stahl 1918/19: 38–46. The plans also at <https://mediatum.ub.tum.de/945221> [16.05.2023].

- 15 Bode 1907: 485.
- 16 The building is briefly mentioned in cemetery guides such as Jochens and May 1994: 140–2.
- 17 In Munich alone, four of the large cemeteries received new funeral parlours in Byzantine or late antique artistic forms in the early twentieth century.
- 18 Rosenberg 1902: 147–8, trans. author.
- 19 Rosenberg 1902: 149, trans. author.

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## BYZANTINISM IN SERBIAN AND CROATIAN ARCHITECTURE (19TH TO 21ST CENTURIES)

*Aleksandar Kadijević and Dragan Damjanović*

Since the fall of Byzantium to the Ottomans in 1453, its millennium-long architectural heritage has been a source of inspiration for architects throughout the Christian nations of the Balkan Peninsula. Through their evocations of Byzantine forms, these nations have shown respect for this great civilisational paradigm. By recalling Byzantine heritage, they have also strengthened the cult of their own medieval traditions, often equating Byzantine and “national” aspects of their historical identity.

While the construction of Orthodox churches of the Serbian Patriarchate in Ottoman-controlled territories from the late fifteenth to the eighteenth century marked the continuation of Byzantine traditions, in Orthodox communities that lived in territories controlled by the Habsburg Empire in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, such “Byzantine survival” architecture began to recede due to the prevalence of Baroque, and later Neoclassical architectural models. The sacral architecture of the Orthodox Church in Habsburg territories during that period can be divided into three basic groups. The most numerous are longitudinal buildings with a (usually semicircular) sanctuary, a bell tower and Baroque and Baroque–Neoclassical style façades, which are generally indistinguishable from Roman Catholic churches. The second group consists of buildings built of wood, regularly very simple in terms of architectural decoration, which prevailed in economically disadvantaged areas, mainly in the territory of the Military Frontier bordering the Ottoman Empire. The third group (the most widespread for the construction of monastery churches) consists of buildings that represent a combination of elements taken from both the Byzantine tradition and the Baroque tradition.

From the mid-nineteenth century, the situation began to change again. Building on the echoes of the Byzantine tradition, Neo-Byzantinism developed in Serbia and Croatia as a style that pursued various ideological goals. In addition to legitimising deep historical connections to Byzantium, and indicating the confessional and/or national affiliation of communities, it also arose from the desire to transfer the functional and structural elements of Byzantine architecture to modern buildings.

In Serbia, Byzantinism was more widespread than in Croatia as an identity marker of this Orthodox Christian nation formed under Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule. It developed much more modestly and somewhat less ideologically in Croatia, to demonstrate the connection of modern culture to its medieval roots and traces of Byzantine culture on

the eastern coast of the Adriatic. After these two nations found themselves in a common state in 1918, their religious and memorial architecture often contained evocations and paraphrases of Byzantine architecture to a much greater extent, partly with the aim of highlighting common roots and partly, paradoxically, to emphasise different national identities.

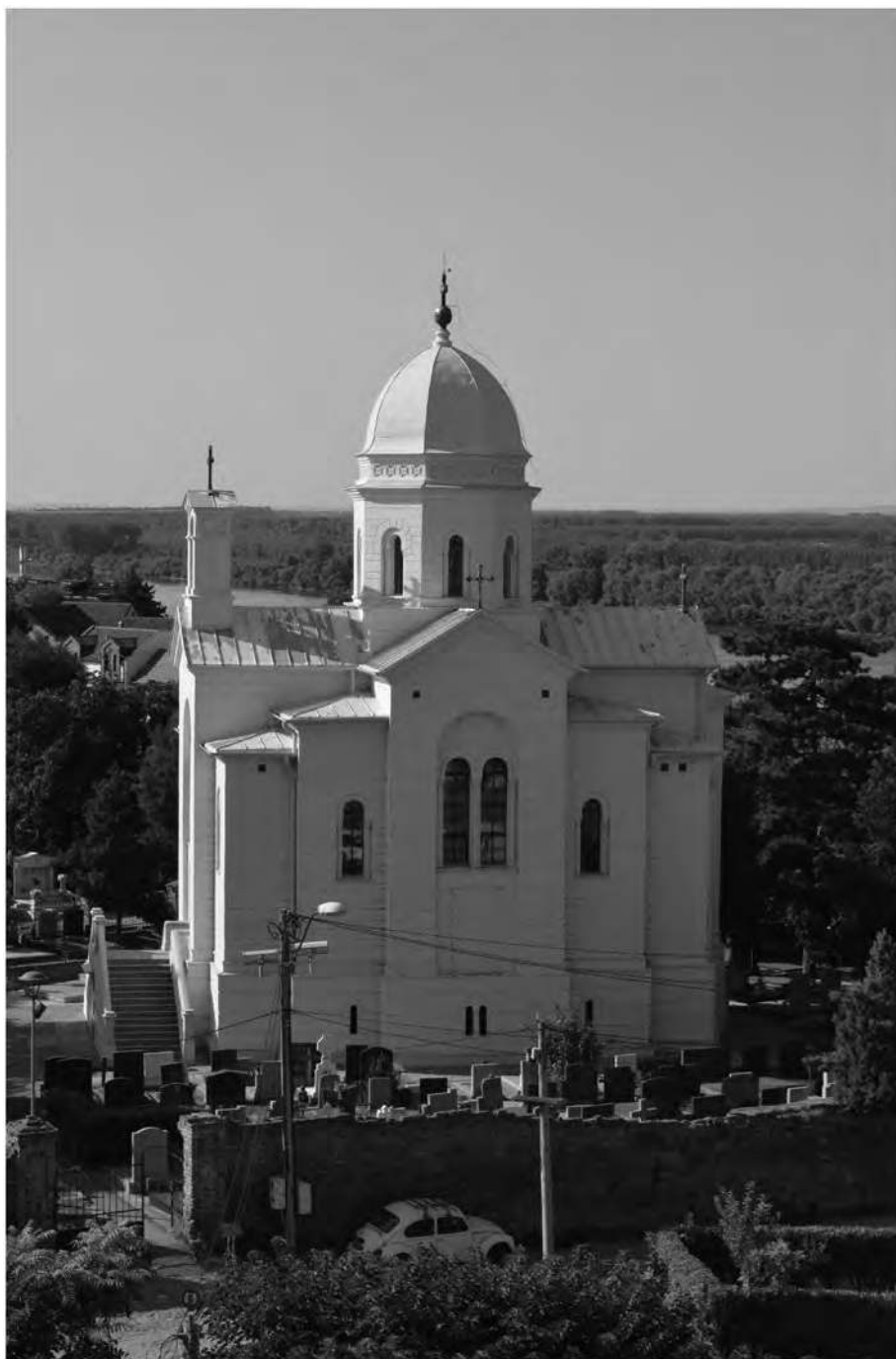
In the text that follows, the main currents of Byzantinism in modern Serbian and Croatian architecture will be presented, demonstrating not only the timeless paradigmatic role played by Byzantine sacral buildings but also the nostalgia of architects and clients in the western Balkans. The Byzantine was desired for reasons related to the construction of cultural, religious and political identity, but also because of the applicability of its construction elements to modern design.

### **Byzantine Evocations in the Modern Architecture of Serbia and Croatia**

During the nineteenth century, and especially after 1850, spurred by historiographical research and growing nationalism, patrons and Orthodox clergy increasingly requested architects to design ecclesiastical structures in accordance with the stylistic canon of the eastern Christian tradition – variously referred to in contemporary and scholarly discourse as “Serbo-Byzantine”, “Byzantine” or by other related designations, both in the territories controlled by the newly formed Principality (later Kingdom) of Serbia, and by the Habsburgs.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the driving role of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the restoration of Byzantium was supported by the building activities of the Serbian Obrenović (1815–42 and 1858–1903) and Karađorđević (1804–13, 1903–18) dynasties, as well as key educational and scientific institutions, artistic and patriotic associations.

Although local architectural traditions were important to the beginnings of Byzantine Revival architecture of the western Balkans (as shown by the work of the architect Andreja Damjanov (1813–78) in present-day Serbia, Bosnia–Herzegovina and Northern Macedonia from the 1850s to the 1870s), the main starting point for determining what modern Byzantine architecture should be was the work of the architect Theophilus von Hansen (1813–91) in Vienna.<sup>2</sup> As a professor at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, he was hugely influential in the development of Byzantinism in architecture across all of Central and southeastern Europe. His Serbian students Svetozar Ivačković (1844–1924), Dušan Živanović (1853–1937), Jovan Ilkić (1857–1917), and Vladimir Nikolić (1857–1922) creatively developed Hansen’s work and adapted it to the needs of their patrons in both Austria-Hungary and Serbia.<sup>3</sup> Their churches in Pančevo, Zemun (Figure 20.1), Kruševac, Vražogrnac, Paraćin, Boževac, Jagodina and Sremski Karlovci, as well as the home of St Sava in Belgrade, and the residence of the Eparchy of Niš by Ilkić, evoked the Byzantine tradition as part of a wider orientalist eclectic mix (along with elements of the Neo-Gothic and Neo-Renaissance) that reflected the multi-ethnic character of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which they had studied. Nevertheless, the primacy of Byzantium as a fundamental layer of this eclectic expression was underlined by the most talented student of Hansen, Ivačković, who noted that he passionately “reaches into the treasury of Byzantium”, whose “original stylistic source is Hagia Sophia of Constantinople”.<sup>4</sup>

Support for Byzantinism in architecture also came from theoretical circles. Encouraged by the thesis of the first Serbian urban planner Emilijan Josimović (1823–97), who maintained that the “Byzantine style is also ours”,<sup>5</sup> influential designer Andra Stevanović (1859–1929) noted in his entrance speech at the Technical Faculty in Belgrade (1890) that in the Constantinopolitan Cathedral, the perfection of architecture comes to the fore through its structural



*Figure 20.1* Svetozar Ivačković (1844–1924), Chapel of Saint Demetrius in Zemun, 1874–1878; © Dragan Damjanović.

characteristics, imposing nature, size, layout, lighting, lightness, elegance and beauty of decoration and ornamentation – observations well received by his professional audience.

After decades of the predominance of Hansen's influence, from the beginning of the twentieth-century general European interest in the Byzantine heritage encouraged new types of Byzantine evocations in Serbian church architecture. Designs for the most monumental place of worship – the church of St George, the mausoleum of the Karađorđević dynasty in Oplenac (1909) by architect Kosta Jovanović (1884–1934) – and the celebrated model for the never-built Vidovdan or St Vitus Day Temple in Gazimestan by Ivan Meštrović (1911–15), were more-or-less based on the Byzantine churches of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople (opened 550), St Mark's Basilica in Venice (consecrated 1094) and Hosios Loukas in Phocis (founded in the tenth century).

Serbian architects and engineers could now learn about the genesis of Byzantine structures and forms during their studies at the Belgrade Technical Faculty, as well as from rich historiographical, conservation and travel literature. In addition to the influence of Byzantine heritage, research by western European and Russian historians of art and architecture encouraged the revival of Byzantine art among Serbs, as did domestic scholarship, such as Božidar Nikolajević's (1877–1947) book *Byzantine Art* which was published in the early twentieth century after the pioneering studies of the architects and art historians Dragutin Milutinović (1840–1900) and Mihajlo Valtrović (1839–1915).

Following the call for competition proposals in the "Serbian-Byzantine style" for the design of the future memorial church of St Sava in the Serbian capital Belgrade in 1905 – the largest temple of the Serbian Orthodox Church – academician/architect Sava Dimitrijević (1847–1927) submitted his awarded (but not preserved) competition design under the indicative name "Aja Sophia". From the available information about the content of the Dimitrijević's design and that of other competitors, we learn that none evoked the ancient Constantinople church precisely, including Ivačković's, whose design relied on the aforementioned, and by this point deeply rooted, eclectic Hanseatic manner. Similarly, enthusiastic Byzantinism, complemented by elements of Art Nouveau, was also affirmed in the rejected competition project of the young architect Momir Korunović (1883–1969) for the Belgrade Palace of the Monopoly Administration (1908) (Figure 20.2).

In the sacral architecture of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia, the Neo-Byzantine style emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the 1850s and 1860s, after a century and a half of Baroque and Neoclassical dominance, a tendency emerged in Orthodox Church architecture which continues to this day: the belief that the architecture of Eastern-Rite and Western-Rite churches cannot share identical characteristics. It was developed by a number of architects from various parts of the Habsburg Empire.<sup>6</sup> As in Serbia, Neo-Byzantine motifs were introduced under the influence of developments in Vienna, primarily Hansen's architecture, and so an eclectic mix of Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance elements became the dominant style of Orthodox church architecture. Hansen's influence is particularly evident in the oeuvre of the architect Franz/Franjo Klein (1828–89) who, in designing the Orthodox church in Zagreb (1865–66), almost directly replicated the motifs from Hansen's Greek church in Vienna in the articulation of its main portal and windows. The Orthodox parish church in Otočac (1860–63), by an unknown architect, was likewise designed under Hansen's strong influence.

Eclecticism was also a dominant characteristic of Orthodox sacral architecture in Dalmatia in this period. The parish church of the Holy Annunciation in Dubrovnik (1869–77) designed by the Split-based architect Emil Vecchietti (1830–1901) – built as a single-nave building with





Figure 20.2 Momir Korunović (1883–1969), *Palace of the Monopoly Administration in Belgrade*, competition project, 1908; Copyright expired or unknown

two towers on the western façade – stands out for its monumentality and quality. Vecchietti studied architecture in Padua, so his work was much more influenced by the contemporary Italian “Lombard-Byzantine” style. In the following decades, Byzantinism was further developed by productive architects who were educated in Vienna, mostly at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts or in the studio of the architect Friedrich von Schmidt (1825–91): Hermann Bollé (1845–1926), Vincenz/Vinko Rauscher (1853–?), Janko Holjac (1865–1939), Stjepan Podhorsky (1875–1945) and Ćiril Metod Iveković (1864–1933). The work of all these architects is characterised by a pronounced eclecticism, reflecting either an insufficient familiarity with Byzantine heritage or a deliberately free interpretation of it. The Neo-Byzantine works of Bollé and Rauscher are marked by a combination of Byzantine, Early Christian, Early Medieval, Romanesque, and Renaissance forms. Holjac incorporated motifs drawn from Russian church architecture (occasionally employed by Bollé as well). Iveković relied primarily on Neo-Romanesque features, while Podhorsky introduced Art Nouveau elements into his Neo-Byzantine designs.

Neo-Byzantine elements were used almost exclusively in the construction and restoration of Eastern-Rite churches – both Orthodox and Greek Catholic. The majority of these churches were longitudinal buildings that incorporated Neo-Byzantine motifs only in the façades or in elements of the interior furnishings, primarily the iconostases. Unlike Serbian architects, Croatian architects were only rarely given the opportunity to design churches whose spatial conception evoked Byzantine centrally planned buildings covered by domes – these were mostly mausolea or smaller chapels. The most important Neo-Byzantine work by Bollé is the domed Kukulj Chapel at Mirogoj Cemetery in Zagreb (1891–93) (Figure 20.3).



*Figure 20.3* Herman Bollé (1845–1926), Orthodox Chapel at Mirogoj Cemetery in Zagreb, 1891–1893  
© Našice Local History Museum, photography inv. nr. 1185

He applied a similar design in the construction of smaller mausolea, such as those of the Stanić family in Vukovar (1906–07) and of the Maksimović (1902–05) and Đuričić (1906–12) families in Ruma. The latest example of this approach is a lavish chapel with a dominant dome built according to designs by Podhorsky in Strmac Pribički (1911–13) for the bishops of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Križevci, a diocese of the Eastern Rite in union with the Roman Catholic Church.

Alongside the construction of new buildings, Bollé, Rauscher, and Holjac also had the opportunity to remodel a series of older churches, most often Baroque or Neoclassical in origin, in the Neo-Byzantine style. The principal aim of these restorations was to emphasise through style that the churches belonged to the Eastern Christian Rite. Bollé redesigned the Greek Catholic church in Zagreb (1885–1886) and a number of Orthodox churches: the parish church in Zagreb (1883–84, 1899, 1913–14), the cathedral in Pakrac (1893–97), the monastery church in Grgeteg (1897–1902), the church of the Holy Spirit in Ruma (1902–05) and many others, while Holjac and Rauscher rebuilt and refurnished the Orthodox cathedral in Plaški (1899–1903).

The Neo-Byzantine style in Croatia would remain primarily associated with the architecture of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic communities in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, it also began to appear in Catholic sacred architecture due to ideological and political reasons. It was an expression of the ambitions of architects, artists, historians and intellectuals to create a Croatian national architectural style based on the architecture of early medieval Dalmatia (the monuments of that period of Croatian history have been preserved mostly in this province), which began to be perceived as a local version of Byzantine architecture. In this case, Byzantinism served as a reference to a period of Croatian political independence in the early medieval period, an independence which was also desired in modern times.

Along with political reasons, the Neo-Byzantine style also emerged as a response to the extreme ornamentalism of the Vienna Secession architectural movement. Early medieval architecture, and Byzantine architecture in particular, featured elements whose simplicity matched the sensibilities of an increasingly permeating modernism. A crucial role in spreading the use of the style was played by the pioneer of Croatian modernist architecture Viktor Kovačić (1874–1924, Otto Wagner's student), winner of the 1908–09 competition for the designs of the new St Blaise parish church in Zagreb. The church, built between 1911 and 1914, shows that Kovačić boldly combined Byzantine with proto-modernist elements.<sup>7</sup> The floor plan of the church has the shape of a Greek cross with a large reinforced concrete dome over the central area of the intersection, with a span of 18 metres (Figures 20.4 and 20.5).<sup>8</sup>

After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro united with the South Slavic provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later renamed Yugoslavia. The architecture of the new state continued the tendencies established before 1918, both in Serbia and in Croatia. The use of Neo-Byzantine elements remained therefore widespread, particularly since there was a marked interest in preserving the Byzantine cultural legacy of the defunct Russian Empire.

Architectural Byzantinism was expressed in two ways: through conservative imitation of medieval buildings or through their inspired reinterpretation. The first, more widespread method, resulted in dry eclectic compositions, expressions of restrained imagination, while



*Figure 20.4* Viktor Kovačić (*Figure 20.4* Viktor Kovačić (1874–1924), Church of Saint Blaise in Zagreb, 1911–1914; Copyright expired or unknown (photo taken from the book Edo Šen, *Arhitekt Viktor Kovačić*, Zagreb, 1927, table VII)

the second method enriched the model with current artistic trends – Expressionism, Art Deco and Zenitism (a local avant-garde movement).

Among Serbian architects, the neo-medieval narrative drew on two main sources of inspiration – predominantly the iconic medieval Byzantine architecture of Constantinople, above all Justinian’s Hagia Sophia, while many architects also turned to motifs from Serbian medieval architecture, particularly those of the lavishly decorated church of Gračanica Monastery (1315–21).

The legacy of Constantinopolitan architecture was supported by influential Byzantine studies and congresses, as well as curricula at the Belgrade Faculty of Architecture, from which future designers received fundamental incentives to design in the Byzantine style. Respected critics also provided support, noting that by restoring Byzantine heritage, Serbian architecture was “moving forward” and fundamentally modernising, striving for “ultimate constructiveness”.<sup>9</sup>

Imitations of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople were at the forefront as in the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Russian branch of Byzantinism where it served as a central inspiration and symbolic legitimisation of restorationist aspirations. Due to its proportional adaptation to the structure of smaller churches and palaces, it was most often evoked in a reduced form, with a smaller diameter, higher tambour and narrower dome and sub-dome space.



*Figure 20.5* Viktor Kovačić (1874–1924), Interior of the Church of Saint Blaise in Zagreb, 1911–1914  
© Dragan Damjanović

More direct evocations of Justinian's Hagia Sophia came to the fore in the competition designs for the most monumental of all Serbian churches – St Sava on Vračar in Belgrade (1926).<sup>10</sup> The basic prerequisite was that this building in the nation's capital “be in the Serbian-Byzantine style from the time of Prince Lazar” (which means fourteenth century), with a note that the goal was internal and external grandiosity, the realisation of a spatial area of 3000 square metres and a place for 6000 believers, for which it was best suited to emulate the architectural complex of the Hagia Sophia.<sup>11</sup>

While the winning project by architect Bogdan Nestorović (1901–75) was unexpectedly marked by dry compilation and primarily an imitation of the Gračanica Monastery church, most of the other participants were inspired by the Justinian's cathedral. Evocations of that church as a whole (elevation, construction, spaciousness), or in details (the shape of the dome, openings and lower parts), can be recognised in the designs of Vasily Androssov (1873–1944), Aleksandar Deroko (1894–1988), Petar (1899–1991) and Branko Krstić (1902–1978), Milan Zloković (1898–1965) and Andrej Papkov (1890–ca.1975), Aleksandar Vasić, Milutin Borisavljević (1889–1970) and the work made jointly by Žarko Tatić (1894–1931) and D. Živković (though part of the latter differed from the Constantinopolitan solution because of the stylistic treatment of the lower parts of the building and the ground floor plan). Apart from Nestorović's design, Gračanica's silhouette was imitated by Miladin Prljević (1900–1973) and Vladimir Dević, while Dušan Babić (1894–1948) and the joint proposal of Branislav Marinković (1903–85) and Živojin Piperski tried to unite inspiration from Gračanica and Hagia Sophia.

The later history of the design and construction of St Sava church – finalised by the decision in 1932 (after stormy polemics and appeals for a new competition) that Nestorović and Deroko should create working drawings by combining new proposals – definitely favoured Hagia Sophia as a model for design and construction, and partly also for spatial solution (Figure 20.6). Begun on the eve of WWII, construction of the church restarted only in 1984 after long-term obstruction by the communist government. More modern materials were used (reinforced concrete) but the 1930s design was respected, whereby the shape of Hagia Sophia's dome was somewhat changed, and a crypt was added to the interior.

While the church of St Sava drew upon a Constantinopolitan model, in the interwar period Belgrade also acquired a monumental church that emulated the forms of Serbian medieval architecture – the church of St Mark, built between 1930 and 1939 to the designs of Petar and Branko Krstić (Figure 20.7). Despite the objections of modernist critics, who regarded them as retrograde and anachronistic, Byzantine evocations have persisted in Serbian sacred architecture. Moreover, they came to be widely applied to building types that had no precedent in the medieval period (the pillars of bridges, factories, memorial ossuaries, national “Pantheons”, museums, residential buildings, municipal buildings, railway stations, exhibition pavilions, kiosks, sports and recreational complexes). Most of the important secular buildings built with motifs taken from medieval Byzantine (both Constantinopolitan and Serbian) heritage were the buildings related to the ruling Serbian and Yugoslav Karađorđević dynasty, such as the palace complex at Dedinje (1924–37).

A number of projects were never built. Dragiša Brašovan's (1887–1965) and Nikola Nestorović's (1868–1957) designs for the palace of the Ministry of Forests and Mines, Agriculture and Water (1923), as well as Brašovan's competition design for the palace of the Ministry of Finance (1925), show a fusion of Byzantine features and academic/theoretical approaches aimed at strengthening the authority of the state apparatus through a syncretic monumentalism. In the second draft of Brašovan's design, the evocation of Hagia Sophia is



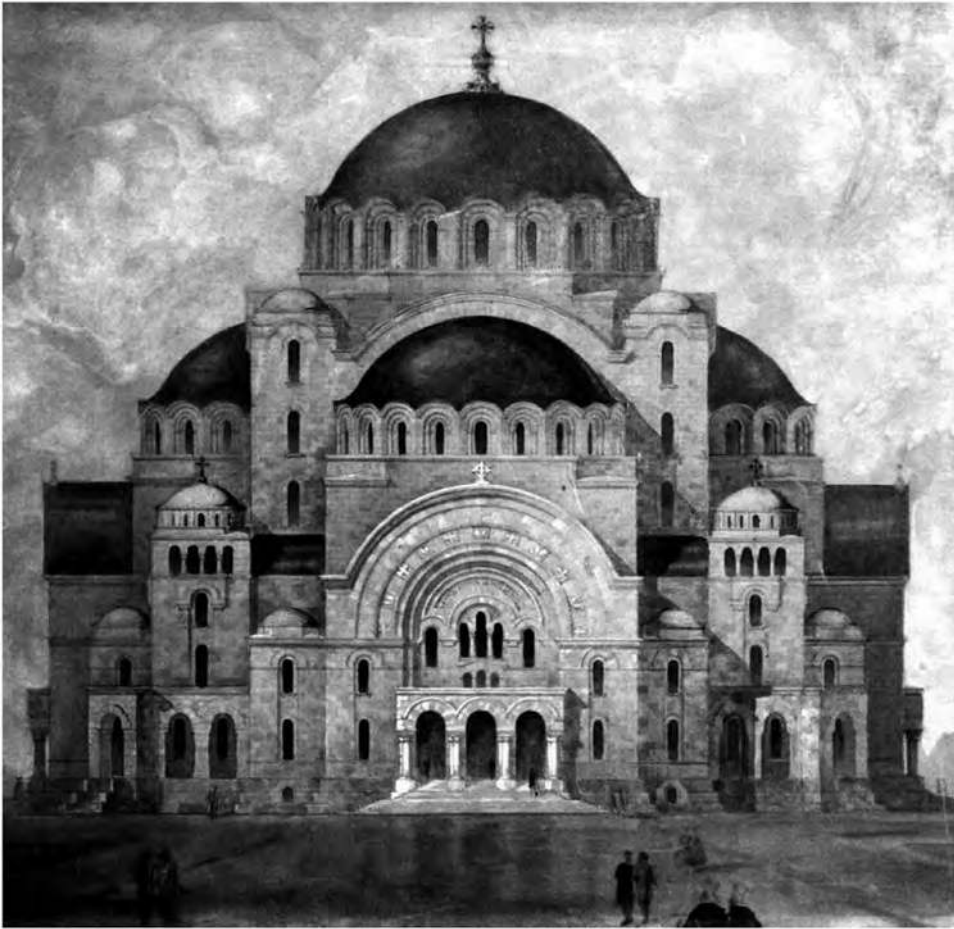
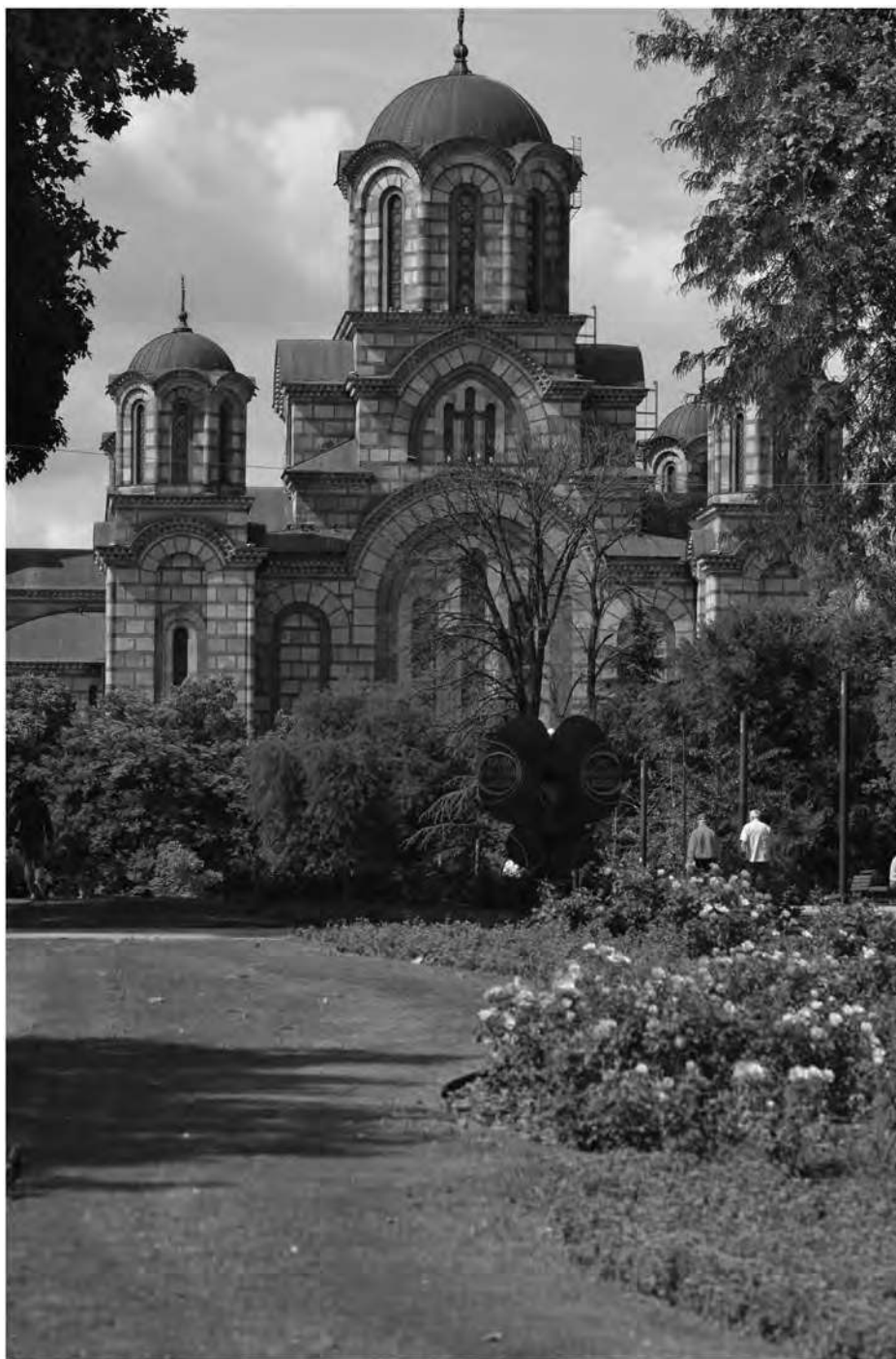


Figure 20.6 Bogdan Nestorović (1901–75), Design for the Temple of St Sava in Belgrade, 1932  
Copyright expired or unknown

much more direct, but its distinctive dome is inorganically grafted onto a massive, romantically dissected volume. At the same time, the brothers Petar and Branko Krstić offered an inspired, non-literal interpretation of its dome in an unfinished design for the Pavilion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the World Fair in Philadelphia (1924–25). Furthermore, imitations of Byzantine-domed basilicas are represented in the unbuilt project design for the National Museum (1928) by the then student and later renowned scholar of Serbian medieval architecture Đurđe Bošković (1904–90) (Figure 20.8) and the Second High School for Girls in Belgrade by the architect Milica Krstić (1887–1964) that was built in 1931–32.

Some architects ventured into bolder combinations of motifs from Byzantine and contemporary architecture, seeking to create a style that was at once modern and grounded in tradition. Among this group, the most important were certainly collaborators of the avant-garde magazine “Zenit” that used the architectural evocation of Hagia Sophia to draw attention to its universal spiritual qualities. Justinian’s church strongly inspired the ideologue of Zenitist “religion and mysticism”, Ljubomir Micić (1895–1971). Two diagrammatic





*Figure 20.7* Petar (1899–1991) and Branko Krstić (1902–1978), Saint Mark's Church in Belgrade, 1930–1939 © Dragan Damjanović



Figure 20.8 Đurđe Bošković, National Museum, student work published in *Raška* magazine, 1928, page 270. Copyright expired or unknown.

drawings of the mystical temple “Zeniteum”, which was intended never to be built, were published in 1924 by architecture student Josip Seissel (1904–87). In a modernist way, he revived the structural logic of Byzantine churches. Following the current expressionist interpretations of the Middle Ages, in the second “Zeniteum” Seissel consciously defied constructive logic, searching for the spiritual emancipation of an immaterial Zenit architecture. Although in his designs, tradition and the avant-garde exist in an unusual but sustainable harmony, this was not sufficiently noticed by the cultural elite.<sup>12</sup>

In Croatian architecture of the 1920s and 1930s, the Neo-Byzantine style appeared almost exclusively in church designs, primarily owing to architect Stjepan Podhorsky. The popularity of the style flourished especially in relation to the millennial celebration of the Croatian Kingdom (925–1925), connected to which a large Franciscan church was built in Duvno (present-day Tomislavgrad in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1924–32) sponsored partly by the Yugoslav Karađorđević dynasty. Podhorsky later employed the same style in the construction of Roman Catholic churches in Đurđevac (1928–29), Makarska (1938–40), Đurmanec (1940–43), Bihać (1932–38) and Mala Bosna near Subotica (1938). In these buildings, under the influence of Kovačić’s St Blaise church, as well as his own research on early medieval Croatian architecture, Podhorsky developed his own version of a Neo-Byzantine–Neo-Romanesque national Croatian style.

In the same period in the architecture of Orthodox churches on the territory of present-day Croatia, the Neo-Byzantine style prevailed, but in somewhat different forms related more

to Serbian architecture of the 1920s and 1930s. The design for the monumental Orthodox church of St Sava in Split (1935) showed an enviable maturity in reinterpreting old Byzantine models, in line with the tradition of building on the Dalmatian coast. However, the construction of the church according to the design proposal of Emil Ciciliani (1907–44) and Helen Baldasar (1894–1970) (started in 1938) soon stopped due to the beginning of WWII.<sup>13</sup>

The collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during WWII, the extensive destruction brought by the conflict and the establishment of the second, communist Yugoslavia after the war all led to a transformation in attitudes both towards religious communities and towards architectural styles. Modernism became the new official style of the state. For the Neo-Byzantine style, which was closely associated with sacred architecture and religious communities, there was little room. In the atheist state, both the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox Churches lost the role they had previously held in society and faced great difficulties in attempting to construct new religious buildings. The Neo-Byzantine style appeared only rarely after the war, primarily in the architecture of Orthodox churches.

The situation changed to some extent in the 1980s, when the ideological and administrative restraints in socialist Yugoslavia weakened and postmodernist ideas began to promote the restoration of reminiscences from historic architecture (including Byzantine). The decisive event that marked a turn in the religious policy of the authorities was the decision to allow the completion of the construction of the church of St Sava in Belgrade (1984), after numerous requests from the Serbian Patriarch German (1899–1991).

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia (1991–92) and the one-party system, the rise of nationalism, and the strengthening of the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church in society, the construction of Orthodox churches experienced a significant boom in the newly formed states – the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Montenegro and the Serb entity within the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska), as well as through the Serbian diaspora. Around 2000 new churches were built so that architectural bureaus specialised in the field appeared, and public interest in the construction of churches increased. A fundamentally new, original matrix of the architectural style for new churches did not develop, but rather inspiration was sought in traditional canons, architects' predilections and the taste of the clergy and founders in the dioceses, whereby the Byzantine layer was intertwined with the motifs taken from Serbian medieval and in some places also Romanesque or vernacular, architecture (Church of St Basil from Ostrog in Bežanijska Kosa neighbourhood, New Belgrade, 1995–2000, architect Mihajlo Mitrović, 1922–2018).

The most explicit example of inspiration from Byzantium is the church of St Demetrius in New Belgrade (1998–2001). Its architectural solution was explained in a text by its architect, Nebojša Popović (1950–98).<sup>14</sup> The church represents a plastically segmented, sharply demarcated geometrical unit with extremely smooth facades. With a reduced composition of cubic masses, centrally grouped and pyramidally graded, finished with “Serbian” domes and a bell tower, it fits somewhat into the abstract urban landscape of New Belgrade. Its striking Neo-Byzantine historicism, stylised by means of the postmodern design process, relies less on the early Byzantine Basilica of St Demetrius, and much more on the single-domed cruciform cubic churches of the middle Byzantine era. The effect of “Neo-Byzantine constructivism” was also achieved, whereby the experiences of Byzantine architectural aesthetics, Hansen's Viennese school and the methods of Soviet constructivists merge into an unusual postmodern whole.

In the last few years, the monumental church of St Sava in Belgrade, which began in the 1930s, was finally completed (for the most part). This project is indicative of the resurgence



*Figure 20.9* Saint Sava Church in Belgrade, 1935–2004 © Dragan Damjanović

of post-communist religiosity and nationalism. Initiated by Serbian architects and artists, it was completed with significant assistance from the Russian state and Russian artists, who worked on the creation of the church's lavish interior mosaics. Through inscriptions on its doors in the languages and scripts of various Christian nations, both Orthodox and Catholic, the church of St Sava, as one of the largest Orthodox churches in the world, while dedicated to a national saint, also seeks to convey the universality of a divided Christendom ([Figures 20.9](#) and [20.10](#)).

Examples of more daring solutions that attempt to boldly merge motifs from contemporary architecture with the Byzantine tradition in Serbian church architecture are rare. Perhaps the most audacious proposal was that of architects Branislav Mitrović and Boris Podrecca for the memorial church in Jajinci (1996–2002), the site of a WWII concentration camp where thousands of people were killed. Memorial architecture as a whole has proved to be a more fertile ground for experimentation within Serbian sacred architecture than the architecture of parish, monastery and cathedral churches and chapels.<sup>15</sup>

In Croatia, Byzantine tendencies in the post-Yugoslav period are associated almost exclusively with the building activity of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Since a large part of the Serbian Orthodox population emigrated from Croatia, new churches have been erected only rarely. The finest example is the chapel of the Serbian Orthodox Church's Spiritual Centre in Zagreb, designed by Dražen Juračić and Jelena Skorup Juračić (2010–11).

References to the Byzantine heritage can only occasionally be detected in contemporary Croatian Catholic church architecture, which has to a much greater extent adopted modern architecture as its principal mode of expression. Among Catholic churches, a rare example with Neo-Byzantine elements is the church of the Croatian Martyrs in Udbina by Marina



*Figure 20.10* Interior of Saint Sava Church in Belgrade with mosaics executed between 2016 and 2020 © Dragan Damjanović

Balin-Fadejev (2005–10), which introduces features – most notably the dome – that may be associated with traditions characteristic of Byzantine architecture.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion

A comparison of the architectural situation in Serbia and Croatia across the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries reveals the differing status of the Neo-Byzantine style in a predominantly Orthodox society versus a predominantly Catholic society (with a significant Orthodox minority). For the Orthodox community, the Neo-Byzantine style spread more widely from sacred architecture into public and even residential architecture, while in the Catholic community, it remained linked primarily to church architecture. Historical references in architecture were also conditioned by political context. In the Kingdom of Serbia, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the contemporary predominantly Orthodox states, the Neo-Byzantine style reflected respect for national and religious tradition. On the other hand, under the atheist communist regime of the second Yugoslavia, it was presented as a kind of atavism, reserved for Orthodox Christians.<sup>17</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Kadijević 2016; Ignjatović 2016.
- 2 Stiller 2013.
- 3 Jovanović 1985.
- 4 Kadijević 2019: 218.

- 5 Makuljević 2015.
- 6 Damjanović 2016: 107.
- 7 Damjanović 2016: 117.
- 8 Jurić 2003.
- 9 Kadijević 2016: 50.
- 10 Kadijević 2016: 53–5.
- 11 Kadijević 2016: 53.
- 12 Bogdanović 2016.
- 13 Čolović 2020: 208–11.
- 14 Popović 1997.
- 15 Stojanović 2020.
- 16 Damjanović 2019.
- 17 Dragan Damjanović's work on this article has been fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project Representation, Development, Education, Participation – Art in Society in 19th–21st Centuries (IP-2022-10-9843).

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# 21

## IMMIGRANT ART AND ARCHITECTURE

### Byzantium and the Greek Diaspora in the United States

*Kostis Kourelis*

Half a million people are not a demographically significant number in the mass migration movements of the U.S. The estimated half a million Greeks who emigrated between 1890 and 1924 made up a tenth of the equivalent Italian or eastern European populations, but they played a disproportionate role in shaping America's urban topography through churches, shops and the ethnic neighbourhoods known as "Greektowns". Places of worship formed the cultural, social and educational centres of immigrant communities in American cities. Consider Kehila Kedosha Janina, a synagogue of the Greek diaspora overshadowed by the eastern European majority of the Lower East Side. Even as a small house-sized shul, Kehila Kedosha asserts its identity through stylistic references. Its ogival arch on the main entrance alludes to indigenous Ottoman architecture of the Epirote homeland but it is capped by an oversized keystone and oculus of the Colonial Revival style which celebrates assimilation into American history. These choices were made in contrast to the Byzantine Revival style promoted by Reform Judaism, which was fuelled by nascent archaeology during the British Mandate for Palestine. Aside from small Jewish and Roma populations, the overwhelming majority of immigrants from Greece were Christian and saw themselves as the inheritors of Byzantium, whose lost capital of Constantinople they wished to one day possess again. The architectural heritage that these Orthodox Christians brought with them was as complicated as Byzantium itself, irreducible to any single model, including Justinian's Hagia Sophia. After an introduction to the geopolitics of Greece and the U.S., a nuanced chronology of Greek Orthodox churches in America from the 1860s to the 1960s is presented here, illustrating how architectural references continuously shifted, resonating with the diversity of Byzantine architecture itself, even as the link to an Orthodox Greek homeland persisted.

It is difficult to speak of immigrants bringing their Byzantine heritage to the U.S. because Byzantium had already permeated American visual culture before their arrival through the work of H. H. Richardson, Frank Furness, Ralph Adams Cram, Bertram Goodhue, Louis Comfort Tiffany and Louis Sullivan, in projects such as Trinity Church, Boston (1897), St Francis de Sale, Philadelphia (1907), St Bartholomew, New York (1914), Rice University, Houston (1912) or the Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln (1912). A Byzantine orientation had also been grafted into American pedagogy when Charles Eliot Norton developed the first



American art curriculum at Harvard University in 1874 (modelled on John Ruskin's approach). As J. B. Bullen has argued, America embraced Byzantium liberally because, unlike Europe, it had not spent the entire eighteenth century distancing itself from it.<sup>1</sup> Byzantium was, thus, embedded in the "brown decades" of American visual culture (1865–95) and served as a proxy for the ethnic hybridity and organic democracy celebrated by American intellectuals, like poet Walt Whitman.<sup>2</sup> Publications by the architects of the Byzantine Research Fund provided American architects with blueprints for a Byzantine-inflected American style. The American excavations of Byzantine houses at Ancient Corinth and the erection of a Byzantine-inspired museum at the site exemplified the enthusiastic adoption of Byzantine material culture in the 1930s – a period when American audiences linked it directly to avant-garde movements in contemporary art, as canonised by the 1931 Exposition Internationale d'Art Byzantin in Paris.<sup>3</sup> It would not have been unusual for a Greek immigrant in that period to encounter Byzantine icons in metropolitan museums, Byzantine-looking Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian or even Methodist churches, or to rent these spaces for Sunday worship.

The first wave of Greek migration to the U.S. (1880–1924) coincided with the geopolitical collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars and WWI which destabilised the institutions that claimed Byzantine succession in the world order. Both at home and abroad, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Church of Greece, the Church of Russia (and later the Orthodox Church of America), the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Serbian Orthodox Church struggled for ecclesiastical control over what was once a "Byzantine Commonwealth", while the Great Powers rushed in to claim the crumbs of Istanbul.<sup>4</sup> Previously motivated by romantic aestheticism alone, America's cultural adoption of Byzantium took on a geopolitical dimension in 1917 when the country entered WWI and U.S. foreign policy addressed formerly Byzantine lands. Greeks and other immigrants from Ottoman lands enlisted in the U.S. Army and fought in European trenches. The Allies' defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 and the fiasco of the Greek-Turkish war of 1922 instrumentalised Americans (through Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations) in managing the humanitarian crises of the East.

American cultural "ownership" of Byzantine heritage was further consolidated after WWII, especially since the Cold War enemy of Communist Russia had rejected Orthodoxy (while its exiled defenders had set up seminaries and research centres in the U.S.). At every step of the way, national diasporas engaged in the creative construction of their diverse ethnicities in ad hoc ways that hegemonic European nationalism had restricted. The legal status of each Greek parish in the U.S. was an autonomous non-profit organisation governed by a board of trustees elected by the community and chartered by the state in which it operated. Consequently, if that community elected to worship in a converted synagogue (as in St Basil in Chicago) or a converted tavern (as in St Nicholas at the World Trade Center in New York), there was no authority to intervene. Each parish made its own decisions about finances, real estate and architecture. The audience for architectural messaging went beyond the internal Greek community (whose consolidation was shaped by the endowment of a building); it was equally directed towards other ethnic communities (whose sacred spaces stood next door), and to the dominant Anglo-Protestant culture (which controlled the material, technical and legal vocabulary).

Immigrants from post-Ottoman lands had different architectural sensibilities from those of other more populous diasporas (e.g. Italian, Irish, Russian Jewish, Polish and German). The worlds that had shaped their cosmopolitanism were violently annihilated by the replacement of the Ottoman Empire with ethno-religiously defined nation states. The violent persecution, ethnic cleansing and economic collapse in the slow disintegration

of the Ottoman Empire were, after all, what had motivated emigration. Jewish, Greek and Armenian minorities were formed by a cosmopolitan cultural environment violently eradicated in Greece, Turkey, the Balkans and the Middle East. The few who emigrated transplanted their hybrid identities to a new continent and found themselves, again, in tolerant multi-ethnic enclaves. Not yet formed by national state ideologies (as those who stayed home were), the post-Ottoman minority diasporas in the U.S. retained elements of eclecticism, hybridity and tolerance in their new situation.

The richness of migrant materialities in the modern period has led diaspora studies into new interpretive paradigms like the notion of *ethnoscapes*<sup>5</sup> or of *liquid modernity*.<sup>6</sup> Modern migrants create unstable, ephemeral spaces that defy the interpretive categories of architectural history, which has been traditionally centred on material permanence, elite patronage, institutional hegemony and centre-periphery models. A counter-tradition that focuses on the subaltern has made great strides in studying the architectures of migration. In a landmark study of America's architectural roots, Dell Upton showcases 22 immigrant groups that shaped vernacular architecture below the radar of academic transmission<sup>7</sup>; Robert Orsi's ethnography of the Madonna of Mount Carmel (f. 1884) argues for a fundamental change in New York's urban space through the religious practices of Italian immigrants;<sup>8</sup> Sarah Lopez defines remittance spaces as a new conceptual category to parse the simultaneous architectural agency of immigrants in Mexico and the U.S.,<sup>9</sup> and Zachary Violette has shown how the building of tenements in New York was not limited to predatory landlords but became an arena of self-expression for immigrants.<sup>10</sup>

The Greek diaspora in the U.S. has been recognised for its culinary, musical and media contributions to American culture but not for its architecture. In his study of *America's Architectural Roots* (1986), Upton notes that Greeks "evidently built little that was distinctive but instead expressed their ethnicity through language, food customs, religion and social organization".<sup>11</sup> Upton acknowledges that more scholarly research could change this negative assessment. Greek American historiography has remained silent about the arts, while not a single architect has been studied by historians.<sup>12</sup>

Housed on the altars and walls of Greek places of worship in the U.S., one can find masterpieces of nineteenth-century art that crossed the Atlantic along with practising artists who established ateliers in New York, Chicago and Boston to serve the emerging diaspora markets. During the nineteenth century, Mount Athos developed a hybrid western-Byzantine style centred around *sketes* (cells) or monastic brotherhoods, most notably the Kausokalyves Monastery School of painting.<sup>13</sup> Greek migrants commissioned Kausokalyvites artist-monks to paint religious canvases, which they packed in their transatlantic luggage, and unrolled on the *templon* screens of American churches. As one of the most fashionable styles of Byzantine iconography in Greece, the Kausokalyves style permeated religious spaces in the diaspora churches.

Art influences in Greece were shaped at an official level by the cultural primacy of the Bavarian royal court in 1832. Religious art in the new nation was led by Friedrich Thiersch (1784–1860) in the Academy of Athens under the influence of the Nazarene movement, wherein Byzantine iconography was infused with a mystical luminosity (influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites of England). Starting in the 1910s, Greek painters trained in the Athens School of Fine Art immigrated to the U.S. to launch successful careers. Theodore Tsavalas, most notable among them, worked on the murals of the Holy Trinity Church in New York for 15 years – the church burned down in 1927 and was replaced by the current Cathedral (Figure 21.1). He was followed by Constantine Triantafyllou, whose career in religious



Figure 21.1 Theodore Tsavalas, *Virgin Enthroned*, 1922, St George Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Philadelphia, photograph. © Photographed by the author.

iconography lasted into the 1950s. Matching in quality the great Nazarene icons in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens (1862) or the imagery in St Sophia Cathedral in London (1882), the icons and murals of Greek American artists in the U.S. remain uncatalogued.

The study of Greek American churches is hindered by the relatively small number of Greek immigrants and, more importantly, by the economic mobility that allowed those immigrants to upgrade their parish churches by moving to better real estate. Consequently, only 13% of Greek American churches active in 1912 survive today. By joining the mass “white flight” afforded by assimilation and the automobile, Greeks migrated again in the 1960s, this time domestically, from multicultural downtowns to monochromatic suburbs. Set in seas of parking lots, these new churches were designed to be “read” quickly and from afar by those in passing cars as ethnic monuments of affluence and success. Their domes rose as an ethnic marker for Greek Orthodoxy, which one art historian has called “the tyranny of Hagia Sophia”.<sup>14</sup> During the turbulent 1960s, economic depression and racial tensions turned Greektowns into depopulated ruins. The Greektowns of Detroit and Baltimore were hit hard by the 1967 and 1968 riots, while the famous Greektown of Chicago was bulldozed into a six-lane highway and the Modernist campus of the University of Illinois. Recovering elements of the architectural legacy of Greek immigration to the U.S. before the age of air travel, tourism, mass media and Zorba the Greek, therefore, becomes an archaeological project. The varied appropriation of Byzantium (beyond the superficial dome) becomes pressing, once we recognise how much it resembles processes in Asian American Studies, African American Studies or contemporary Migration Studies. Rather than looking for normalcy in architectural transmission (elite patrons, celebrated architects, signature projects), the architecture of migration requires a paradigm shift into heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity, disjuncture and difference, all concepts familiar to the study of Byzantium itself which occupies the borders of Western historiography.<sup>15</sup>

Greek American architectural agency developed during the gradual decline of post-imperial Europe and the rise of American global dominance. Between 1880 and 1924, half a million Greeks who migrated to the U.S. were driven by their homeland’s financial collapse and prolonged military conflicts. Unlike their Christian peers from southern and eastern Europe, Greeks did not have the benefit of an infrastructure such as the pre-existing Roman Catholic Archdiocese that Irish immigrants had set in place a century earlier. In contrast to a well-oiled Catholic ecclesiastical infrastructure, the old Orthodox Ecumene disintegrated among subsidiary sees. In-fighting between Orthodox bishoprics back home pitched the respective diasporas at war with each other in America (making it impossible for the foundation of a nationally diverse Orthodox Archdiocese). Moreover, Greece’s “National Schism” (1915–22) divided Greeks between Royalists and Republicans, aligned with the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria) and the Allied Powers (France, Britain, Russia), respectively. It was split that extended to churches abroad.

The legal separation between church and state legislated by the U.S. Constitution gave the immigrant laity complete control over the administrative and fiscal management of their parishes. This led to a unique experiment of radical democracy, not practised by Orthodox Christians since the Council of Nicaea (325). The internal fragmentation was framed by relentless external threats from high rates of intermarriage (and conversion to the non-Greek spouse’s religion) to Protestant proselytisation, including through civic organisations like the YMCA, YWCA (Young Men’s and Women’s Christian Associations), Public Bath Associations to the settlement house movement. In contrast to the Catholic Church of America (established in 1784), the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

was a late-comer, formed in 1922 at the tail end of the first migration movement (curtailed by the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924). Confronted with parish charters that preceded its own, the Archdiocese did not take effective control until 1930 when it appeased the warring parishes that had seceded along the National Schism. And it was not until the ordination of Archbishop Iakovos in 1959 that the Archdiocese established an architectural policy.

Without a doubt, Greek immigrants exploited their classical heritage to earn their contested whiteness.<sup>16</sup> The process escalated with the City Beautiful Movement, an urban planning philosophy that emerged following the 1893 Chicago World Fair. This movement promoted Beaux Arts classicism – a grand, European-inspired architectural style emphasising symmetry, classical orders and monumental scale – which came to dominate the American artistic Renaissance of the Gilded Age (roughly 1876–1917).<sup>17</sup> They also capitalised on their Orthodox inheritance, using Byzantium as a point of reference. The selection of Byzantine models, however, was far from singular. We can subdivide Byzantine reception into four consecutive architectural periods: (A) a Helleno-Byzantine style (1890s–1920s), (B) a Byzantino-Romanesque style (1920s–50s), (C) a Middle Byzantine Revival style (1960s–present) and (D) a Modernist style (1960s–80s).<sup>18</sup> “Byzantium” is a complicated entity that straddles borders, ethnicities and aesthetics. An evolving Greek diaspora exploited Byzantium’s inherent pluralism to tell different stories at different times.

The first communities of the Greek diaspora worshipped in rented spaces and eventually purchased older churches that had been abandoned by their congregations. Typically of a lower economic status, Greek immigrants inhabited ethnic slums and run-down buildings abandoned by an elite class fleeing to newer and more suburban enclaves. W. E. Du Bois diagnosed this process of slum formation in Philadelphia in 1899 as did the members of Jane Adams’ Hull House settlement in Chicago (both cities adjacent to the cities’ Greek-towns). A fundamental component of the Greek ecclesiastical experience was, therefore, the diversity of architectural spaces (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Templar, commercial) that they could afford. They Byzantinised those spaces by the addition of icon screens but, unlike their Russian coreligionists, kept the Protestant pews. This inter-denominational experience gave the Greeks in the U.S. a pluralistic education not available in the homeland. Most often, these churches were Neoclassical, Romanesque or Gothic, but they included Byzantine Revival churches – as in the case of the Annunciation Cathedral of Baltimore, a circular church from 1891. In the tradition of appropriation, spoliation and reuse, Greek American communities inherited aged and deteriorating buildings, which they quickly learned how to restore, conserve and curate through a do-it-yourself approach. Inadvertently, they became stewards of an older American heritage. The memory of that pluralism survived into the twentieth century, as those bricolage spaces eventually became memorialised by later generations.

The first Greek Orthodox church, the Holy Trinity in New Orleans (1866), is noteworthy as a vernacular Greek Revival clapboard structure with four Corinthian columns and a pedimented porch. It was financed by Greek merchants who exploited American cotton (built on the labour of African slaves). New Orleans’ Holy Trinity represents a short-lived pan-Orthodox model where Russians, Greeks, Serbians, Romanians and Syrians worshipped together (an inclusivity that was revived in the 2010s among urban congregations throughout the U.S.). English became the shared language of administration and the architecture was similarly generically classical. By 1920, this ecumenical inclusivity of the “Eastern Orthodox Church” of New Orleans was re-chartered as the “Hellenic Orthodox Church”. Conflicts among Orthodox spheres of influence were heightened

during the Balkan Wars, WWI and the Bolshevik Revolution; diasporas that in the 1860s worshipped under an Orthodox umbrella were pitched against each other and divided into competing national parishes.

Greece's own church had seceded in 1833, declaring independence (autocephaly) from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, but this was not recognised by Constantinople until 1850. Pastoral authority over extra-territorial Greeks fell under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, whereas the Church of Russia had gained priority over North America through its early missionary reach in Alaska in 1794. The Orthodox Churches of Athens, Constantinople and Moscow all staked their claim in the diasporas of the U.S., an amorphous mixture of nationalities, languages and independently chartered parishes. The long disintegration of the Ottoman Empire (1821–1923) caused strife among many minority communities that sided along new national divisions. Those divisions ripped apart communities of Greek nationals, dividing their allegiances between warring Greek political parties and the Great Powers of WWI. During the two decades of the National Schism, the Church of Greece and the Patriarchate of Constantinople also took sides, turning a global/political conflict into an ecclesiastical one. Every American city had two warring Orthodox churches whose division had nothing to do with American realities. The U.S. government did not occupy Thessaloniki or bombard Athens (as did the French), but it aligned its policy to the Republican faction (of the National Schism) and participated in the occupation of Istanbul (1918–23). That is to say that America's reception of Byzantium was no longer politically neutral. The ecumenicism of Holy Trinity, New Orleans and its neutral American Greek Revival style could not be sustained when ethnicity, language and nation-building led the violent dissolution in the homelands. While the multiple immigrant ethnicities assimilated in the secular dimensions of the so-called American "melting pot", they hardened their religious affiliations along tribal affiliations. As late as 1963, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. famously described 11am on Sunday mornings as the most segregated hour in America.

Although Holy Trinity in New Orleans was the first documented newly built Greek ecclesiastical building in the U.S. (on a modest scale), Holy Trinity in Lowell, Massachusetts (1908), was the first of true architectural significance and monumental scale. It was also the first church to explore a Byzantine vocabulary. The Greek community in Lowell was not only the third largest Greek community in the U.S. (after New York and Chicago), it was one of the largest migrant groups of the city (along with Poles, French-Canadians and Portuguese). Lowell's Greeks were predominantly mill-workers who lived in the dense confines of the once Irish-dominated "Acre", which was transformed into a Greektown. Hailing primarily from the Peloponnese, Lowell also became a Royalist bastion during the National Schism. Holy Trinity incorporates Byzantine and Romanesque features, designed by Henry L. Rourke who created a similar hybrid style for Lowell's French-Canadian ethnic Church of St Jean Baptiste (1896) where Jack Kerouac served as an altar boy. Holy Trinity is fronted by two flanking vaulted towers modelled on the transverse arches of Hagia Sophia; the towers are topped with cupolas inspired by Late-Byzantine churches. Oral traditions claim that the congregation sent Rourke to Constantinople to study Hagia Sophia, but the claim seems spurious. Rising across the canal from the earlier Gothic Revival St Patrick's (1853), Holy Trinity produced an image of diversity and confrontation: "Here truly meet East and West, two excellent examples of the Byzantine and Gothic fronting each other, the gilded domes and splendid spires rising out of the midst of tumble-down tenements."<sup>19</sup>

Chicago's Church of the Annunciation (1909), designed by Worthmann & Steinbach architects, served as the earliest prototype for many later Greek Orthodox churches (Figure 21.2).





*Figure 21.2* Worthmann & Steinbach architects, Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Chicago, 1909, photograph. © Photographed by the author.



Its double bell towers, cross plan, elongated nave and dome were based on Theophil Hansen's (1813–91) design for the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens (1862), underscoring the tensions between Athens and Constantinople. Between 1840 and 1870, the Church of Greece had formed a national Helleno-Byzantine style that synthesised Early Christian, Middle Byzantine, Romanesque, Greek and Roman forms.<sup>20</sup> Lysandros Kaftantzoglou (1811–85), one of the style's inventors and first professors of architecture in Greece (whose son became ambassador to Washington) spoke of an enlightened Byzantium unbeholden to slavish imitation but infused with European rationality.<sup>21</sup> This newly coined "Helleno-Byzantine" style aligned with the revivalist projects of King Ludwig I of Bavaria (r. 1825–48, father of King Otto of Greece) and Ludwig II (r. 1864–86).<sup>22</sup> Greece's Helleno-Byzantine solution aligned with the German *Rundbogenstil* movement that sought to provide a simplified, pan-European solution to the nineteenth century's burning question of "what style should we build in?" This *Rundbogenstil* served the multicultural needs of many American diasporas and national agendas.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1900s, Chicago's population was 80% foreign-born or the young children of foreign-born parents, and the various religions they represented organised their urban life. The Catholic Church's "bricks-and-mortar" policy led it to speculate on housing development, anchored by new parishes.<sup>24</sup> Firms like Worthmann & Steinbach shaped the architectural identities of Polish, Ukrainian and other eastern European immigrants. Chicago's 15,000 Greeks invested in the same architectural strategy used by the 500,000 Poles, for whom Worthmann & Steinbach developed the celebrated Polish Cathedral Style.<sup>25</sup> With a single gesture, the Annunciation celebrated the Helleno-Byzantine style of Athens, while also espousing the light Byzantine influence evident in the religious styles of peer immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. The inclusivity provided by the *Rundbogenstil* of Europe was creating implied kinships among the diverse nationals of the new continent. For architecture, the melting pot had already congealed in Europe. Advertising himself as "the only Greek architect in Chicago", Nikolas Dokos disseminated the Helleno-Byzantine style – a term that was in currency within the immigrant press as much as in the academic discourse of nineteenth-century Greek intellectuals. Dokos circulated Chicago's Hagia Sophia prototype provided by the Annunciation to other congregations as far south as Atlanta and as far West as Salt Lake City.

The second phase of Greek American churches is the most interesting and the most difficult to define. It is marked by the rise of first- and second-generation Greek immigrant architects, by great changes in the design of churches in Greece, by the peak of American-Byzantine revivalism and by a new sense of romantic yearning (decadence over religion). It also follows the establishment of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America in 1922. The Archdiocese does not seem to have had a centralised architectural policy at first, since the majority of the churches under its jurisdiction had already been established, and most of them were housed in structures that had been purchased from other denominations. No longer subordinate but on an equal footing with the Church of Greece, the Archdiocese of America seems to have subsequently pursued a Byzantium that had not already been digested by Athens. It is hard to pinpoint the exact moment of this shift, but the churches of the 1930s exhibit a new muscularity, the abandonment of the double-tower for dynamic asymmetries, and an academic awareness of Southern European Romanesque features. The second-oldest Greek community had been established in New York in 1891. The Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New York, however, burned down in 1924 along with a newly completed iconographic programme by Tsavalas. The new Holy

Trinity (1929–31), designed by Kerr Rainsford, John A. Thompson and Gerald A. Holmes, is asymmetrical, multi-faceted and domed, with a single large bell tower. It is dressed in a pan-Mediterranean medieval style with features from Italy, Spain and Greece. It borrows elements from its neighbour, the Church of the Assumption (1888) – a Romanesque Revival missionary Presbyterian church targeting Czech immigrants. Known as Little Bohemia, the “ethnic slum” in which the new Holy Trinity was located was being gentrified into the Upper East Side through new multistorey apartment blocks that were also designed in a Byzantino-Romanesque style – such as Emery Roth’s 200 block of 73rd Street. Holy Trinity, along with the wider real estate development of the area, embraced a picturesque asymmetry. Unlike the Byzantino-Romanesque hybrids of earlier periods, the revival styles of American architecture in the 1920s were academically correct. An explosion of interest in Byzantine archaeology among American, British and Greek archaeologists at the Great Palace in Istanbul or in Corinth was coupled with the adoption of Byzantium by the artistic avant-garde.<sup>26</sup> International collaborations between British, French, Greek and American architects created a nascent Byzantine historic preservation movement, exemplified by Ernest Hébrard’s (1875–1933) redesign of Thessaloniki after the 1917 fire or Aristotle Zachos’ (1871–1939) restoration of Hagios Demetrios and new designs throughout Greece.

America’s entrance into WWI facilitated a new internationalism fuelled by the idealism of President Woodrow Wilson. Mobilisation, moreover, gave immigrants opportunities to declare their patriotism by joining the U.S. army (and consequently fast-track their naturalisation). Greek immigrant Peter Camburas enlisted in the Corps of Engineers and was deployed on the Western Front. After the armistice of 1918, he requested permission to stay in France for a year in order to study at the École des Beaux Arts. Witnessing firsthand the German bombing of medieval towns and cathedrals, Camburas’ relationship to the Middle Ages was transformed, as was the case for many of his fellow enlisted American architects like Arthur Meigs, whose experiences in the villages of France, as a captain in the artillery unit, inspired a new aesthetic in his design of Philadelphia’s country estates. Camburas became Chicago’s most prolific Greek architect, beginning with the Church of the Assumption (1937–38). Camburas incorporated into his work innovations based on the historical investigation and restoration of Byzantine churches, such as Constantine and Helen in Volos (1930–35), an undomed basilica with a free-standing bell tower. Camburas’ churches combine heavy stone exteriors of the Western Middle Ages with basilican models of the fifth-to-sixth centuries, excavated in great numbers by Zachos’ student, Anastasios Orlandos (1887–1979).<sup>27</sup>

Equally important for this period was the practice of Ernest and Alexander Eugene who maintained offices in Chicago and Ann Arbor. The Eugenes immigrated from Constantinople in 1916, following the ethnic persecutions of the Balkan Wars (Ernest’s education began at Istanbul’s Imperial School of Engineering). They both attended the University of Michigan, Ernest specialising in engineering and Alexander in architecture. They developed a more austere but plastic architecture, with single towers and massive stone construction at St Nicholas in St Louis (1930), St Nicholas in Tarpon Springs (1943), Holy Trinity in Wilmington (1952) and many other churches that deserve documentation ([Figure 21.3](#)). The majority of first Greek American churches, we must remember, were Romanesque or Gothic Revival hand-me-downs, most prominently Holy Trinity in Chicago’s Greektown. The Byzantino-Romanesque strategy of Camburas and Eugene incorporated such Western



*Figure 21.3* Eugene Brothers architects, St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Tarpon Springs, 1943, photograph. © Shutterstock.

appropriations through an echo chamber of shared romantic medievalism. It also allowed for the design of larger complexes, including adjoining community centres and schools.

The last two phases of Byzantine Revival in Greek churches simultaneously emerged around 1959 as a strict traditionalism and a loose modernism. Archbishop Iakovos of America (in office 1959–96) was one of the most influential Greek Orthodox clerics in America (famously marching with the Reverend Martin Luther King in Selma and attempting – unsuccessfully – to unite all Orthodox Americans). Strict traditionalism became Iakovos’ preferred style guided by architect W. Stuart Thompson (1890–1968), who was the official architect of the American School of Classical Studies in Greece. Thompson had designed a Byzantinising Archaeological Museum in Corinth (1932), Loring Hall (1929), the Gennadius Library (1926) and other buildings in Greece, Albania and Turkey, while simultaneously sustaining an architectural practice in New York (mostly focusing on apartment buildings and suburban developments). Thompson’s understanding of Byzantine architecture was sharpened through the restoration of the tenth-century Holy Apostles by the Ford Foundation (1954–59) during the Athenian Agora excavations. Based on these credentials, the Greek community of Stamford, Connecticut, commissioned Thompson to design their Church of the Archangels (1959) based on the Holy Apostles. Having just been



*Figure 21.4* W. Stuart Thompson architect, Holy Cross Theological Seminary Chapel, Brookline, 1969, photograph. © Photographed by the author.

ordained, Archbishop Iakovos attended the opening and embraced Thompson's rendition of Byzantium with its stamp of approval by the American archaeological community. The Middle Byzantine cross-in-square churches of Greece with no other variations became the Archdiocese's official mode, as showcased in Iakovos' selection of Thompson to design the chapel of Holy Cross Seminary in Brookline, MA (1969) ([Figure 21.4](#)). At the same time, the convenience of air travel allowed for a constant supply of Greek iconographers to decorate the churches with historically correct Byzantine frescoes.

Wanting to separate themselves from the asphyxiating world of their blue-collar parents, postwar white-collar Greek children exploited the expressive freedoms of modernism, as did many assimilated white ethnics. The Catholic Church had insisted on using correct historical precedents for its architecture in the U.S. In 1965, however, the Second Vatican Council allowed for the introduction of new building models, embracing modernism. Catholic Church design of the late 1960s and 1970s exhibits unprecedented innovations in form. Frank Lloyd Wright's (1867–1959) Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church (1956) in the suburbs of Milwaukee is the most celebrated break from tradition, however. In 1910, Wright had lectured to the Greek working classes at Hull House (Jane Adams' settlement house at the heart of Chicago's Greektown), but his relationship to Orthodoxy came through his Montenegrin wife Olgivanna. Wright's Annunciation (like his contemporary Beth Shalom Synagogue in Philadelphia) has been

celebrated for its rethinking of older norms. Modernist designs by lesser-known architects followed, i.e. the Ascension in the suburbs of Oakland (1960), the Annunciation in the suburbs of Atlanta (1967) and Ss Constantine and Helen in the suburbs of Gary (1975). The structural machismo of reinforced concrete brought about large domes and gratuitous allusions to Hagia Sophia. Other designers capitalised on the opportunity to create concrete groin vaults or elongated barrel vaults. As was the case with post-Vatican II Catholic churches, modernism created some extraordinary renderings of Byzantium and some cheap architectural expedients. The Modernist experimentations of Greek churches in the U.S. came to a close with postmodernism and the revival of historical styles in the 1980s. Traditionalism persevered, while experimentation with Modernist forms continued in a limited fashion in Europe, as in Marcel Ferrier's Greek Orthodox Church of St Demetrios (1994) or Herzog & de Meuron's Greek Orthodox Church competition entry (1989), both in Zurich. The 2023 conference "The Shape of the Sacred: Eastern Christianity and Architectural Modernity" organised by Joseph L. Clark and Inga Leonova at Fordham University (and planned publication) addressed these very questions.

The consecration of Santiago Calatrava's St Nicholas church at the World Trade Center in 2022 invigorated popular conversation over space, architecture and the Greek American experience, but it has also revealed the intellectual vacuum in art historical scholarship on diaspora architecture, art and material culture (including the building that St Nicholas replaced). Nikolas Dokos, Peter Camburas, Ernest and Alexander Eugene and W. Stuart Thompson, the leading characters in this architectural innovation, are obscure in the annals of both Greek American history and architectural history in both the U.S. and Greece. Thanks to their distant, fragmented and pluralist new setting, the diasporas of Chicago, New York, St Louis and Tarpon Springs played with Byzantine heritage in far more creative ways than either the Church of Greece or the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which tightly codified the shape of the buildings under their jurisdiction. After all, each Greek Orthodox parish church in the U.S. belongs to and is managed by its community as an independent non-profit foundation. While my periodisation of Greek American church architecture into four phases is provisional, I hope it generates future scholarly monographs espousing the approach of vernacular studies which reflects contemporary migration studies. The decentred and hybrid character of diaspora architecture has built obstacles to paradigms and typologies. To the art historian, however, hybridity is at the heart of Byzantium's cultural millennium in which Hagia Sophia was merely a "white elephant", never repeated. In Byzantine architecture, Romanesque elements had already entered the Despotate of Epirus; the Palaiologan churches of Constantinople already embraced eclecticising oversized domes; experiments in mixing three-aisled basilicas with domes had already been tried out in the Despotate of Mistras; and Middle Byzantine architecture developed according to regional adaptations (best known among them are the Greek versus the Constantinopolitan Schools).<sup>28</sup> The post-Byzantine period of the Ottoman Empire provided yet more regional hybridity, including the Turkish Baroque woodwork of Macedonia, the stone masonry in Epirus, the slender blind drums of the Peloponnese and the iconic white chapels in the Aegean, which after all are some of the most valued Byzantine features for contemporary branding and tourism.

In 1918, Fiske Kimball published one of the earliest histories of architecture in the U.S. The section on Byzantium, written by his co-author George Edgell, warned readers against

reducing the Byzantine legacy to the early centuries of the empire and advocated for embracing its organic development:

The dynamic quality of the art has largely been overlooked, and the style invested with a false conservatism which recent writers on Byzantine architecture are only beginning to dispel. It is well, therefore, especially in a general history of architecture, to emphasize the fact that the Byzantine style was not only an architecture of transition, but especially an independent, self-sufficient art which showed even new vitality from the age of the first Constantine in the fourth century to that of the last in the fifteenth, and, in a sense, shows it even to-day.<sup>29</sup>

Before he was recruited to direct the University of Virginia's newly formed architectural school, laying the foundations of the Institute of Fine Arts in New York, and ultimately directing the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Kimball taught at the University of Michigan, where Ernest and Alexander Eugene were students. Their work exemplifies an expansive incorporation of the Byzantine tradition.

By the end of the nineteenth century, when Greeks arrived in the U.S., they encountered a fully Americanised Byzantine aesthetic (Richardson, Cram etc.). Was this Byzantine architecture more correct than the evolving Byzantium encountered firsthand in their village churches? A historical paradox confronted them. During its first century as a nation, Greece largely rejected Byzantium for a purist Neoclassicism. At the same time, the U.S. was building a pluralistic aesthetic influenced by John Ruskin's embrace of Byzantium. In short, when Greeks arrived in the U.S., Byzantium had already been claimed by others. It adorned Protestant and Catholic churches, synagogues, museums, universities and state capitals. A second-generation Greek American child in the 1930s may have worshipped in a classical-style church while attending a Byzantine-style public school. The Greek American aesthetic experience today is largely imported from Greece or even from Spain in the case of Santiago Calatrava's rib work and white translucency at St Nicholas. The historical disinterest over the art and materialities of the Greek American experience creates a problematic cultural amnesia and includes the erasure of the original St Nicholas of 1922 that was destroyed on 9/11. The persistence of reducing all Greek American architectural heritage to Hagia Sophia is a tyranny imposed by simplifications that serve contemporary understandings of Byzantium rather than those contemporary to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>30</sup> The Helleno-Byzantine style, the Byzantino-Romanesque style, the Middle Byzantine Revival style and the Modernist style underscore four historical episodes when Greek immigrants exercised their architectural agency to change the American-built environment and transform Byzantine heritage globally.

## Notes

- 1 Bullen 2003: 186–225. See also Nelson's introduction in this Handbook.
- 2 Mumford 1931. "Brown decades" coined by cultural critic Lewis Mumford to celebrate the rough, heavy, hybrid styles of 1865–95 in contrast to the delicate Victorian styles that preceded and the white classical styles that followed them.
- 3 Kourelis 2007.
- 4 Obolensky 1971.
- 5 Appadurai 1990.
- 6 Bauman 2000.



- 7 Upton 1986.
- 8 Orsi 2001.
- 9 Lopez 2015.
- 10 Violette 2019.
- 11 Upton 1986: 14.
- 12 An encyclopaedia of Greek Orthodox churches in the U.S. and a pictorial catalogue from the Metropolis of Chicago are noble starting points, see Baroutas 2006; Fiorentinos 2004.
- 13 Graikos 2011.
- 14 Cutler 1972.
- 15 Nelson 1996.
- 16 Anagnostou 2004.
- 17 Kourelis 2023.
- 18 For an earlier articulation of this typology, see Kourelis and Marinis 2012.
- 19 Burgess 1913, quoted in Kitroeff 2020: 21.
- 20 Philippides 1984: 95–8.
- 21 Philippides 1995.
- 22 Bullen 2003: 34.
- 23 Curran 2003.
- 24 Rzeznik 2010.
- 25 McNamara 2005.
- 26 Kourelis 2007.
- 27 Chlepa 2011.
- 28 Krautheimer and Ćurčić 1986: 353–411.
- 29 Kimball and Edgel 1918: 213.
- 30 See also Bhalla's essay in this Handbook.

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## 22

# BYZANTIUM IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

## The Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Hagios Froumentios c. 1929

*Mikael Muehlbauer*

Between 1927 and 1929, the Greek community in Ethiopia constructed a small Orthodox cathedral, dedicated to the fourth-century saint Frumentius of Tyre (BHG 2157, Ἅγιος Φρουμέντιος, *Hagios Froumentios*, also referred to as Abba Salama). The cathedral was built in the immigrant quarter, known today as *Piassa* ([the] Piazza), of the new capital of the Ethiopian Empire: Addis Ababa (Figure 22.1).<sup>1</sup> As documented in a guidebook to Ethiopia, published by a resident Greek just prior to the Italian invasion, the cathedral plot was gradually purchased between 1918 and 1923 on the initiative of Dr Jakovos Zervos, a community leader and the court physician to the Ethiopian Emperor.<sup>2</sup> Although the church was only completed in 1929, it was consecrated as early as 1926.<sup>3</sup>

Although Greek-Ethiopians, like Armenian immigrants in Ethiopia, have been an integral part of the city's urban demographic since its 1889 founding, whose history is well-known, their historic Greek Orthodox Cathedral remains completely unstudied as a work of architecture.<sup>4</sup> As I will show here, the design of this church encapsulates the Neo-Byzantine worldview of Greek immigrants in Ethiopia's early-twentieth-century empire. I suggest that the architecture of the cathedral explicitly cites late antique/early Byzantine architecture, particularly the limestone churches of pre-Islamic Syria-Palestine, as well as incorporating subtler evocations of Ethiopia's historic past. This architectural citation of early Byzantine churches, I understand as a reference to the role of Byzantium in the conversion of ancient Ethiopia (Aksum) to Christianity in the fourth century by St Frumentius of Tyre, to whom the church is dedicated. By building the church in a manner reminiscent of early Byzantine churches in Syria, the Greek Orthodox community in Addis Ababa presented itself as heirs to fourth-century Byzantium. The Ethiopian Empire presented itself as a divinely legitimised continuation of the ancient Aksumite Empire. Greek migrants invoked the role of Byzantium in Aksum's conversion, thus grounding this diaspora parish in the history and ideology of their adoptive home.<sup>5</sup>

### The Greek Diaspora in Ethiopia

The Empire of Ethiopia (1270–1974) in the Horn of Africa was, like the Crimean Peninsula and Alexandria, a locale long embedded into Greek national consciousness. Though, by



*Figure 22.1* Hagios Froumentios, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, west end and transept, 1929, photograph. © Photographed by the author.

and large, few Greek traders and artisans settled there until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Empire's late antique predecessor, Aksum, was closely linked with Byzantium. Byzantine traders en-route to India regularly passed through the Empire's international port of Adulis, and Aksum's coins often bore Greek inscriptions.<sup>6</sup> Monumental epigraphy commissioned by the Aksumites often included Greek to be read by foreigners.<sup>7</sup> It was a Greek-speaking priest in training from Tyre, now Lebanon, called St Frumentius, who allegedly converted the Aksumite king, Ezana (r. 320–60), to Christianity and became the Empire's first bishop.<sup>8</sup> In the sixth century, relations between the Byzantine Empire and the Aksumites reached their apex when they jointly invaded Arabia – a saga famously recounted by Procopius.<sup>9</sup> This story was so well known to Enlightenment era Europeans, that when Scottish explorer James Bruce (1730–94) visited Ethiopia in the eighteenth century (1769–72), he brought a Cypriot guide in expectation of numerous Greek speakers there.<sup>10</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, as part of the general push towards state building and “modernisation” initiated by Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889–1913), Greek migrants seeking overseas opportunities trickled into Ethiopia, with the majority finding work as artisans or petty restaurateurs in the burgeoning capital city of Addis Ababa.<sup>11</sup> Although, historically, Greek migrants to Ethiopia were too scattered and few to form a parish, by 1921 their population in the capital had swelled to approximately 700 persons and the community required a place of worship.<sup>12</sup> Although highland Ethiopians are, by and large, Orthodox Christian in their own right, Ethiopian Christianity is Miaphysite (understands Jesus to have one united nature that is both flesh and spirit) and thereby incompatible with the beliefs of Chalcedonian Greeks.

In 1908, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria proclaimed the formation of a diocese of Aksum to serve Greek Ethiopians.<sup>13</sup> Although the cathedral was based in Addis Ababa, where the majority of Greek immigrants lived, Aksum was the ancient capital, and a natural point of reference for Ethiopia's longstanding connections, both real and perceived, to Byzantium. This worldview is evidenced in an official account of the diocese's inception written by Demetrios Kallimachos (1879–1963), an advisor to the Greek patriarch. He begins with a long preamble that situates the Chalcedonian Orthodox church within Ethiopia. According to Kallimachos, the establishment of a diocese of Aksum was not a new development, but a continuation of Byzantine precedent. Frumentius of Tyre, the first bishop of Aksum is recast as an agent of Alexandrian Patriarch Anastasias the Great (296–373), instead of the shipwrecked traveller recounted in classical sources.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the non-Chalcedonian Coptic Church, of which Ethiopian Orthodoxy was then a part, is declared “the Greek Orthodox Church of St Mark”, an irredentist statement paralleling the then-popular *Megali Idea* (Great Idea) which envisioned the newly founded Modern Greek state and kingdom as encompassing the territories of the old Byzantine Empire, especially Asia Minor.<sup>15</sup> The metropolitan cathedral of Aksum in Addis Ababa was soon consecrated in honour of St Frumentius, the Byzantine agent responsible for Aksum's conversion, making this diasporic diocese integral to Byzantium's modern legacy.

The cathedral of Aksum in Addis Ababa, as I will show, mirrors this worldview through its architecture. The designers of the church made architectural reference to the life and times of St Frumentius to integrate the Greek immigrant community into Ethiopia's national history, vis-à-vis Byzantium. Frumentius' identity, a Greek speaker from the late Roman Levant, is recast explicitly through the revival of Byzantine forms from Syria-Palestine. Thus, together with broader references to fourth-century Byzantium and subtler nods to Ethiopian architecture, the fabric of the cathedral made manifest the ancient roots of this new diocese.

### **The Cathedral of Hagios Froumentios**

The church occupies a gated courtyard area, which is raised above the street level. Immediately south of the church is the parish office, with a freestanding belfry on the far west of the precinct. The cathedral itself is cruciform and gabled, built of local, lightly rusticated basalt ashlar with a corrugated tin roof.<sup>16</sup> The sombre colour of the masonry and the heavy horizontal articulation of the cornices project a monumentality that belies the church's diminutive scale. The single-vessel nave is bisected with short, single-bay transept arms, forming a cruciform *naos* which terminates in a semi-circular apse conch. Each of the three façades has a portal, with small porches on the transept arms and a double door on the west end. The projecting pedimental porches are barrel vaulted with columns and cross-monogrammed crocket capitals. The church occupies a single story, though in the nave, a partial wall forms a western narthex from which a transverse gallery may be accessed. The church is well-lit. A triangle of arched lancets illuminates the west end, while the nave and apse are each opened with three evenly spaced windows per side. Window openings are outlined with fillet mouldings and torus mouldings on the cornice. Porthole oculi pierce the apexes of the transept and apse, which, in the latter location, incorporates on its frame a radial inscription that reads ΟΙΚΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ (*House of God*, indicating the altar within) and E.O.K. (initials identifying the diocese as Greek Orthodox [lit. Greek Orthodox Community]).



Figure 22.2 Hagios Froumentios, naos elevation, photograph. © Photographed by the author.

The monument rises from three heavily chamfered courses at the base of the wall; another powerful horizontal accent is added by the massive cornice running below the windows and intersecting the portals.

The dark basalt skin of the cathedral contrasts with Hagios Froumentios' bright and spacious interior (Figure 22.2). An open, centralised space, the naos is flanked with wooden *kathismata* (stalls), while the short transept arms contain the *prothesis* and *diakonikon*, though the loft on the west end is also used as a storage space. The east arm, containing the altar and apse, is enclosed with a wooden *iconostasis* elevated over a two-step bema. The decoration is understated. Hung icons line the walls of the church, while wooden angle supports frame the naos and provide visual support for the wood and plaster ceiling formed as a shallow groin vault. Despite invasive overpainting, the church bears remnants of rich murals. Figurative images are concentrated in the apse, including the conch and triumphal arch spandrels, though the vault is also blanketed with a starry sky. The conch contains an example of late Byzantine iconography (Figure 22.2) known as the *Panagia Platytera*, that is, the Theotokos in the firmament of heaven bearing a *tondo* of a bust-length Christ. This image is framed by putti and clouds on the spandrels, and it is crowned with angels blowing the trumpets of judgement. Smaller-scale murals (Figure 22.3) order the interior into registers and frame other figurative murals that have since been painted over.

Although the church was clearly designed with Byzantine-rite worship in mind, the architecture is atypical in its diaspora context. Understated and small, Hagios Froumentios's silhouette is lost within the early-twentieth-century imperial cityscape of Addis Ababa. This stands in sharp contrast to those Greek Orthodox churches erected in other African contexts, such as the large and conspicuous cross-domed Orthodox church of the Annunciation in Lubumbashi (Elizabethville), in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Belgian Congo), built in 1956 for a once substantial Greek community (Figure 22.4).<sup>17</sup> There we



*Figure 22.3* Hagios Froumentios, mural detail, photograph. © Photographed by the author.



*Figure 22.4* Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation, Lubumbashi (Elizabethville), Democratic Republic of the Congo (Belgian Congo), 1956, photograph. © Patrick Meinhardt/AFP via Getty Images, generously paid for by a subvention from the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University.



find an unassimilated and domineering homage to Greek Orthodoxy and the Byzantine legacy. The church in Lubumbashi is a large, cross-domed basilica, and an unabashed pastiche of Greek middle Byzantine architecture, both in its fabric and articulation. A clear homage to the so-called Greek School of middle Byzantine architecture, the church at Lubumbashi accommodates a squared ashlar skin, broken up into neat registers with brick sawtooth bands, as well as screens of white faux spolia columns and jambs to accentuate the windows and porches.<sup>18</sup> Unlike in Ethiopia, where Greeks tried their best to integrate into an independent African empire that was part of the Byzantine legacy, in Lubumbashi Greeks were the beneficiary of a brutal racial caste system where Europeans dominated the segregated cityscape.<sup>19</sup>

The cathedral of Hagios Froumentios in Addis Ababa, by contrast, is a study in immigrant assimilation and cultural accommodation. It was no Athenian transplant, though it did reference Byzantium in its own ideologically charged way. The exterior of the church, with its grey, ashlar skin and prominent gables is strongly reminiscent of early churches in Syria (Figure 22.5).<sup>20</sup> Unlike the recessed brick, or banded masonry-brick constructions of Byzantium's Anatolian and Balkan territories, the early churches of Syria were differentiated by their limestone fabrics and decorative use of deeply undercut mouldings.<sup>21</sup> As in Syria, we find at Hagios Froumentios both an ashlar masonry fabric and a shared use of deeply profiled mouldings to articulate the exterior and a heavy cornice below the window line. These features, together with the non-standard use of pedimented porches and foliate capitals, are found at both Hagios Froumentios (Figure 22.1, here manifested as crockets) and ancient Syrian monastery churches like Deir Sim'an (Figure 22.5).<sup>22</sup> All of these



*Figure 22.5* Deir Sim'an (Monastery of Simon), Syria, Late Antique, south elevation, photograph by Frank Kidner. © Frank Kidner photographs, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC, PHBZ024.2016.5829, CC BY-SA 4.0.



similarities suggest that Syrian limestone churches were the inspiration for the architecture of the Greek Orthodox cathedral in Addis Ababa.

As discussed earlier, the new Greek diocese of Aksum saw itself in continuity with Late Antiquity, with St Frumentius of Tyre as its patron saint. Given that the historical Frumentius was himself a product of the Byzantine Levant, it may be that the community intended to pay homage to his homeland by reviving the architecture of late antique Syria. Indeed, just as Ethiopia's Greek diocese was founded, photos of Byzantine Syria were first revealed to the world, thanks to the work of Howard Crosby Butler (1872–1922), a Princeton University archaeologist who undertook extensive surveys and excavations there.<sup>23</sup> His finds confounded expectations and were widely publicised.<sup>24</sup> For the Greeks of Ethiopia, whose patron saint was Frumentius, it would have been fitting to reimagine the built environment of his fourth-century, Syrian home for their new church.

The late antique revivalist style of the church also went beyond Syria. Its single-nave, cruciform shape and groin-vaulted ceiling are martyrion-like and not dissimilar to late Roman mausolea, such as the fifth-century church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki.<sup>25</sup> The painting programme in the interior is deliberately archaising. The starry sky on the vault evokes that of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (425–50) in Ravenna, while the ornamental framing bands that break up the wall surfaces resemble the “jewelled style” of the Justinianic mosaics in the Hagia Sophia, among other sixth-century monuments (Figure 22.3).<sup>26</sup> Like the churches of Byzantine Syria, these early Byzantine monuments were well known at that time and for the most part accessible via print media.<sup>27</sup> In the context of the cathedral's founding, these architectural references to Byzantium's late antique and, more specifically, Levantine past were deliberate. The new Greek diocese grounded itself in Ethiopia through ancient precedent. The modern Ethiopian Empire of the early twentieth century was ancient Aksum, just as the Greeks of Addis Ababa were the heirs of St Frumentius of Tyre.<sup>28</sup>

That is not to say that the architecture of Hagios Froumentios was a pure pastiche of Late Antique buildings. Cruciform in conception and laid on a four-tiered foundation, the church's form also subtly recalls the medieval (thirteenth century?) Ethiopian Church of St George at Lalibela, which was a well-known architectural marvel and itself an aisleless cruciform church set atop a stepped plinth.<sup>29</sup> In terms of materials, the use of rusticated, basalt ashlar masonry appears somewhat Italianate and resembles other projects from early-twentieth-century Addis Ababa. The fabric of Hagios Froumentios is especially similar to the Ethiopian imperial church of St George (Figure 22.6), built between 1896 and 1911, an otherwise centrally planned octagonal church whose Neo-Baroque construction involved Greek masons and was spearheaded by a Greek architect, Panayotis Myriallis.<sup>30</sup> Although less prominent than the early Byzantine design schemes employed at Hagios Froumentios, the subtle incorporation of medieval Ethiopian forms and Neo-Baroque imperial materials into this church served to fully ground its diaspora community in their adoptive home. This, together with its small size, allowed the cathedral to fully blend into the burgeoning cityscape, a near-perfect metaphor for the urban parishioners for whom the church was built.

Today, the Greek Orthodox community of Addis Ababa is dwindling, with emigration common.<sup>31</sup> A far cry from the Neo-Byzantine mythology and pomp of its founding, the church of Hagios Froumentios and its immigrant parish is now a largely forgotten chapter of modern Orthodox history. As I have shown here, however, the cathedral's architecture preserves an important chapter of the Greek diasporic experience. The church, which recreates the built environment of Late Antiquity, references the ancient place of the Greeks in



Figure 22.6 Cathedral of St George, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, west elevation, 1896–1911, photograph. © Public Domain: Ondřej Žváček via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

the Horn of Africa, as well as their adoptive home in Ethiopia. Although the Greek presence in Ethiopia has lost its import, we find fossilised at Hagios Froumentios an early-twentieth-century snapshot of Byzantium in Addis Ababa.

### Notes

- 1 On the founding of this city, see [Garretson 2000](#).
- 2 [Zervos 1936](#): 461–2.
- 3 [Zervos 1936](#): 462. Indeed, this is likely the point of reference for the 1927 date provided in the Amharic-language dedicatory inscription on the north portal lintel of the church. It is unknown why the construction date is often published as 1935, see [Natsoulas and Wion 2005](#): 883.
- 4 Among the large body of works on Greek immigrants in Ethiopia, see especially [Natsoulas 1977](#); [Ghanotakis 1979](#).
- 5 [Hirsch and Fauvelle 2001](#).
- 6 [Indicopleustes 2010](#).
- 7 [Bernand 2000](#).
- 8 On the literary sources of this figure, see [Marassini 2014](#): 53–60.
- 9 [Procopius 2014](#): 49–53.
- 10 [Fouyas 1971](#). Though few and far between, prior to the nineteenth century, Greek immigrants found work where they could, often in fields eschewed by locals, including as blacksmiths and jewellers, although some attained high rank as advisors to the royal court. See [Natsoulas 1996](#).
- 11 [Natsoulas 1977](#): 137–40; [Natsoulas 1989](#): 236, 239–42.
- 12 [Ghanotakis 1979](#): 100. From 1910 to 1927, a Greek diaspora “community centre” by the same dedication, served as a temporary church, [Ghanotakis 1979](#): 45, 59.
- 13 [Methodios 1971](#) Abridged and translated after [Kallimachos 1909](#).

- 14 Methodios 1971: 152–4.
- 15 Methodios 1971: 151. On the *Megali Idea* and Greek irredentism, see Zelepos 2002.
- 16 This assumption is based on those mentioned in the building contract (1910) of the similarly designed, and roughly contemporary, Ethiopian imperial Church of St George. Methodios 1971: 19.
- 17 On the Greek diaspora in Lubumbashi, see O'bweng-Okwess 2013.
- 18 Bouras 2018: 127–296.
- 19 Dibwe Dia Mwembu 2009.
- 20 Butler and Smith 1929.
- 21 Clauss-Balty 2022.
- 22 Butler 1920: 6, 273–4.
- 23 Johnson 1986: 173–4.
- 24 See, for example, Butler 1903.
- 25 Johnson 2009.
- 26 Swift and Alwis 2010. On the Justinianic mosaics of the Hagia Sophia, see Teteriatnikov 2017.
- 27 See, for example, Woltmann and Woermann 1880.
- 28 Hirsch and Fauvelle 2001.
- 29 Muehlbauer 2021. See early publications on the church in Zervos 1936: 382–3; Raffray 1882.
- 30 Methodios 1971. Greek masons in Addis Ababa numbered some 50 persons by 1907. Ghanotakis 1979: 42–3.
- 31 Natsoulas and Wion 2005: 883.

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## PART V

### Art



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## VISUAL PARADIGMS

## The Form and Shape of Byzantine Reception

*Glenn Peers*

## Out-of-Place Paradigms

Byzantium is ultimately a dream and a fantasy. It no longer exists except in the imaginations of us moderns. In that way, it is a kind of projecting screen or mirror. Its visual and material qualities have been the primary means by which Byzantine paradigms have arrived for us. The dreamy, transporting interior of San Marco, Venice (consecrated 1094), for example, or the Orientalised expanse of Hagia Sophia's othering world – both can stand for a time past but not gone, still available for us to become more authentic, to draw closer to God, to make better versions of ourselves in the face of the alienation and soullessness of the modern world or dread of the Anthropocene.

In these ways, Byzantium has been a fractured reflection, or to use the metaphor of the influential Byzantinist Cyril Mango (1928–2021), a “distorting mirror” (the title of his inaugural lecture at Oxford University in 1974). It seems to hold true for us, but we have consistently turned it to our purposes. And in the process, we've largely left it behind. But that doesn't make the historical processes less compelling or necessary to discuss. Indeed, the form and shape of Byzantine reception contain many striking insights into our conditions, even as it leaves behind the history of those peoples and cultures that comprised Byzantium.

Byzantium, as variously conceived and reconceived, continues to infiltrate, change, trouble and enrich (and more) the modern world. Its gravitational pull of exoticism, aestheticism and spirituality has exerted great force over the last 200 years or so. Too much so for the scope of this chapter, since here we can only treat some select themes and highlights. The extent of Byzantium's reach into modern cultures is still being understood and written. The work of identifying sources for the modern use of mosaic or icon-like poses in painting has accelerated in recent years. The ideological or conceptual underpinnings for these material or aesthetic choices have not been analysed as deeply as they might, but then Byzantine Studies, like its cousin discipline Byzantinism, is still performing important publishing and collecting basic materials.

Medievalism, within which Byzantinism plays a somewhat marginal role, has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years, as we attempt to comprehend better how our own biases and assumptions have determined the questions we ask of the past. According



to medievalist Richard Utz (b. 1961), medievalism is “the ongoing and broad cultural phenomenon of reinventing, remembering, recreating, and reenacting the Middle Ages”.<sup>1</sup> Byzantinism is a related, but subsidiary phenomenon, which must contend with negative connotations and political manipulations.<sup>2</sup> It is a contentious legacy, of course. And it contains practices, beliefs, texts and performances that are post-Byzantine, all of which are also



*Figure 23.1* Constantine Simonides (ed.), *St Matthew, Frontispiece to Facsimiles of Certain Portions of the Gospel of St Matthew*, London: Trübner and Co., 1861. © Public Domain.

affected by impulses and desires based on imaginative and conceptual ideas of Byzantium outside its historical category.<sup>3</sup>

Illuminating of this thread of Byzantine fantasy that runs through modernism is the extravagant figure of manuscript- and icon-dealer, as well as forger, Constantine Simonides (1820–67), whose relatively short life was filled with swashbuckling palaeography: if this phrase can be applied to anyone, it is Simonides.<sup>4</sup> We can no longer be quite sure if we have fully escaped his inventions, since he was one of the greatest forgers of Hellenism, ever. But some of his claims for Byzantium are clearly false, like his “discovery” of Byzantine texts describing telescopes and colour photography; all of them seem motivated by personal ambitions, of course, but there is also the creation of a Byzantine culture, and by extension modern Greek culture, to which western culture was indebted at a fundamental level. Playing with art-historical traditions, Simonides also invented (in his version, “came upon” on Mount Athos) texts written by the late Byzantine painter Manuel Panselinos (late thirteenth century), one of the acknowledged, authentic masters of the period. He claimed as visual proof a painting, which he included as an engraved frontispiece to his published “edition”, done by Panselinos. In his rendering, Simonides produced a version of a Byzantine paradigm with no discernible relation to the style of the painter or to the period altogether (Figure 23.1).

It is a fantasy created retroactively to prove formally that the Byzantine style not only anticipated the Italian Renaissance of Giotto and Raphael, but also that it did so in a direct, unbroken chain of visual transmission from antiquity. It is an extraordinary version of cultural history, spanning at least two millennia, to arrive at a modern moment where Byzantium is a perfect tradition, an admirable model and an energetic innovator – all largely unacknowledged in the West, but awaiting “discovery”. This case is also extreme, but not out of keeping with contemporary (legal) efforts to rewrite and resituate Byzantine culture as a European culture, bridging antiquity and the modern world. It also shows how visual models – in the fake painting behind Simonides’s leading engraving – make an argument synoptically, wordlessly, for a Byzantine world scaffolding our own to help us realise the world had already arrived.

### **Art Cannot Be Captured by History**

Simonides’s engraving is art history, even if it escapes, distorts or subverts that history, and it also reveals the ways art is able to create endless stories. Art cannot be captured or consumed, to paraphrase the American art historian David Joselit.<sup>5</sup> One could tell the history of the evangelist portrait faked by Simonides, but it would have to take account of the object that he was seen copying on Mount Athos, the manuscript illumination of the evangelist that allowed his extension of that endless series of sacred Byzantine portraiture to endure and persist. And it would have to make the case retroactively for the series pre-existing and pre-determining the history of Byzantine and Western art. This form of art history is wobbly, distorted, but certain ontological qualities of art as objects already allow art to escape history generally. Art is a durational phenomenon, made in a moment and place, but continuing into an unknown time, location, and context almost perpetually. In this way, art can endlessly create experience for humans, but also narratives and histories. It is here, present before us, but it is also something else and elsewhere. It is excessive and other. And so, Byzantine art exists on these registers, as history but also as a paradigm of something other than history.

One of the great insights into Byzantine art by the French philosopher Marie-France Mondzain (b. 1944) is the direction of the gaze in this visual tradition.<sup>6</sup> Most emphatically in icons of Christ, that determining gaze is not our own, but that of Christ, looking out steadfastly, almost eternally, at his creation. According to Joselit,

Mondzain's analysis of icons offers just one example of a vast category of art's incarnation of alterity: its capacity to make divine beings manifest and thus subject them to human manipulation and desire ... But as in Byzantium, where the alterity of art was tied to the alterity of the Christian god, in modern times there is a specific form of difference that art is privileged to carry: nation, ethnicity, race, and personal markers of identity, such as gender and sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

The alterity of Byzantine art is undeniable in my opinion: this art has always compelled human attention, imagination, aspirations (and more) in an economy of the gaze, to use Mondzain's formulation, within which that art is always primary and the human secondary. But it is also transhistorical in the sense that it has carried and continues to carry just the markers that Joselit claims for modern art: confessional, national, linguistic, ethnic, racial, gender and sexual. Byzantine art continues into the present as a durational, experiential, generative set of paradigms. It is in and out of history, and therefore its reception is ever eluding explanation.

### Danish Byzantinism

Per Kirkeby (1938–2018) was a highly accomplished Danish artist (poet, painter, writer, sculptor) with a strong sense not only of the physical world (he studied natural history when at university), but also of the past enduring into the present (he penned a book on El Greco, for example). These perspectives informed his art and writing in fundamental ways, and they crystallised in an exhibition in 2012 at the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens: *Per Kirkeby: A Creative Dialogue with Byzantine Art*.<sup>8</sup> The exhibition was held in a subterranean level of the museum, and it comprised seven selections from the permanent collection and 29 paintings and other works done by Kirkeby, hung together with little museological intervention – all the works were treated equally, hung with even spacing and at conventional height, just like a conventional White Cube arrangement (though the walls were not white). In that way, it could be said, justifiably, that a creative dialogue was made possible among the works and visitors.

Kirkeby's ostensible reception of Byzantine forms and ideas, and its working through in his own art, were bases for the dialogue, but the visitor had to assume a strong share in the dialogue. Kirkeby's titles gave some assistance for understanding the connections drawn in the show, such as in the oil painting *Constantinopel* (1978). This work is an abstract, atmospheric rendering of structure and element, as I interpret the solid verticals and the aqueous, shifting forms moving in and around those solids. The play of concrete and stable, and kinetic and reactive, makes for a vibrant, compelling work to which the title helps to bring specificity of place – Istanbul's particular meeting of land and water – into interpretation. Likewise, the scale is striking (122 × 122 cm); too large to be a sketch made in place, the painting is a mediated, processed rendering of the experience of mood and environment. But it is also one of an unlimited number of views of the city done over the centuries, however fine the work can be said to be.

It is in the pairing around subject matter where we can perhaps examine the quality and means of artistic reception on the part of this modern Danish painter – as ratified, too, it must be said, by a state museum devoted to that historical period. The curators chose a seventeenth-century icon of the *Anastasis*, called *Descent into Hell* in the catalogue, to converse with Kirkeby's own version, *Anastasis* (*sic*) done in 1997.

Kirkeby's picture in scale strongly dramatises the event (200 × 180 cm, oil on canvas), while the post-Byzantine icon is restrained and intimate in its rendering of Christ's freeing of Adam and Eve from the clutches of Hades in the time between crucifixion and resurrection (40 × 27 cm) (Figure 23.2). Moreover, the colours are intensely kinetic again in Kirkeby's version of that signal moment of deliverance in Orthodox belief. Red, burning bright, flares the centre ground of the painting, while the periphery is mostly cooler, reds and blacks being edged out by yellow-ochre. In some ways, the gold enframing of central



Figure 23.2 Per Kirkeby (1938–2018), *Anastasis*, 1997, Oil on Canvas, 200 × 180 cm, Trapholt Museum of Modern Art and Design, Trapholt, Denmark. © Trapholt Museum of Modern Art and Design, Trapholt, Denmark.

iconic actions is reminiscent of icons' organisational principles, but it is also evocative here of sunlight piercing cloud and darkness, or a bold dusk, or better, dawn, given the symbolism of the event. In other words, the painting strongly suggests its filiation to the icon of the Anastasis, even while its visual strategies diverge. In what form or shape is Kirkeby's painting Byzantine? What is the nature of the dialogue?

Kirkeby's iconographical fixations included rendering significant moments in the sacred history of Christianity. And he had travelled in Greece and Turkey and professed a strong attachment to the land and seascapes. He evidently felt a compulsion towards Byzantine culture connected to this Orthodox (and formerly Orthodox) region, though he stated explicitly that he did not have "any real art-historical knowledge of Byzantine imagery, architecture and icons". It was in the Chora Church in Istanbul (fourteenth century) that he "understood that [he] was allowed to 'abuse' the Byzantine pictures", to "use", and to "steal" and "abuse", as he put it.<sup>9</sup> And the abuse, one might say, took the form of excising the central figures of these narratives, for while he understood that Christ was a "still-active force" in our time, he could not be directly seen.<sup>10</sup> Mondzain's economy of the gaze would seem to have been bankrupt in this Byzantinism, but is it only the stare of Christ that constitutes the currency of the Byzantine visual economy over time? Kirkeby calls these visual elements from Byzantine culture "traces", and these traces are clearly not focused on the well-known iconic fixed gaze, but rather on what accumulates around it, the aura of effect and presence, the pictorial parallel of "the earth shaking beneath your feet".<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Kirkeby declared his allegiance to Byzantine iconoclasts and their (for him) resistance to revealing the body, especially that of the Lord; the body is impermanence. "The eye behind the gaze is the most important thing", he wrote.<sup>12</sup>

The powerful life of stone and ore is another way into this aspect of Byzantine reception, since Kirkeby also professed a strong interest in geology. In writing about Per Kirkeby's "mineral life", the art historian Richard Schiff begins with a quotation from Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher (1839–1914):

Thought is not necessarily connected with a brain ... Not only is thought in the organic world, but it develops there. Where there is a relationship, there is a thought, whether or not a brain is thinking it. We come upon our thoughts, discovering them in the world as much as inventing them in the imagination.<sup>13</sup>

This description of Kirkeby's working method, as well as a set of ruminations around a kind of vitalism running through the world and art, takes into account Kirkeby's capacious and idiosyncratic reception of Byzantine art. It is a generous appetite for the material remnants of Christian faith that has to turn away from it, almost, in order to find that culture's true subject (for him). That is, "the eye behind the gaze" is no longer discernible as such, but provisionally captured in abstraction, as another version of Byzantine art's sedimenting in modern culture. That geological life of forms still reaches into our own.

It must be recognised, once again, that frequently Byzantine sedimentation is imaginatively misplaced. Kirkeby, too, fell into the Object-Out-of-Place art trap (one might say, with some exaggeration) with his idiosyncratic study of and explanations for Byzantine art. He wrote a book in 1995 on El Greco (1541–1614), for example, in which he ranged quite far beyond what we know of the life and work of that Cretan émigré painter.<sup>14</sup> Most tellingly for this partial exploration of the journeys of Byzantinism, he described the Byzantine background to certain medieval paintings in Danish churches, such as the *Hodegetria* ("she who shows the

way”), a well-established Byzantine iconographic type, in the church at Måløv (founded in the twelfth century), northwest of Copenhagen. The migration of forms, such as this popular and powerful iconography of the Virgin and Child, is a well-established phenomenon. But Kirkeby also imagined a painter who had travelled to Denmark from the formerly Byzantine world, like El Greco’s journey from Crete to Spain. In the sixteenth-century frescoes at the Rynkeby Church on the island of Funen in central Denmark, Kirkeby saw Byzantium in the music-playing angels. This insight takes special pleading since the formal connections between those angels and their counterparts in late or post-Byzantine paintings are weak. But for Kirkeby’s own self-explanation of the spiritual valences of his painting, a story of a Danish Byzantinism was deeply desirable and realised. However attenuated the branches of the family tree were, Kirkeby could trace his spiritual, artistic heritage back to Byzantium.

### Political Byzantinism

Contemporary African American artists have recently come to mobilise Byzantinism for the impact that culture’s visual forms bring to contemporary assertions of social and political critique. Little in Byzantine art that survives can be said to reveal overt criticism of existing figures and structures of power.<sup>15</sup> Yet the forms of Byzantine art have continued through diverse cultures, long after the period ended, and have generated new lives. As stated above, as a category of things in the world, art endures, and although it is made and experienced in a specific time and place, it goes on creating context and meaning, even as it carries its original time and meaning. Byzantine art carries forward special conditions and significances, all tied up in many possible contingencies. That surplus can enable unexpected signals to arrive, as in early modern Denmark or the contemporary US.

Titus Kaphar (b. 1976) is one of the most accomplished and well-known artists working in the US today. His work has consistently spoken to present-day concerns around race and systemic inequality in that country, and it has done so powerfully and persuasively. An important component of his aesthetic is pulling historical forms and formats into his unmistakably contemporary presentations of power and presence. Kaphar has commented on these strategies, saying:

I think history is kind of like a sometimes visible, sometimes invisible armature on which the present is constructed. All history becomes interesting when we can see how the past affects our present...[T]he simple act of placing these contrasting gestures side by side reminds me that history doesn’t remain in the past.<sup>16</sup>

Kaphar (to my knowledge) has not spoken about the Byzantine background to his work generally, or to *The Jerome Project* (created mostly between 2014 and 2015) specifically, but visual analysis can reveal how Byzantinism again escapes from its historical specificity to enlarge the possibilities of meaning and experience in a “present”.

*The Jerome Project* comprises a series of portraits of African American men. Each man, named Jerome and subjected to incarceration, is shown facing forward, looking directly at the viewer. They are depicted in what one might call soft realism, that is, with sufficiently full attention to detail that individuality emerges, but without the sharp focus of photographic renderings – the painterliness of the portraits is clear. The photographic substrate is evident, however, in the presentation of the men, in the sense of recalling “mugshots”, photographs taken when these men would have entered the legal system’s archival homogeneity.



And yet, Byzantinising valences are also discernible. The rectangular format, though closer to the form of an escutcheon with rounded indents at the vertical corners, recalls not only icons, but also one of the icons' own ancestors: mummy or Fayum portraits, from the first century CE onwards, named after the site in Egypt where most extant examples have been found. In that sense, the Jerome portraits evoke death, given that both saints on icons and figures on Fayum panels had already died. They also ascribe dignity and value to their subjects, in the pacific, watchful expressions they bear, and even in some examples, where the man's head might be cocked slightly to one side, each carries themselves and presents with poise and self-possession. One doesn't need to possess the art-historical knowledge to perform this analysis, but the formal vocabulary employed by Kaphar mobilises the possibilities inherent in it.

If the portrait conditions recall both the humiliation of being absorbed by state apparatuses and the high honour of worshipped individuals, the framing strategies amplify these contradictory meanings. In the first place, the gold background to the portraits is immediately legible as a habitual Byzantine surround for venerable figures. It is quintessentially Byzantine, one would probably say. The cropped and focused portraits are strongly analogous to icons, and the gold ground seals it. The Jeromes are individuals, but they are also a series; men by all appearances, but also exalted to a timeless place of gold, a sign for paradise; their gaze is the gaze of Christ (see Mondzain), and it captures and keeps us.

And yet, and yet, Kaphar performs another complicating act, in the dipping of the finished portraits into tar. The black, viscous substance hardens and beards the panels, and leaves an uneven field of visual opacity over the men's faces. It covers the mouths of the men, sometimes more, taking away their power of verbal communication. Their eyes, consequently, do their insistent, extratemporal communicating, like so many icons of Christ and of the saints. The tar also recalls, moreover, extra-judicial punishments and executions (lynchings) enacted on African American men and women throughout American history. The means of their martyrdom and silencing are thereby demonstrated.<sup>17</sup>

Byzantinism, in other words, provides a visual language for expressing the dignity of human subjects and for re-placing them in a timeless present, which might be heaven. It also activates a transitive, relational intensity between depicted and viewing subjects. The economy of the gaze here deploys a different currency, but the transactional exchange is directly comparable. The icon contains the controlling gaze. Turning from it raises ethical risks, at least shame, but perhaps at most accepting complicity in deep, ongoing injustices.

The paintings in this series are often hung, to my understanding, in close proximity to each other, as a serried rank of saints and martyrs. Other painters mobilising Byzantinism for the purpose of political critique can opt for different display strategies and divergent valences for that expressive visual vocabulary. Kehinde Wiley's (b. 1977) *Portrait of Malak Lunsford* (2019) was included in the exhibition *Icons: Worship and Adoration* at the Kunsthalle Bremen–Der Kunstverein in Bremen (19 October 2019–1 March 2020) (Figure 23.3).<sup>18</sup>

In some ways, this inclusion could be surprising: the half-length portrait shows a young African American man presented in social terms very like early modern portraits of high-ranking men; it has a secular underpinning. However, stylised tendrils and flowers snake across the picture plane, granting decorative pleasure and recalling medieval symbolism attached to flowers and portraits, particularly those of holy figures. And the gold background and gabled frame do indeed recall medieval and early modern devotional panels. In the exhibition, the preceding room was occupied by a Masolino *Madonna with Child* (1423), which was strikingly fronted by a prie-dieu (prayer desk). The religious aura of the Wiley





*Figure 23.3* Installation view of Kehinde Wiley (1977–), *Portrait of Malak Lunsford*, 2019, 22 carat gold leaf and oil on wood panel, 101.6 × 60.96 cm; and Katharina Fritsch (1956–), *Madonna*, 1987, duroplast, 170 × 40 × 34 cm; from *Icons: Worship and Adoration*, Kunsthalle Bremen–Der Kunstverein in Bremen, 19 October 2019–1 March 2020, photograph by Kunsthalle Bremen – Marcus Meyer – ARTOTHEK. © Kehinde Wiley. © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

portrait was pre-established then, and the intense mauve room designed for its display, along with the presence of one of the few benches in the exhibition, lent a chapel-like environment for viewing and experiencing the painting.

Formatting and materials, as well as (or perhaps principally) the transitive relationship of viewer and viewed (and the ambiguity of which is which), are primary elements cited and deployed by these important contemporary painters. Their Byzantinising is recognised as such, too, since Wiley’s inclusion in a show on icons state his work’s connections to such traditions, art historical, religious, and cultural. However well an artist understands Byzantine forms in their historical specificity, the forms will keep migrating, transforming what they reach, as long as our visual capacities continue to reach over and beyond time. To quote the philosopher of science Bruno Latour (1947–2022): “In all our activities, what we fabricate goes beyond us”.<sup>19</sup>

### Fauve Byzantinism

If it can be said that Per Kirkeby extracted from Byzantine art his highly personal interpretations of its forms and meanings, he was also largely unconstrained in his imagining figures

and stories that brought that past into alignment with his present aspirations and creativity. There is no evidence of a Byzantine painter in sixteenth-century Denmark (though it is not on its own terms impossible). That is one form of Byzantinism, elastic and inventive, and in Kirkeby's case, very successful in creating compelling art. The paintings of Kehinde Wiley and Titus Kaphar are differently Byzantinising, in their canny, skilled manipulations of Byzantine visual forms and conventions. In this way, they have been able to express powerful, complex issues around race and injustice in the US. Unlike Kirkeby's art, little overt spirituality infiltrates those forms and conventions. The paintings derive authority from religious art, but not content as such.

Henri Matisse (1869–1954) falls between these positions, it might be argued. Formally, as will be demonstrated, his paintings (especially of the first decades of the twentieth century) show strong stylistic affinities with Byzantine art. And arguments were being made during the artist's lifetime about the degree to which these paintings engaged spiritual and intellectual matters beyond their vibrant, active surfaces. Some contemporary commentators interpreted Matisse's work in terms not unrelated to (imagined) forms of Byzantine spirituality, namely his former son-in-law, Georges Duthuit (1891–1973) and Matthew Stewart Prichard (1865–1936), a wealthy former curator with a deep attachment to Byzantine art. Matisse's own position was never fully disclosed, if indeed he had one; in any case, he was not religious in a conventional sense, and metaphor and analogy are the artistic modes perhaps most appropriate to understanding his religious impulses. As the art historian Catherine Bock-Weiss writes, "Matisse acknowledged religious parallels, but, without this pressure to relate his art to religious experience, his concerns were habitually more materialist, secular, pragmatic".<sup>20</sup>

And yet the breakthroughs of some of Matisse's paintings from the first two decades of the twentieth century were lightning bolts for viewers like Prichard and Duthuit. One could excuse such commentators, with their spiritual, aesthetic searching, for finding in *The Conversation*, painted between 1908 and 1912, a radically new way of comprehending experience through reference to the past (Figure 23.4).

The canvas (177 × 217 cm) shows two figures facing one another, a pajamaed man on the left-hand side, and a robed woman on the right. They are set against a vibrant blue wall, containing a window looking out beyond a black balustrade to an unshadowed, verdant garden. Autobiographical elements are discernible, but so too are compositional elements derived from the long history of Christian iconography of the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. The tonal quality of the painting's colours, likewise, recalls the deeply saturated fields of colour in Byzantine mosaic and painting. In that sense, the compositional and colouristic qualities of the painting raise it above a simple representation of a bourgeois domestic interior, showing a conversation between husband and wife, to the level of icon, of encounter between angel and mother of God. This elevation occurs through the presence of the divine breaking into this closed world, revealed by the window's opening to splendour, and through the initiation of a new rapport among artist, model and viewer. Catherine Bock-Weiss says of it:

As an embodiment of rapport, it resembles the religious icon that makes present a sacred exchange between heaven and earth: the believing icon maker, the image itself, the imaged (God or saint), and the believing viewer ...In this view, an icon does not reproduce, it signifies; it does not describe, it designates an event. And, of course, all



Figure 23.4 Henri Matisse (1869–1954), *The Conversation*, 1908–12, oil on canvas, 177 × 217 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, photograph by Pavel Demidov, Konstantin Sinyavsky. © The State Hermitage Museum.

of this is accomplished with bright, shadowless colors; clear, flat shapes; sinuous lines; and compressed spatial elements that paradoxically bespeak immensity, rather than constriction.<sup>21</sup>

This sense of relation, of rapport, among things in the world goes to the heart of Matisse's understanding of his own project, and love is the underlying link, the energy producing relation. For seekers like Duthuit and Prichard, Byzantine art provided Matisse with the formal and material means to produce such profound innovations in art's role in society, to allow art to regain a central place in the reintegration of humanity's spiritual wellbeing, just as in Byzantium (they claimed).

It should be said that Matisse was an excellent student of Byzantine art. At the hands of Prichard, he came to know a great deal about coins, enamels and other Byzantine objects. Also, before the First World War, he had travelled to imperial Russia and been impressed by the newly restored icons, which “popped” dramatically now that the original colours had been revealed underneath centuries of smoke and oil, as well as overpainting. Prichard left testimony of some of his tutorial sessions with Matisse, this from June 1914: “To-day Matisse said that Byzantine expression and his have the same aim, and that he likes Byzantine coins without any reservation. He looks at them and seizes their meaning without any artistic interruption”.<sup>22</sup> One can see how such translations occurred for Matisse,



*Figure 23.5* Henri Matisse (1869–1954), *Le Rifain assis*, 1912, Oil On Canvas, 200.3 × 160.7 cm, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia. © 2023 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

in paintings like *Le Rifain assis* (Seated Riffian, 1912), where the frontal figure draws upon the enthroned figure of Christ; the derivation is largely linear and design focused, as opposed to colouristic, given the basis in close inspection of coins with Prichard ([Figure 23.5](#)).

And what this version of Byzantine gives Matisse might be a version of spiritual authority in that Oriental Other, but at the least it communicates, through these well-established visual tropes, a strong personality and presence, without having to provide gesture, emotion or attributes.<sup>23</sup>

### Utopian Byzantinism

Prichard was a strong influence on Matisse and his work, at least for a time – they grew apart after the War – and he was certainly a determining factor in the directions Duthuit's work took. For one thing, Prichard and Duthuit shared an idealised view of the Byzantine world, magnified through the Byzantine theme parks of Ravenna and Venice.<sup>24</sup> Idealised, but also emotionally available for them, as Prichard wrote:

I look at an object of Byzantine art with affection. As a student of art, I am pleased by its evocative character. The action which suggests Christianity under the guise of love and not of dogma appeals to me also. But there is no justification for me to possess it. Our action to-day must find other symbols, and we must remember that our psychology has changed ... We cannot react to Byzantine art as did the Byzantine. We feel the slight psychological insufficiency of its constitution, as well as our estrangement from its meaning. Art must always be modern.<sup>25</sup>

It's a statement of utopian attraction, both forbidding and distant, and proximate and sympathetic. Moreover, real committed action is stimulated by the Byzantine; it is a world that can bring about social change in the present, if this particular equilibrium of dogma-less love and modern art can be maintained. Prichard also, at the same time, distances himself from a simple historical or archaeological understanding of Byzantium. Byzantium is remote, distinct, but evocative, in its elusive incompleteness; it is available for selection and quotation, but it cannot be integrated into the modern. Thus, the particular Byzantinism of Matisse, one could say.

To stay with that French moment a little longer, a certain kind of idealism is surely evident in this description of Prichard and Duthuit, and their attempts to make Matisse their aesthetic vanguard for a new future. Prichard, in the end, wrote very little, but he was indeed very influential through his charismatic teaching and striking intellect. No less charismatic or intelligent (in my opinion – how can I judge, truly?), Georges Duthuit emerges through his many writings as one of the most idiosyncratic, but also still compelling thinkers about the Byzantine past and its place in the present.<sup>26</sup>

For Duthuit, Byzantium represented a singular historical moment of common purpose and unified action. Memorably, he called that culture a “spectator-less theatre”, and his imagining of church space as a socially integrated place of total cohesion, however appealing it might be, is without basis in the historical period. Religion provided the “glue” for this culture's cohesion, as he understood it. Christianity was a collectivity of love, without dogma or hierarchy, in his view, and significantly for this chapter, the art and architecture were the essential, necessary settings for such performances. Duthuit proposed a strong model for the reintegration of art and the social, and the rebalancing of culture involved the rejection of classical mimesis for the rich surrounds of Byzantine church spaces. The qualities of Byzantine art, as it was understood by these writers, were against classical restraint and all for the absorption of the viewer and art:

These characteristics would include a powerful disposition of light, an exhilarating deployment of spatial expansiveness, a content so general, so nondirective, as to allow maximum freedom of response from the viewer, and a concern for iconic “presence” over mimetic “representation”.<sup>27</sup>

In this way, the ethical and the aesthetic, distilled in this vision of the Byzantine, provided open-ended focus and purpose to an empty, rudderless modernism.

Duthuit knew Byzantine art very well, despite his lack of formal training, and his insights and programmatic readings are based on direct experience of the art and architecture. San Marco in Venice always seems to be the background and context for his writing about this culture's art. And Duthuit's work on the first great exhibition of Byzantine art in Paris in 1931 lent him a firsthand understanding of the "thingness" of this art. The relationship of the viewer to art strongly determines his understanding of presence as the essential role such art can fulfil.

This thread runs through much of Byzantine reception history. The iconic "thereness" of so much of Byzantine art undermines the sense of representation and replaces it with a relational presence, which is not unique to Byzantium, but still very marked in the extant monuments. One could say Kirkeby was attracted and repulsed by that presence, his Protestant heritage perhaps forcing him into an iconoclastic position, as he called it: rather than showing Christ, he presented the aura of his absence, the wake of presence. Likewise, in the political art of Wiley and Kaphar, Byzantinising elements gave dignity and authority to their otherwise frequently degraded subjects; Byzantium gave these artists vocabulary to speak power back into those men. Duthuit made these arguments for Byzantium as ideal social and aesthetic model earlier and was willing to carry them farther; his economy of gaze was total and encompassing, and fully absorbing of human, space and icon into a horizontal world including all these subjects.

### **American Byzantine-Subjects**

Duthuit was an excellent ambassador for the excess and presence of Byzantine art. His relationship with Matisse withered, and Prichard died in 1936, but Duthuit continued to write on subjects of vital importance to him. He stridently and publicly argued against the well-known and powerful figure, writer and statesman André Malraux (1901–76) to little evident effect, and he also made inroads into the post-War American scene with his editorial helming of the journal *Transition*, though it ran only six issues before terminating in 1950.<sup>28</sup> The journal had outsized influence, since it was very high quality and ran the most "of the moment" writing of the avant-garde outside of France in translation, some carried out by Samuel Beckett (1906–89), even if uncredited.<sup>29</sup> Artist Willem de Kooning (1904–97) recalled the impact of the journal into the 1970s, so it made a mark among important artists in New York at a crucial historical juncture, one can assert.<sup>30</sup>

Artists of the post-war period sampled cultures like the Byzantine to a greater or lesser extent. Some of de Kooning's greatest works had a Byzantine underpinning, but in the fuller mode of Duthuit's arguments for the social idealism and the roles of art in subject formation, the work of the contemporary artist Barnett Newman (1905–70) illumines particularly well some of the themes of this chapter.<sup>31</sup> Newman had the first issue of *Transition* from 1948 in his library at the time of his death, but he left no record of meeting or reading Duthuit. Indirect evidence exists that he was aware of some of Duthuit's arguments, even if we don't know for certain if he had read Duthuit's manifesto in the fifth issue on Byzantine art's possible role in the creation of a more just society. However, Duthuit did write an editorial in that first issue in which he proclaimed that the writers gathered were:

... united by a common will to be true to truth, and a common awareness of a new age already kicking in the womb. That age, they hold, will utter a simplification, an astonishing simplification: whereby science and divination, metaphysics, and the arts,



all the lusty incompatibles, will no longer seem apart or out of joint, but fused and re-minted into a wise wholeness. It is their aim, and the ambition of this paper, to recover somehow the virtue that has gone out of life: to unseal the spirit of festivity; to find again the adjustment, togetherness, at-one-ment of the tavern; to return to the sense of rapture.<sup>32</sup>

The keyword here is “at-one-ment”, a phrase apparently invented by Duthuit (it’s not clear if he was writing in English, or translated [or had translated] a text originally composed in French).

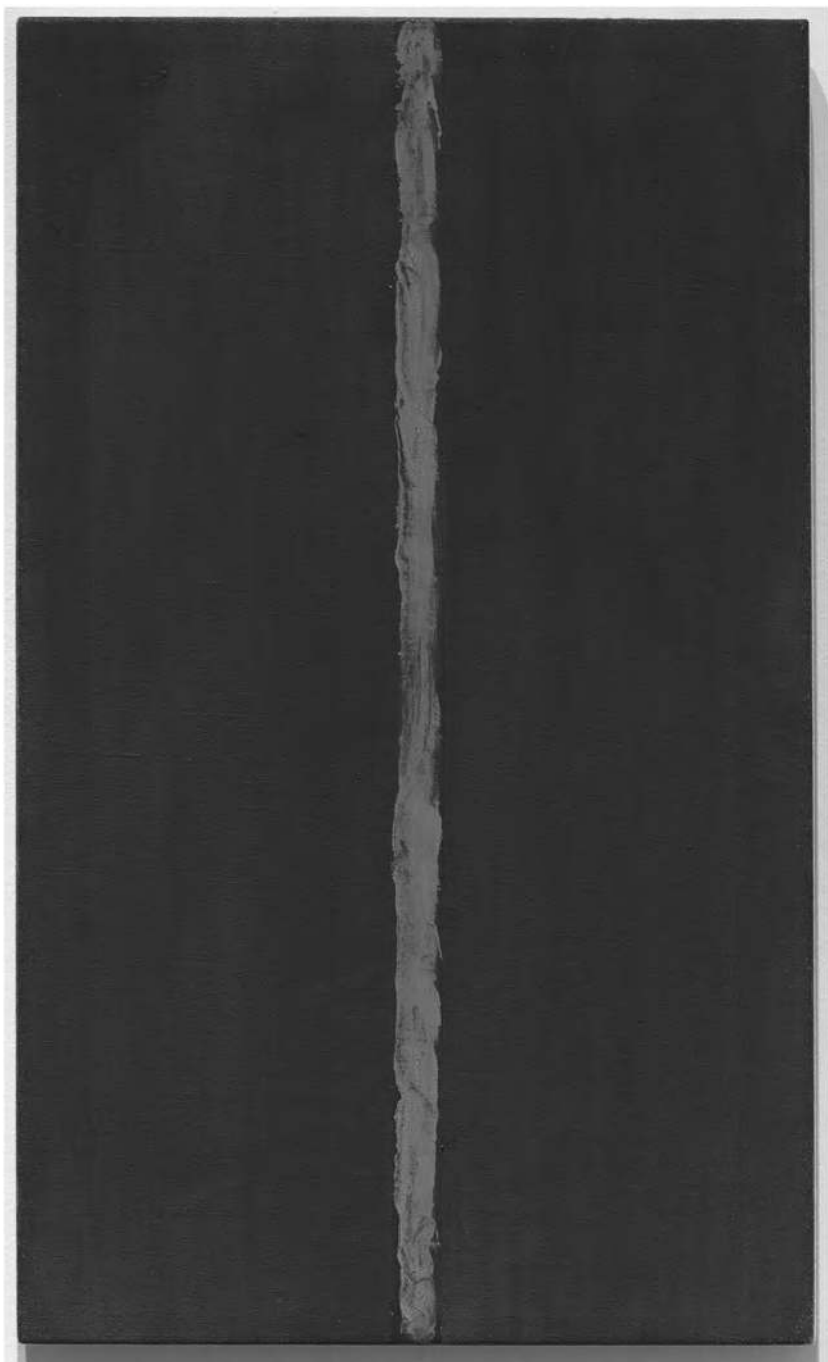
It’s an unusual formulation, eye- and attention-catching, and something apparently lodged in Newman’s mind. A capacious intellectual and a highly sociable person, Newman was also a committed anarchist with a strong sense of the necessity for cultural rejuvenation under the Cold War conditions that were then becoming normalised.<sup>33</sup> In his chapter, “The Sublime is Now” from 1948, he declared it was the time for “making [cathedrals] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings”.<sup>34</sup> The sympathy evoked with Duthuit’s positions here is discernible, and so it is not a complete surprise that one of Newman’s masterpieces, his first probably, was in the process of being made in 1948, too. Newman was careful, and sometimes slow, with titling, but that painting came to be called *Onement I* by him.

The painting is not heroically scaled – that would come soon enough – but the insight the painting demonstrates is no less profound for its size (69.2 × 41.3 cm).

Newman’s breakthrough achievement, *Onement I*, is deceptively straightforward (Figure 23.6). It comprises three vertical fields, two brownish, large passages of oil paint framing an irregular line of orangeish paint bisecting, still marked by the jagged edging left by the masking tape. This latter field came to be called a “zip” and came to occupy a significant determining role in how this painting created its relational intensity and meaning. For the “zip” is match and completion of the vertical viewing human subject of the painting; it brings that subject into focused awareness of their individual body echoed by the “zip”; and it creates, furthermore, a sense of dividuality, that is open relationality, a unifying encounter with art that forges reconnected and conscientious human sociality.<sup>35</sup>

Such meaningful associations of the modern and the Byzantine are only intellectual exercises until tested in exhibition. In 2013, this argument was demonstrated in *Byzantine Things in the World*, held at The Menil Collection in Houston, Texas. The exhibition was premised on the ahistorical positions outlined in this chapter, that Byzantine art, or just Byzantinism, can speak from the past into the present; and moreover, to try out the reverse ahistorical perspective, that modern art and conditions can reveal new meanings in that medieval culture. In one room, Newman’s *Untitled (Number 2)* from 1950 (oil on canvas, 121.92 × 13.0175 × 6.35 cm) was placed in conversation with icons from the Collection, namely a late Byzantine St Andreas and a comparably dated St John the Baptist (respectively, 106.8 × 44.7 × 2.8; 64.1 × 48.9 × 3.8 cm).<sup>36</sup> The vertical orientations of Newman’s work and St Andreas, both bridging an open doorway between them, accentuated human bodies’ self-presencing, and their passages and movements. This conversation in the Menil galleries among modern and Byzantine works (and non-Western art, too) was carried out in this open, expansive spirit that Newman might even have endorsed. It’s challenging, a comparative approach encouraged every viewer to check their assumptions about art and their relation to it. Indeed, Mondzain’s gaze is made clear in the stare of the icons and the provocative challenge of some of modernism’s most powerful artists. To paraphrase one of the founders of The Menil Collection, Dominique de Menil (1908–97), art and the viewer





*Figure 23.6* Barnett Newman (1905–1970), *Onement I*, 1948, Oil On Canvas, and Oil On Masking Tape On Canvas, 69.2 × 41.2 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Gift of Annalee Newman. © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY © ARS, NY.

carry out a mutual interrogation. And so, in such a setting, Byzantine art can determine our (non-Byzantines') experience and define our subjectivity still.

How can such Byzantinising arguments be proven, in any case? They are our ongoing fantasies, that truth resides still in these objects and awaits our proper bodied approach and mindful attentiveness. Newman hoped as much for his paintings, and in his most reaching moments probably believed he had found a key. Historical Orthodoxy had already established for itself that bodily approach and mindful attentiveness were necessary for the salvation of humanity. This position is not so far from modernism's dreams, minus heaven.

Light, of course, was an essential element of whether the argument carried on the floor of the Menil. The presence of an illuminated/ing equal-armed cross by the artist Dan Flavin (1933–96), *Untitled(to Barbara Wool)* (1970; 48 × 48 × 8), in the corner between the Newman and St John the Baptist, spread a particular halation or rosy-red light within the span of those two works and across the gallery space.<sup>37</sup> I would recall the words of Catherine Bock-Weiss once again, when she stressed Duthuit's broad ideals of Byzantium in relation to "a powerful disposition of light, an exhilarating deployment of spatial expansiveness, a content so general, so nondirective, as to allow maximum freedom of response from the viewer", to the degree that iconic presence prevailed.<sup>38</sup> In some fashion, one could say that those assertions of Prichard and Duthuit, which Bock-Weiss is describing so vividly and succinctly, were demonstrated, under the best conditions, by the dialogue among the works in the Menil exhibition. No one who saw this installation could doubt the power and efficacy of iconic presence. And so Byzantinism continues to ramify and regenerate.

## Conclusion

This chapter has followed only a few pathways by which the Byzantine Empire has entered into and played a role in modernism in Europe and the US. The qualities of spiritual presence and evocation, along with formal aspects that enhanced these qualities, but also authority and dignity, figured large in the examples chosen to exemplify Byzantinism in the modern West. Other features await exploration and discussion in the essays in this collection, and beyond.

Byzantinism is a rich and relatively new object of critical study, emerging as a category within and alongside the "Medievalism" of western Europe and its global extensions. We humans keep searching for solutions to present impasses and difficulties, and Byzantium offers productive ways to think about ourselves, to find art that is meaningful, and to help resolve some of the intractable paradoxes and contradictions of the modern or post-modern world. In 1965, Cyril Mango could claim that "Above all, Byzantinism was the belief in a single, Christian, Roman Empire".<sup>39</sup> Happily, that statement no longer holds – quite. It still motivates militaristic adventurism that we are witnessing in eastern Europe now; its premises have left a swath of bloodshed in the last century and more. For many, hopefully, Byzantinism is an arena of idealism, its mirror directed at catching sight of aspirational elements in our cultures. Cross-cultural work shows particular promise at this moment, as does work with Byzantium through queer and disability studies.<sup>40</sup> These aspects might not undo all the harm militaristic or ethnic Byzantinism has done in the modern world, but they mitigate it. Duthuit's dreamy, unlikely Byzantine world possesses some compelling power, and art alters the world out of history. Thankfully, that protean iconic presence remains for us (still and again) to think and feel with.

## Notes

- 1 Pugh and Aronstein 2021: 4, citing [Utz 2017](#).
- 2 [Goldwyn 2022](#).
- 3 [D'Arcens 2016](#), in Pugh and Aronstein 2021: 5.
- 4 [Diamantopoulou 2020](#). See [Simonides 1861](#).
- 5 This section is indebted to [Joselit 2023](#) and [Wood 2019](#).
- 6 Expressed most eloquently in [Mondzain 2004](#).
- 7 [Joselit 2023](#): 12.
- 8 Wivel and Goula 2012. The history of the Byzantine and Christian Museum has not been without difficulties in a culture focused so strongly on antiquity. See, for example, [Hatzopoulos 2013](#).
- 9 [Wivel and Goula 2012](#): 13–15.
- 10 [Wivel and Goula 2012](#): 48.
- 11 Kirkeby quoted in [Wivel and Goula 2012](#): 67. See also 73.
- 12 [Wivel and Goula 2012](#): 60–2.
- 13 Shiff cites [Pierce 1960](#): IV: 438, in [Shiff 2008](#): 62–3. I might also cite here, since I believe a “relational stance” to the world applies generally to Kirkeby, [Hornborg 2006](#): 22, “Entities such as plants or even rocks may be approached as communicative subjects rather than the inert objects perceived by modernists”.
- 14 [Wivel and Goula 2012](#): 50–2, and also 152.
- 15 I made a case some years ago, in [Peers 1997](#), that the Patriarch Photius devised a visual critique of the emperor Basil I in the prefatory images of that great manuscript given to the latter c. 880. The argument has not won converts, a sign of how difficult it is to persuade contemporary scholars of Byzantium that subversion was possible in its art.
- 16 In [Frank 2017](#).
- 17 On these difficult issues, see the writing of the scholar of Religion, Biko Mandela Gray, including [Gray 2020](#), 2021. See, also, [Gane 2021](#).
- 18 [Grunenberg and Fischer-Hausdorf 2019](#): 36–9.
- 19 [Latour 2010](#): 223.
- 20 This section draws on the excellent discussion in [Bock-Weiss 2009](#): 147–68, quotation from 168.
- 21 [Bock-Weiss 2009](#): 152.
- 22 [Labrusse 1999](#): 108–9, 280 n. 192.
- 23 I initially made this argument in [Peers 2010](#). [Nelson 2015](#) makes a similar point.
- 24 A nod to the critical work of Annabel Jane Wharton, primarily [Wharton 2006](#), 2015.
- 25 [Labrusse 1999](#): 279 n. 184.
- 26 See [Duthuit 1949](#), but see also [Duthuit 1956](#). See [Batario 2018a](#), as well as [Batario 2018b](#); and see [Labrusse 2021](#): 593–5.
- 27 [Bock-Weiss 2009](#): 162.
- 28 Respectively, [Duthuit 1956](#).
- 29 For Duthuit, beyond citations already provided, see [Labrusse 2003](#), as well as [Labrusse 2007](#): 77–81, and [Labrusse 2006](#).
- 30 [Stevens and Swan 2004](#): 94–6, and [Zilczer 1993](#): 41–2, 56.
- 31 See [Peers 2010](#).
- 32 Duthuit’s editorial statement in [Duthuit 1948](#).
- 33 See [Shiff 2023](#): 393–401.
- 34 See [O’Neill 1990](#): 170–3. The passage runs, “We are reasserting man’s natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions ... We are creating images whose reality is self-evident and which are devoid of the props and crutches that evoke associations with outmoded images, both sublime and beautiful. We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making *cathedrals* out of Christ, man, or ‘life,’ we are making [them] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history”.
- 35 These arguments are made at greater length in [Peers 2010](#), 2013, 2021.
- 36 See, also, [Carr 2011](#): 60–1, 52–3.

- 37 Flavin had his own version of Byzantinism, a humble one. Here he is recalling the time he spent as a guard at the Metropolitan Museum and his encounters with a Russian icon of Christ, “Last week in the Metropolitan, I saw a large icon from the school of Novgorod. I smiled when I recognized it. It had more than its painting. There was a physical feeling in the panel. Its recurving warp bore a history. This icon had that magical presiding presence which I have tried to realize in my own icons. But my icons differ from a Byzantine Christ held in majesty; they are dumb – anonymous and inglorious. They are as mute and undistinguished as the run of our architecture. My icons do not raise up the blessed Savior in elaborate cathedrals. They are constructed concentrations celebrating barren rooms. They bring a limited light” (9 August 1962). See Thierolf and Vogt 2009: 10, as well as Dervaux 2012: 91.
- 38 Again, Bock-Weiss 2009: 162.
- 39 Mango 1965: 30.
- 40 An example of a cross-cultural study is the study by Kefala 2020. While outside of the purview of this chapter, I believe it is worth citing the science-fiction novels, Martine 2019, 2021, with similar Aztec-Byzantine interests and told from a queer perspective. Roland Betancourt’s works on Byzantinism and queer studies are necessary reading. See Betancourt 2017, 2020, 2021.

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## 24

# IT ALL STARTED WITH ITALY

## The Reception of Italy's Mosaics in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

*Giovanni Gasbarri*

No single case study can fully encapsulate the complexity inherent in the modern reception of Italy's medieval mosaics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is particularly true in relation to the gradual recognition and appreciation of their Byzantine origins, a process conditioned by numerous factors rooted in features intrinsic to Italy's cultural heritage. More than in any other western European country, the corpus of medieval mosaics in Italy covers a vast geographical and temporal range, from Venice to Sicily and from late antiquity to beyond the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This scope reflects the diversity of patronage and contexts across regions with distinct historical backgrounds. The uneven distribution of medieval monuments in Italy, which affected their state of preservation over the centuries, becomes crucial when addressing their reception, especially in light of the specific conditions of the country's road system and land use during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many areas preserving medieval mosaics lay outside the traditional tourist routes and were arduous or even dangerous to access. Such was the case for most provinces in southern Italy and peripheral cities like Ravenna, which lacked a rail connection until 1863 and remained difficult to reach thereafter.<sup>2</sup> Limited accessibility severely hindered the systematic study of monuments, often confining scholarly interest to local or occasional investigations. Italy's late unification, not completed until 1871, when Rome effectively became the new capital, also delayed the establishment of a centralised system for cataloguing and protecting the national artistic heritage, thereby impeding comprehensive, comparative studies of medieval mosaics across the country. Many of these difficulties, however, were rooted in broader questions of national identity and cultural self-definition. For nineteenth-century Italian intellectuals committed to tracing the historical foundations of the newly unified state, acknowledging Byzantium's substantial influence on Italy's artistic heritage posed significant challenges. Due to the absence of a unified and autonomous "Kingdom of Italy" or any other independent polity during the Middle Ages that could be taken as a stable reference point for shaping an Italian identity narrative, Byzantium became an additional, problematic element in this endeavour. In the public consciousness, the Byzantine Empire was regarded as a foreign entity, typically associated with notions of lust, decadence and corruption, and its very existence served as a stark reminder of the fall of the western Roman Empire, an event that could hardly be celebrated in Italian nationalist propaganda.<sup>3</sup>



During the nineteenth century, however, the pervasive biases against Byzantium came into conflict with its gradual rediscovery and appreciation by European scholars, a shift in which Italy played a pivotal role. To archaeologists and art historians seeking to explore the artistic culture of Byzantium, such monuments as San Marco in Venice (rebuilt from the eleventh century), San Vitale in Ravenna (consecrated 547) and the cathedral of Monreale in Sicily (founded 1174) offered a more convenient and relatively accessible “Byzantine experience” at a time when numerous remnants of Byzantine art in the eastern Mediterranean region were in ruins, unreachable or poorly known. Italy’s reputation as an ideal environment for research in Byzantine art history was further reinforced by the unquestionable calibre of its monuments. Ravenna is home to the only existing monumental portraits of Justinian (r. 527–65) and Theodora (d. 548), Byzantium’s most iconic imperial couple; on the opposite side of the country, Monreale boasts the most extensive mosaic cycle of the Middle Ages, covering over 6000 square metres and surpassing any similar ensembles in Greece or Constantinople. Not surprisingly, Italy and its mosaics have often served as a privileged lens through which the western European perspective on Byzantine art was constructed and perpetuated. Yet, this perspective was inherently partial and to some extent artificial, shaped by a limited selection of surviving artworks and dependent heavily on their state of preservation, accessibility and the diverse contexts in which they were observed and interpreted. San Marco in Venice, the churches of Ravenna and the great Norman cathedrals in Sicily have undergone separate historical trajectories, presenting themselves to scholars at different times and in diverse ways. Each case requires consideration in its own right.

### Venice

As an irreplaceable cornerstone of Venice’s urban identity, San Marco has always been a major attraction for scholars and travellers and was extensively analysed and described well before the nineteenth century. The origins of the mosaic cycles and the participation of Byzantine artists in their creation were an early topic of interest for local historiographers. By the end of the eighteenth century, for example, such scholars as Giovanni Antonio Meschinello (1737–99) and Anton Maria Zanetti (1706–78) had already acknowledged the substantial influence of “the Greeks” – that is, Byzantine architects and mosaicists – on Venice’s medieval artistic renaissance.<sup>4</sup> However, they were inclined to minimise these contributions, instead highlighting the ingenuity and originality of Venetian artists, believed to have been directly inspired by the splendours of classical art. The emphasis on the independence of local artistic schools remained dominant in Venetian historiography into the nineteenth century, significantly influencing the work of Pietro Selvatico (1803–80), widely regarded as the leading expert on Venice’s artistic heritage at the time. Despite his familiarity with international scholarship and the accounts of European travellers to the eastern Mediterranean, Selvatico often struggled to identify a distinctly Byzantine character in San Marco, perceiving its essence as fundamentally “Latin”. Nevertheless, he recognised that a comprehensive understanding of Byzantine art’s true nature was still elusive among his contemporaries, implying the existence of a complex interplay of dynamics that transcended simplistic categorisations.<sup>5</sup>

The publication of John Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53) and later his *St. Mark’s Rest* (1877–84) fundamentally altered the discourse surrounding Venice’s Byzantine heritage. Ruskin celebrated the aesthetic qualities of San Marco’s earliest mosaics and their

seamless integration with architectural forms. He also praised Byzantine mosaicists as conveyors of a unique artistic language, reflective of a superior worldview and societal understanding that exerted a profound influence on all subsequent transformations of the church. By advocating for an “ethical” approach to cultural heritage, Ruskin directly challenged traditional biases against Byzantine art and reshaped the ongoing debate about the proper conservation of Venetian monuments, prompting discussion among leading Italian figures, including the theorist and restorer Camillo Boito (1836–1914) and the engineer–architect Pietro Saccardo (1830–1903).<sup>6</sup> One notable outcome of this debate was *La Basilica di San Marco in Venezia illustrata* (The basilica of San Marco in Venice illustrated, Figure 24.1), a luxurious encyclopaedia entirely dedicated to San Marco, edited by Boito and published by Ferdinando Ongania between 1881 and 1893.<sup>7</sup>

This work included contributions from younger proponents of Ruskin’s theories, such as architect Raffaele Cattaneo (1861–89) and archaeologist Giacomo Boni (1859–1925), the latter of whom would soon become renowned for his discovery of the ruins of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome in 1900.<sup>8</sup> *La Basilica di San Marco* provided the first comprehensive visual documentation of the entire church, utilising the most advanced printing technologies available at the time. The chapter on mosaics was authored by the supervisor of the basilica’s restoration, Saccardo, whose meticulous on-site examinations and thorough review of archival documents set a new benchmark for future studies. The imposing format and exceptionally high price of *La Basilica di San Marco* soon proved to be a significant impediment to its wide circulation. To overcome this, the publisher released more accessible stand-alone volumes in French aimed at an international audience, including Saccardo’s *Les mosaïques de Saint-Marc à Venise* (The mosaics of Saint Mark in Venice, 1896). Alongside Antonio Pasini’s popular *Guide de la Basilique St. Marc à Venise* (Guide to the basilica of St Mark in Venice, 1888), these works helped recalibrate Ruskin’s theoretical framework with concrete material evidence, offering readers accurate and up-to-date information for subsequent research.

At the turn of the twentieth century, research into the mosaics of San Marco flourished, boosted by advances in photographic technology and innovative research methodologies. A landmark in this field was Johan Jakob Tikkanen’s essay *Die Genesismosaik von S. Marco in Venedig und ihr Verhältniss zu den Miniaturen der Cottonbibel* (The Genesis mosaics from St Mark in Venice and their relationship with the miniatures of the Cotton Bible, 1889), in which he identified an iconographic link between the narthex mosaics of San Marco and the miniatures of the Cotton Genesis in the British Library. This groundbreaking discovery opened a new chapter in the study of San Marco and, more broadly, medieval Mediterranean art.<sup>9</sup>

## Ravenna

Just over 100 km south of bustling, cosmopolitan Venice, Ravenna presented a striking contrast. Encircled by marshy and inhospitable terrain, it lacked regular rail connections until the last quarter of the nineteenth century and was accessible only via inconvenient routes remote from well-trodden tourist paths. This seclusion helped preserve the city’s late antique urban layout almost intact. Despite numerous restorations since the eighteenth century,<sup>10</sup> the relatively untouched state of Ravenna’s monuments and mosaic cycles conjured the illusion of a city suspended in time, a “Byzantine Pompeii” frozen in the sixth century, still preserving its past status as an imperial capital. The image of Byzantine art

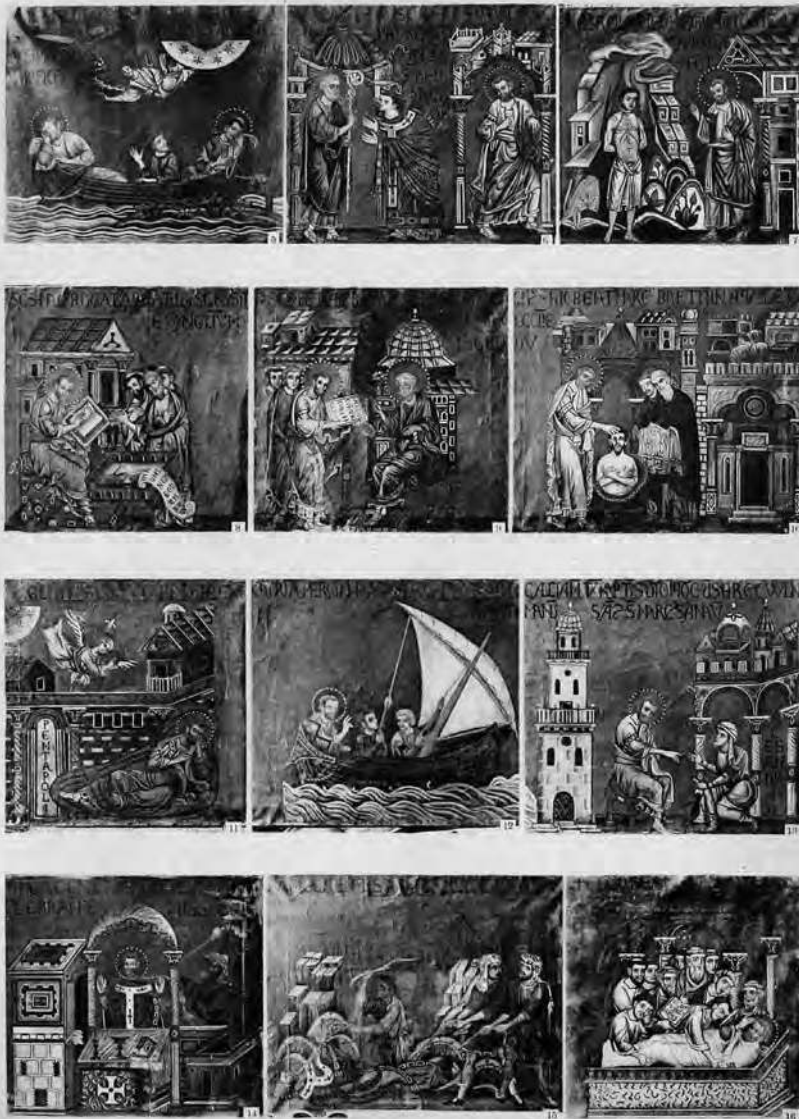


Figure 24.1 C. Boito (ed.), Selection of heliographies representing stories from the life of St Mark from the mosaics of San Marco in Venice, from *La Basilica di San Marco in Venezia illustrata nella storia e nell'arte da scrittori veneziani, Parte Prima*. Venice, 1888, pl. I. © Public Domain.

that scholars and travellers gleaned from Ravenna's monuments often developed independently of direct familiarity with the broader artistic heritage of the eastern Mediterranean. This perception had a profound impact on contemporary artistic production as well: a substantial portion of the Byzantine-inspired history painting created in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew heavily upon Ravenna's models, even when depicting scenes from periods well beyond the city's golden era.<sup>11</sup>

On a scholarly level, the major challenge in Ravenna was not so much questioning the "Byzantine identity" of its mosaics, as was the case in Venice, but rather evaluating the accuracy of the image of Byzantium that emerged when these mosaics were treated as the principal source of information. Many enduring misconceptions about the two-dimensionality and lack of naturalism in Byzantine art originate from nineteenth-century literature, which often used Ravenna's mosaics to assess the entire scope of Byzantine artistic culture. The earliest systematic studies of Ravenna's monuments by Joseph Bard (*Statistique monumentaire dressée dans la ville de Ravenne*, Monumental survey of the city of Ravenna, 1840) and Ferdinand von Quast (*Die alt-christlichen Bauwerke von Ravenna*, The ancient Christian buildings of Ravenna, 1842, [Figure 24.2](#)) primarily adhered to a traditional perspective, measuring the aesthetic values of the mosaics against the canons of Greco-Roman art, consequently interpreting the repetitive compositions and two-dimensional style observed in San Vitale and Sant'Apollinare in Classe (consecrated 549) as indicators of a decline from classical norms.<sup>12</sup>

The hypothesis that these features might represent a distinct visual language, rooted in the late antique eastern Mediterranean, began to gain currency through the work of such Russian scholars as Fyodor Buslaev (1818–98), Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925), Dmitry Aynalov (1862–1939) and Egor Redin (1863–1908).<sup>13</sup> It later formed a central argument in the debates over the origins of post-classical art that characterised scholarly discussions between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>14</sup> With the refinement of methodological tools and knowledge, the discourse surrounding Ravenna's mosaics became increasingly sophisticated, with such specialists as Jean-Paul Richter (*Die Mosaiken von Ravenna*, The mosaics of Ravenna, 1878), Charles Bayet (*L'art byzantin*, Byzantine art, 1883) and Charles Diehl (*Ravenne*, 1886) treating them as exceptional witnesses to a complex transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages and from East to West. This new approach exposed the limits of categories such as "ancient", "Byzantine" and "medieval" for conveying the historical and cultural significance of these mosaics. Towards the end of the century, Ravenna's perceived liminal character provoked substantial discussions, particularly among Italian scholars who struggled to integrate the mosaics' "eastern" elements into a cohesive national art-historical narrative.<sup>15</sup> A pivotal figure in this context was Corrado Ricci (1858–1934), an art historian, politician and native of Ravenna who was not only committed to the study of the mosaics but also deeply involved in their preservation and restoration.<sup>16</sup> His sustained efforts culminated in a series of documentation campaigns, the results of which were compiled in his innovative multi-volume *Monumenti: tavole storiche dei mosaici di Ravenna* (Monuments: Historical plates of the mosaics of Ravenna, 1930–37), which remains an indispensable resource for any scholar studying Ravenna's mosaics.<sup>17</sup>

### Sicily

Before Diehl's *L'art byzantin dans l'Italie méridionale* (Byzantine art in southern Italy, 1894), with Heinrich Wilhelm Schulz's *Denkmaeler der Kunst des Mittelalters in Unteritalien*

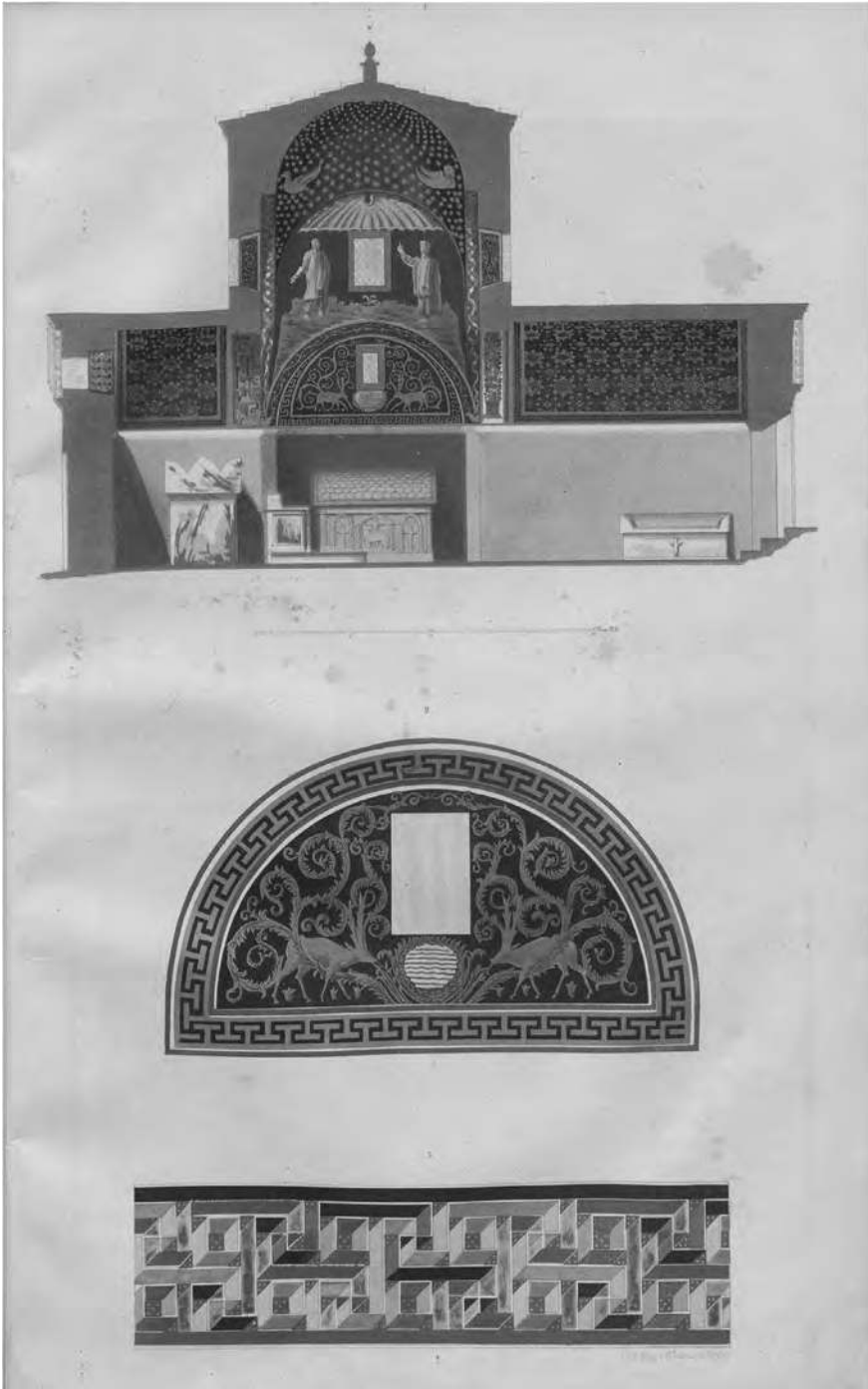


Figure 24.2 Ferdinand von Quast, Longitudinal cutaway and mosaic details of the so-called Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, from *Die alt-christlichen Bauwerke von Ravenna vom fünften bis zum neunten Jahrhundert*. Berlin, 1842, pl. III. © Public Domain.

(Monuments of Medieval art in southern Italy, 1860) as a notable, albeit partial, exception, the artistic legacy of Byzantium rarely received full recognition as an integral part of southern Italy's heritage. The enduring classical biases of the eighteenth century greatly contributed to this oversight. For instance, the diplomat Johann Hermann von Riedesel (1740–85) and Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) provided accounts of their Italian journeys that barely acknowledged the existence of mosaics in Monreale, with von Riedesel dismissing them as unworthy of attention.<sup>18</sup> The challenging accessibility and scattered distribution of the medieval monuments in southern Italy continued to perpetuate this neglect well into the nineteenth century, with the result that the grandiose mosaic cycles of Norman Sicily often eluded the attention of travellers, despite the inclusion of Palermo, Cefalù and Monreale in international tourism itineraries. Within the scholarly community, it was predominantly the architecture of medieval Sicily that garnered significant attention, as demonstrated by the richly illustrated publications of the architects and artists Jacques Ignace Hittorff and Ludwig Zanth (*Architecture moderne de la Sicile*, Modern architecture of Sicily, 1835) and Henry Gally Knight (*The Normans in Sicily*, 1838).<sup>19</sup>

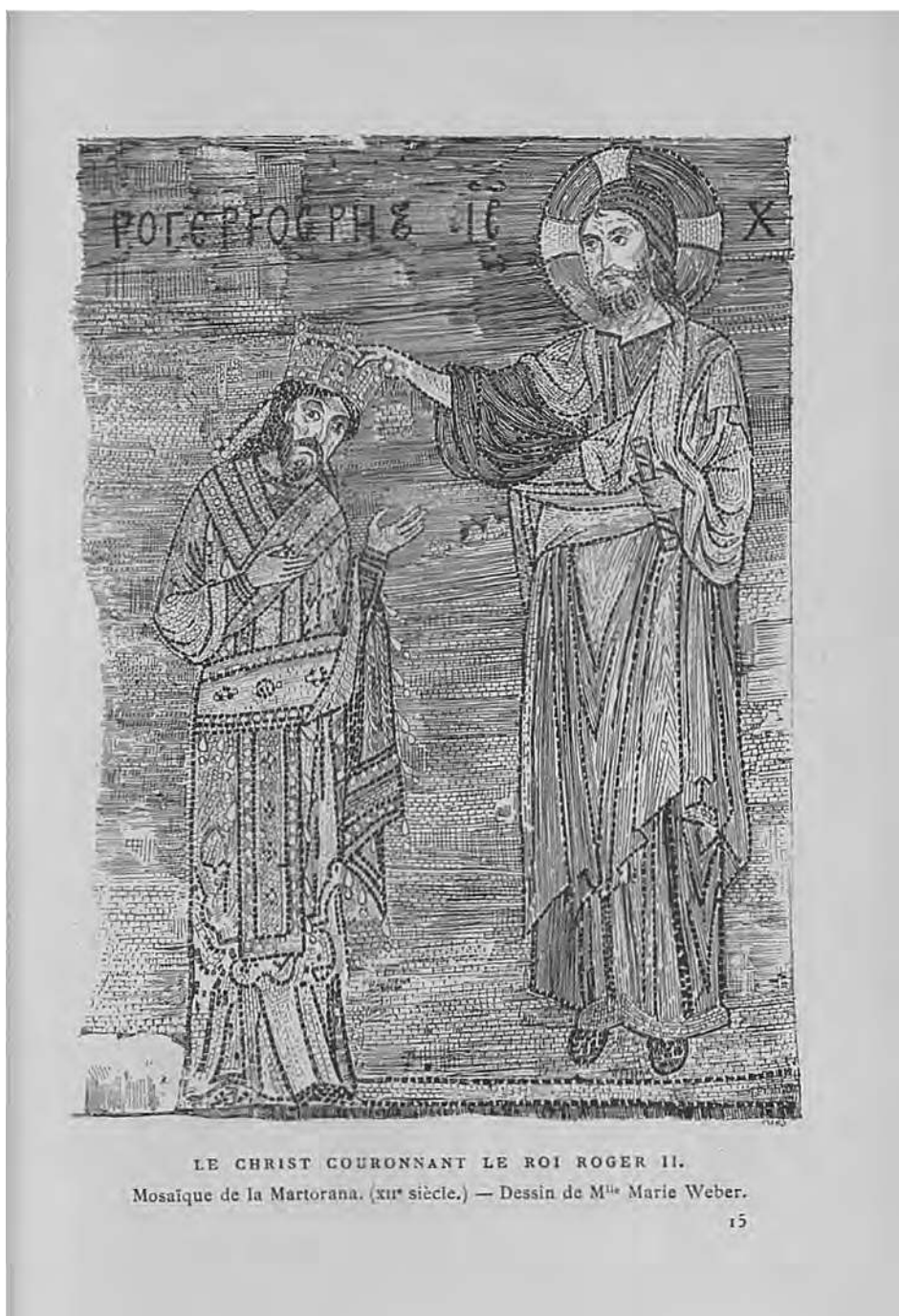
A shift in focus occurred in the central decades of the nineteenth century, when Sicilian mosaics began to be mentioned regularly in restoration reports, travel literature and art history manuals. Initially, the question of the mosaicists' provenance was not a major point of discussion. In the first monographic study dedicated to the Cappella Palatina in Palermo (founded ca. 1132), *Notizie della Basilica di San Pietro* (Notes on the basilica of St Peter) by Niccolò Buscemi (1840), the subjects and inscriptions of the mosaics were meticulously documented without questioning the artists' Sicilian origins, despite acknowledging their training in the "Greek-Byzantine" tradition. Thirty years later, the historian Demetrio Salazar (1822–82), in his *Studi sui monumenti dell'Italia meridionale* (Studies on the monuments of southern Italy, 1871–77), argued that Byzantium naturally lacked any ideal of beauty and could never have influenced the outstanding aesthetic quality found in Sicilian mosaics. Less radically, Gioacchino Di Marzo (1839–1916), a pioneer in the study of art history in Sicily, echoed this view to some extent. In *Delle belle arti in Sicilia* (On fine arts in Sicily, 1858–64), he asserted the overall hegemony of local artists over their Byzantine counterparts, arguing that the contributions of the latter were confined primarily to the earliest stages of Sicilian mosaic history. These nationalistic perspectives, common among many local historiographers, stood in stark contrast to divergent interpretations grounded in the results of international research. In comprehensive surveys such as Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle's *A New History of Painting in Italy* (1864–66) and Ernst Joachim Förster's *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst* (History of Italian art, 1869–78), the mosaics of Palermo, Cefalù and Monreale were attributed primarily to Byzantine artists and celebrated for their exceptional quality.

The principal contribution of Sicilian historiography to mosaic studies was perhaps in the field of surveying and graphic documentation, which stemmed from increasing local attention directed towards the preservation and restoration of ancient monuments.<sup>20</sup> A pivotal example of these efforts is Abbot Domenico Benedetto Gravina's *Il Duomo di Monreale illustrato* (The cathedral of Monreale illustrated, 1859–70, [Figure 24.3](#)), which aimed to provide a thorough visual overview of the cathedral of Monreale akin to Boito's later work on San Marco in Venice. As a foundation for the luxurious chromolithographs that accompanied the work, Gravina opted for drawings executed by teenage amateurs, believing their unrefined skills would authentically capture the supposed primitive style of the mosaics.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 24.3 Domenico Benedetto Gravina, Details of the mosaics in the nave of the cathedral of Monreale, from *Il Duomo di Monreale illustrato*. Palermo, 1859–70, pl. 15-L. © Public Domain.





*Figure 24.4* Charles Diehl, Mosaic panel depicting the Coronation of Roger II from Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio in Palermo, from *L'art byzantin dans l'Italie méridionale*. Paris, 1894, pl. 15. © Public Domain.

Major advancements in the study of mosaics in Sicily occurred towards the end of the century, reflecting broader progress in Byzantine art research across Europe. Diehl's *L'art byzantin dans l'Italie méridionale* (Byzantine art in southern Italy, 1894, [Figure 24.4](#)) is a seminal work in this field, recognised for introducing methodological innovations despite targeting a non-specialist audience and lacking high-quality illustrations.

Diehl analysed the mosaic cycles of Palermo, Cefalù and Monreale as integral components of a broader Byzantine legacy that deeply influenced the artistic culture of southern Italy during the Middle Ages. He argued that the Sicilian mosaics constituted the zenith of the Norman rulers' policy of reconciliation, suggesting that the involvement of Byzantine artists did not represent the introduction of an alien element into Sicilian culture but rather a rejuvenation of the "Greek root" already deeply embedded in the region.

## Conclusion

The last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a pivotal acceleration in specialised research on Byzantium, establishing this era as the foundational period for Byzantine art history as an academic discipline. This swift development led to the publication of the first comprehensive manuals on Byzantine artistic production. Key contributions included Kondakov's *Istoriia vizantiiskago iskusstva* (History of Byzantine art, 1876, translated into French between 1886 and 1891) and Bayet's *L'art byzantin* (Byzantine art, 1883), along with seminal works by such scholars as Oskar Wulff (1864–1946), Ormonde Maddock Dalton (1866–1945), Diehl and Gabriel Millet (1867–1953).<sup>22</sup> By consistently incorporating the churches of Venice, Torcello, Ravenna and Sicily into their studies, these authors cemented the integral connection of Italy's mosaics with the history of Byzantine art. Concurrently, the publication of the first systematic investigations of major mosaic cycles in Greece and Constantinople, such as Kondakov's work on the Chora monastery (Kariye Camii) at Constantinople and the studies by Georgios Lampakis (1854–1914) and Millet on the monastery at Daphni near Athens (eleventh century, second half), vastly broadened the scope for comparison.<sup>23</sup> This new, extended framework allowed scholarship to transcend the predominantly regional focus that had characterised much of the nineteenth-century literature, firmly positioning Italy's mosaics within the global narrative of Byzantine visual culture. Such a shift in perspective laid the groundwork for subsequent generations of scholars, including Otto Demus (1902–90) and Ernst Kitzinger (1912–2003), whose research on the mosaics of Venice and Sicily marked a new phase in the study of Byzantine art in the twentieth century.

## Notes

- 1 [James 2017](#), especially 145–54 for a numerical analysis of the distribution of mosaics across the medieval world.
- 2 [Campini and Moraschi 2023](#): 38.
- 3 [Bernabò 2003](#); [Gasbarri 2015](#).
- 4 [Piva 2013](#).
- 5 [Ballardini 2016](#).
- 6 [Paribeni 2013](#); [Trevisan 2019](#).
- 7 [Favaretto and Vio 2011](#); [Trevisan 2019](#).
- 8 [Pilutti Namer 2013](#); [Russo, Alteri and Paribeni 2021](#).
- 9 [Kessler 2020](#).
- 10 [Ranaldi and Novara 2013](#): 131–98.

- 11 Taroutina 2018: 43–52.
- 12 Campini and Moraschi 2023: 19–21.
- 13 Lidova 2020.
- 14 Frantová 2018.
- 15 Gasbarri 2015: 82–3; Campini and Moraschi 2023: 26–32.
- 16 Iannucci 2004.
- 17 David 2015.
- 18 Vinken 2021: 191–2.
- 19 Barbera and Vitale 2017.
- 20 Guttilla 2004; Paribeni 2013.
- 21 Dotto 2009: 91.
- 22 See the relevant entries in Heid and Dennert 2012.
- 23 Boeck 2021; Kotoula 2013: 262–3; Chlepa 2024: 58–62.

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## 25

# THE RUSSIAN FOUNDATIONS OF BYZANTINE STUDIES

Before and around Kondakov

*Ivan Foletti*

Byzantine studies in Russia arose during the nineteenth century in a progressive manner following the pattern of what had happened in Europe in previous decades: after the establishment of a critical mass of erudites, historical sciences found an institutional place in universities. After decades in which mainly amateurs took an interest in Byzantium, the turning point came in the last four decades of the century with the professionalisation of academia, which inevitably led to the emergence of a new kind of research dependent on institutional funds. The purpose of the following chapter will be to reflect briefly on the manner in which early studies of the empire of Constantinople took root in the Romanov Empire in the period following the Napoleonic wars and up to the First World War. Following this, I would like to focus on the figure of Nikodim P. Kondakov (1844–1925), the first professional Byzantinist within the empire.

Before proceeding, two premises are imposed: the first is that my interest will be oriented, given my specialisation, mainly (though not exclusively) on the history of art historical studies. The second concerns the need to mention not only intellectual and political concepts but also monuments and images because the process of the invention of Byzantine studies in Russia was not limited exclusively to the world of ideas and the academy: on the contrary, the process that saw the emergence of interest in the empire of Constantinople concerned broad sections of the social and cultural elites in those years and their patronage. This was clearly visible especially in imperial commissions – such as the case of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow (consecrated 1839) discussed below – where architecture and imagery were conceived (and perceived) as a direct link to the empire of Constantinople.

### **After Napoleon: Russia and Byzantium**

An essential impetus for the development of Byzantine studies was provided by the Napoleonic wars, which had a decisive impact on the history of Russia and its cultural orientation. Indeed, the invasion of French troops led to a systematic reassessment of the relationship between Russian and European culture. After a period in which Western (and especially French) culture had been regarded in Russia as an uncontested model on both the artistic

and social levels, the shock caused by the events of the war – and especially the burning of Moscow – led Russian elites to question the country's cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> Among the possibilities offered, the tsarist power decided to support a paradoxically very “Western” solution: in the years of Nicholas I (1825–55), it was decided that the official representation of the empire should refer back to the medieval history of Russia. Thus, in parallel with the emergence of styles such as Neo-Gothic, Neo-Romanesque and Neo-Renaissance in continental Europe – which were intended to refer back to the roots of the different European states – a local Neo-Medieval style developed in Russia. It is interesting, however, that during the first phase of its development, up until about the middle of the nineteenth century, the terminology used to describe this new style – linked to the construction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow (Figure 25.1), designed by Constantin Thon (1794–1881) to celebrate the victory over Napoleon – oscillated between Neo-Russian and Neo-Byzantine.<sup>2</sup> Although the building clearly drew on monuments built in the country in the late Middle Ages, we read in period documents of the architect's desire to imitate Justinian's Hagia Sophia with the new cathedral. This new “visual style” conceived and executed by Thon himself was then imposed by imperial decree as the official style of all religious buildings that would be built in the country.<sup>3</sup>

The official style was intended to refer not only to the local past but also to the prestigious “DNA” to which the state had been referring for centuries as heir to the eastern Roman Empire. As far back as the sixteenth century, Ivan the Terrible (1533–84), Muscovy, had in fact wanted to embrace the legacy of Constantinople, a legacy passed on, according to



*Figure 25.1* Unknown photographer, Moscow. Panorama of Zamoskvorechye from the Kremlin during the coronation of Alexander II, 1856, photograph, 37 × 55 cm, State Historical Museum. © Public Domain.

the Russian account, by the patriarch of the city on the Bosphorus who had crowned Ivan as the first tsar.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, centuries later, Catherine the Great (1762–96) had cherished her “Greek dream” of conquering Constantinople (and thus gaining access to the Mediterranean) by renewing the glory of the eastern empire.<sup>5</sup> The idea promoted at the court of Nicholas I was thus – despite the Occidentalism of the previous decades – based on a tradition well known to the country’s elites. And if the aesthetics promoted did not seem to correspond too closely to the taste of these elites, educated in French classicism, the political importance of this choice was evident.<sup>6</sup>

For the purpose of this study, one additional element must be considered: the fact that it was precisely during the years of Nicholas I that critical texts began to appear in Russia that sought to deal with cultural relations between Russia and the empire of Constantinople. Scholars such as Ivan Sakharov (1807–63) and Dimitry Rovinsky (1824–95) – trained as a physician and jurist, respectively – dealt with the Byzantine roots of Russian painting.<sup>7</sup> In their view, such roots could be reconstructed on the basis of Byzantine models, such as the 40 ancient icons that were still present in Russia. Such a claim was based on a very superficial knowledge of these objects since in those years medieval painted panels were concealed under layers of modern repainting. Rather than on actual data, therefore, the two scholars relied on more or less fanciful tales and local tradition. Their determination to seek Byzantine roots for Russian painting, despite the impossibility of proving it by means of objects, however, showed the full importance of this “myth of origins”. Even more explicit in this respect was the work of Grigori Grigorievitch Gagarin (1810–93).<sup>8</sup> A prominent aristocrat, Alexander Pushkin’s (1799–1825) friend and later illustrator, as well as an architect and official of other rank, Gagarin was also the author, in 1856, of an illustrated album that was to document the history of Byzantine culture from the late antique world onwards (Figure 25.2). The most fascinating fact was that this millennial history of Byzantine culture ended, according to Gagarin, precisely in the Russia of the Romanovs.<sup>9</sup>

Official architecture and studies written by scholars of various ranks seemed to prove, in a happy symbiosis, that the Russian Empire was to all intents and purposes the heir to the eastern Roman Empire. As already indicated, the aesthetic quality of the works of art produced in this context did not find much appreciation among contemporary elites (a good example is Nikodim Kondakov’s account complaining about the ugliness of the architect Nikolai Sultanov’s (1850–1908) Neo-Byzantine decorations in the living room of the minister Dmitry Sipyagin (1853–1902), which makes the art historian regret the style of the Second Empire),<sup>10</sup> but this was of secondary importance since it coincided with the interests of the Russian state. Indeed, the Byzantine heritage first and foremost allowed the Romanov Empire to be presented as a culturally different entity to the European West, which had betrayed it in the collective imagination. Moreover, belonging to an eastern tradition could easily be used to justify the empire’s potential imperialist ambitions. The legacy of Byzantium could also become the ideal justification for weakening the Ottoman Empire in every way. A historical enemy of the Russian Empire and, at the same time, a Muslim state that had occupied, from the Russian perspective, the imperial capital, Constantinople, for centuries.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, the first proto-scientific studies on the Byzantine cultural and visual world in Russia made their appearance in the early nineteenth century. These were studies by erudite amateurs trained in the Byzantine question in a very particular climate, that of Russia in search of a new identity. The choice of Byzantium appeared as logical: it represented,



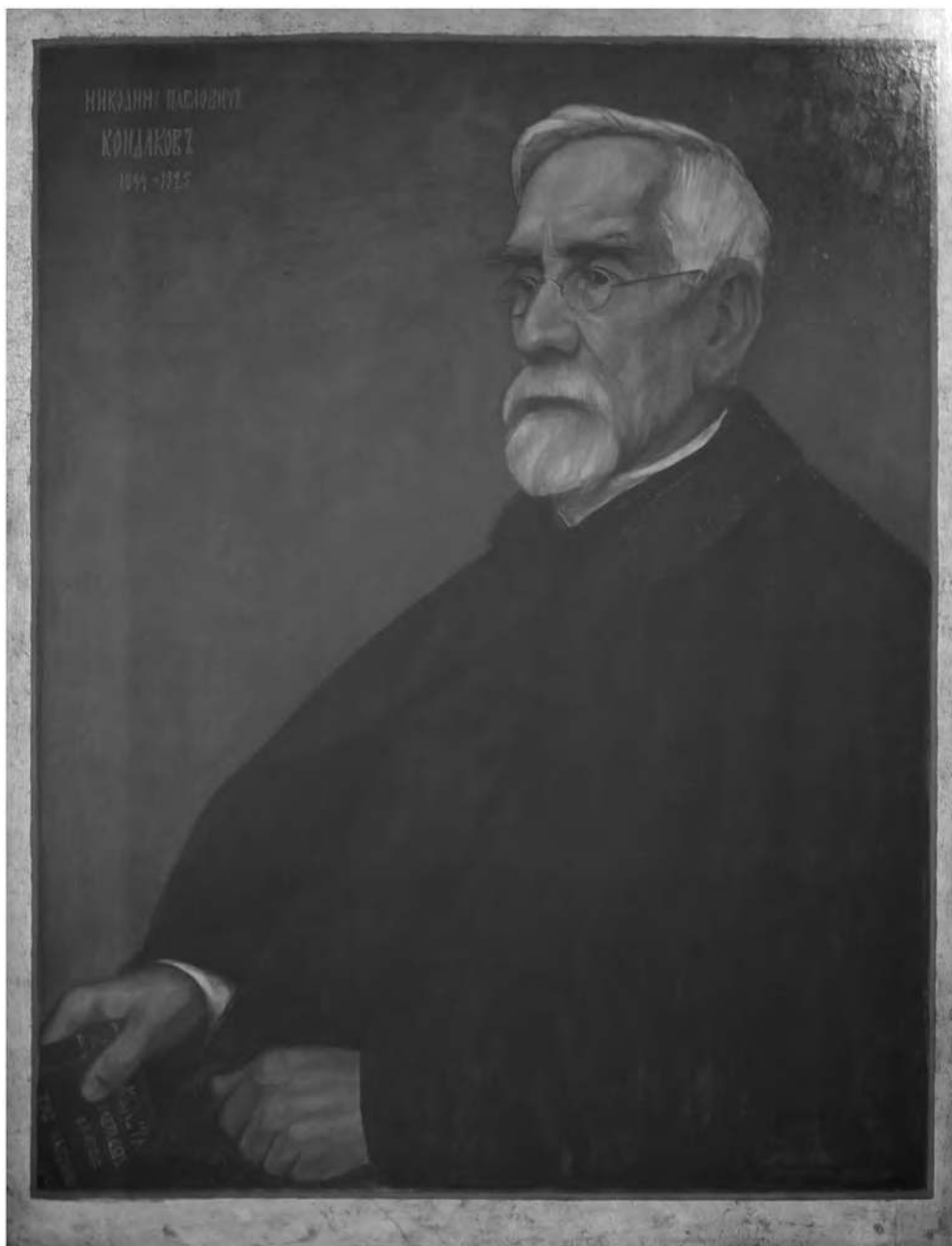


*Figure 25.2* Karl Bryullov (1799–1852), Portrait of G. Gagarin, 1829, paper, watercolour, graphite pencil, 19.8 × 16.5 cm, State Russian Museum. © Public Domain.

on the one hand, a traditional and therefore deep root of the country's Orthodox culture. At the same time, however, the Byzantine Empire had an almost unlimited potential as a “political” tool: it could in fact justify the empire's territorial ambitions. Culture, art and research seemed in this sense to promote and at the same time edify the new official doctrine promoted by tsarist power.

### **Alexander II's Empire, His Reforms and Kondakov's “Conversion”**

For the history of Byzantine studies in Russia, a real turning point came with the figure of Nikodim Kondakov ([Figure 25.3](#)).<sup>12</sup>



*Figure 25.3* Natalia Iashvil (1861–1939), Portrait of Nikodim Kondakov, ca. 1924, oil on canvas, Archive of the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Kondakov Institute. © Alamy.

I do not mean here only a scientific or intellectual turning point: Kondakov in fact embodied in his person many of the changes that took place in the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. Born into servile status, he became a free man through Alexander II's (1855–81) imperial decree of 1861. He also gained access to all levels of education thanks to the tsar's reforms.<sup>13</sup> Finally, thanks to the significant increase in the salaries of university teachers, again linked to the institutional changes promoted by the imperial administration, he was able to devote himself to a life as a professional researcher, a fact inconceivable only a few decades earlier: Kondakov's teacher, Fyodor Buslaev (1818–97), who belonged to the previous generation, still had to be a preceptor in the early part of his career in order to, for example, travel to Italy.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, it is also important to mention the fact that, again thanks to the reforms promoted in the 1880s and 1890s, the Imperial Academy of Sciences (founded in 1724 in Saint Petersburg) provided Kondakov with substantial funds so that he could carry out research trips, with associated photographic documentation, around the entire Mediterranean. In other words, Kondakov's biography is a most flagrant example of how, in the second half of the century, political and social changes simply made possible the birth of modern Byzantine studies.<sup>15</sup>

A second point should be mentioned that Kondakov's education did not consist of teaching devoted entirely to art history. Rather, he officially graduated as a philologist, but courses in cultural and artistic history, taught by Buslaev, himself of literary training, had a fundamental impact on him. Philological training had, however, a clear impact on the method of Kondakov, which was very close to the evolutionary-linguistic view promoted, for example, by his fellow student and great Russian linguist Alexander Veselovsky (1843–1918).<sup>16</sup>

After completing his studies at Moscow University, and teaching for a few years in a secondary school, Kondakov was called in 1870 (with pedagogical service taken in September 1871) by the University of New Russia in Odessa where he had been recommended by his teacher Buslaev.<sup>17</sup> Thus, he could finally devote himself fully to research, quickly writing a first doctoral thesis devoted to the archaeological monuments of the Harpies in the Crimea.<sup>18</sup> Having a background in philology, the scholar thus seemed launched into a career in ancient world studies. The turning point, however, came again in the first half of the 1870s when the young Kondakov decided to devote his second doctoral thesis (the equivalent of a *habilitation* in various European systems) to the history of Byzantine miniatures. The resulting volume was in fact the first panoramic study devoted to Byzantine art.<sup>19</sup> From the introduction of the volume, two aspects were clear: Kondakov's method – a kind of iconographic evolutionism (i.e., the idea of a traceable linear development in the evolution of iconographic motifs) – evidenced great debt to his philological training but also to the scientific trends of those years, with the humanities adopting a philosophical perspective developed in the field of the biological sciences.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the more or less explicitly formulated idea that Russia should be understood as the heir of Byzantium was one of the red threads of Kondakov's discourse. It was, as mentioned above, an idea that had been present in Russian history for centuries, but which had regained particular vigour after the Napoleonic wars.

Kondakov's "conversion" to Byzantium becomes even more logical if we contextualise it in the mid-1870s – the thesis was published in 1876 – a particularly important moment in the history of rivalry between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. The ever-increasing tension – which had as its official pretext the situation in the Balkans (particularly dramatic in Bulgaria) – led to the outbreak of the war that in the years 1877–78 brought the Russians

to the gates of Constantinople.<sup>21</sup> Without the intervention of the allied fleet, which menacingly convinced the Russian army not to attack the city, Catherine the Great's dream would most likely have been realised. It was therefore in this context that Kondakov began to systematically study Byzantine visual culture. A culture that he regarded, like many of his contemporaries, as the matrix from which the Russian world had emerged. Interestingly, as in the previous generation, it is clear from his memoirs that Kondakov did not personally appreciate the art of Byzantium.<sup>22</sup> However, studying it was a patriotic duty for him.

### **International (Art) History in the Service of the Homeland**

In the years that followed, Kondakov became the globally recognised specialist in Byzantine art. His texts were translated into French, but across the old (and new) continent early specialists in Byzantine studies – an emerging field during the period from France to Germany and from Italy to Great Britain – referred to his research (also in Russian) copiously.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly enough, as an article published in 1900 by Charles Diehl (1859–1944) shows, even in France it was absolutely logical to consider a Russian scholar the most suitable person to study the Byzantine world: who else but an “heir” was to be in charge of this field?<sup>24</sup>

Over the years, Kondakov published abundantly on subjects pertaining to Byzantine studies: from mosaics in the churches of Constantinople to Byzantine enamels, from monuments in Syria and Palestine to those on Mount Athos and from the Sinai manuscripts to panel paintings.<sup>25</sup> His knowledge of the field was incredible, as each study was preceded by a field trip. Through his research, the world of eastern Christianity thus received increasing international attention. Starting from clearly positivist foundations – Kondakov saw himself as an archaeologist who needed to collect present objective “data” – the scholar made public a wealth of unpublished objects and monuments that in fact built the material basis for modern Byzantine studies. It is therefore natural that he enjoyed high esteem internationally. In 1924, at the First Congress of Byzantine Studies, he was unanimously called the patriarch of Byzantine studies.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to this, Kondakov's studies are also an illuminating example of the close relationship that can exist between scholarly research and political interests. This is particularly visible in the studies Kondakov devoted to the art of the South Caucasus – that is, the cultures of medieval Armenia and Iberia.<sup>27</sup> In his studies of the region the scholar denied, on several occasions, the peculiarities of the two ancient cultures, which he presented as a single provincial reception of Byzantium.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, for example, in his studies on the enamels of Iberia, Kondakov did not hesitate to use “qualitative” criteria to create a discourse of centre and periphery: enamels of quality, even if preserved in Georgia, and decorated with inscriptions in medieval Georgian, had to be necessarily Byzantine, while those of inferior quality had to belong to the local culture, even if accompanied by Greek scripts.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that the proposals made by the Russian scholar did not correspond, at least in broad terms, to what is evident from the objects themselves. The medieval cultures of Armenia and Iberia were certainly connected but clearly distinct, especially after the seventh century.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, on a qualitative level, some of the objects produced in the region surpass Constantinopolitan production.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the fact that the collapsed dome of the Hagia Sophia was repaired in the tenth century by an Armenian architect, Tiridates (c. 940s–1020), confirms that medieval hierarchies were much more complex than Kondakov allowed for.<sup>32</sup> Reading his texts, one cannot shake the impression that the need to present the region's art as that of an indistinct province corresponded to Russian colonial



*Figure 25.4* Dmitri Yermakov (1846–1916), The Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky in Tiflis, 1881–1916, photograph. © Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons.

interests.<sup>33</sup> A similar sentiment is also palpable in the Alexander Nevsky Church built in Tbilisi (consecrated in 1897), the capital of the viceroyalty, to celebrate the subjugation of the entire Caucasus (Figure 25.4).<sup>34</sup>

This Neo-Byzantine building, dedicated to Russia's national saint par excellence, dominated the city (and the region) clearly showing what Saint Petersburg's perspective was as follows: the whole region was to be perceived as having always been the colony of a great empire.

Kondakov's post-1900 research, too, often seems surprisingly in tune with Russian international policy: this is the case, for example, with his studies on North Macedonia, which, according to Kondakov, must be considered on historical, cultural and linguistic grounds as culturally Bulgarian: such "scholarly" research corresponded perfectly with Russian ambitions in the region.<sup>35</sup>

### Conclusion

One is therefore forced to conclude that the birth and development of Byzantine studies in Russia during the nineteenth century, in addition to being the fruit of genuine historical interest, was primarily a political endeavour. Within the framework of the "Great Game" pitting Russia against the British Empire for control of Central Asia, but more generally within the framework of Russia's imperial and expansionist policy, "Byzantium" proved to be a very useful tool to justify with history the ever-increasing appetite of the tsarist empire. This explains the substantial funds that were devoted to artistic production and

(art) historical research: art, architecture and scholarship, at least during the nineteenth century, were to visualise and demonstrate that a *translatio imperii* from Constantinople to Moscow had occurred.

As in the case of other European colonial empires, which throughout the nineteenth century used the past to justify the present, Russia followed a generalised trend. In the country of the tsars, however, this fiction was all the stronger as it was unanimously accepted in both Russia and the West. Unsurprisingly, it was at the end of the nineteenth century that the fifteenth-century letter of the monk Philotheus of Pskov (1465–1542) presenting Moscow as the Third Rome was first published.<sup>36</sup> Little did the original meaning of this medieval text matter, which had a mainly eschatological significance. In the Russia of the last Romanovs, the text became further proof that Moscow had always regarded itself as the true successor of Constantinople and that the Russian Empire therefore had a “dynastic right” to aspire to control the Orthodox world and to a certain extent the territories of the ancient eastern Roman Empire.

In this context it is interesting to observe the role of erudites and early professional scholars. They naturally participated in a project in which the interests of the empire seemed to coincide with those of their research. In Kondakov’s case, then, the situation was even more interesting since for him personally the empire had played an almost paternal role: it was thanks to the tsars’ reforms that he had been able to make an exceptional social ascent, so it is logical that his loyalty to the regime must have been immense.

It is obviously reductive to read the history of Byzantinism only through a political lens: a closer look reveals many more nuances: from the genuine interest of some intellectual groups in the Russo-Byzantine Orthodox past to a pan-European fashion for the medieval past and from personal interests – Kondakov admits in his memoirs that he chose to study Byzantine art history because it guaranteed him an academic career<sup>37</sup> – to a real, well-documented historical relationship between the empire of Constantinople and Rus. However, from a bird’s-eye view, and this is the perspective required of us in a handbook, the political use of the concept of Byzantium in Russia in the nineteenth century seems to have played the decisive role in the birth and development of the studies and in the construction of the country’s imperialist identity.

## Notes

1 Heller 1997: 661; Aizlewood 2000; Lieven 2009.

2 Kirichenko 2012; Foletti 2016.

3 Thon 1844; St. 218 Ustava Stroitel’nogo 1857.

4 Madariaga 2005.

5 Carrère d’Encausse 2006.

6 Kirichenko 2011.

7 Sakharov 1841–49; Rovinsky 1856.

8 Bertash 2011.

9 Gagarin 1856: II–III.

10 Kondakov 1927: 78.

11 Gábor 2011.

12 Foletti 2017; Kyzlasova 2018 with further bibliography.

13 Mironov and Elkov 2000.

14 For Buslajev in general see Kyzlasova 1985 and Medvedkova 2012. For his economic situation in his youth, see Pypin 1897; Kondakov 1927: 27.

15 See, e.g., Tunkina 2001; Foletti 2017: 36–7.

16 Velmezova 2007.

- 17 Vernadsky 1926: 12; Kyzlasova 1985: 84.
- 18 Kondakov 1873.
- 19 Kondakov 1876.
- 20 Foletti 2017: 178–9.
- 21 Reid 2000: 39–46.
- 22 Kondakov 1927: 78.
- 23 Kondakov 1879–81; Foletti 2013; Foletti 2017: 201–5.
- 24 Diehl 1900.
- 25 For Kondakov's bibliography, see Vernadsky 1926; Foletti 2017; Kyzlasova 2008.
- 26 Grégoire 1924.
- 27 Kondakov 1890; Kondakov and Tolstoy 1891.
- 28 Kondakov and Tolstoy 1891: 36.
- 29 Kondakov 1890: 7, 25, 28.
- 30 Donabédian 2020.
- 31 Michele Bacci et al. 2023.
- 32 Donabédian 1991; Maranci 2003.
- 33 Foletti 2016; Foletti et al. 2023.
- 34 Wortman 2003: 101–229.
- 35 Kondakov 1909; Vzdornov 2006.
- 36 Boček et al. 2019.
- 37 Kondakov 1927: 23–4.

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## 26

# “FROM DEATH TO NEW BIRTH”

## The Arts and Crafts Reappropriation of Byzantine Art and Architecture

*Dimitra Kotoula*

It is part of that change in the master art from late and decaying Classical into Byzantine, or, as I would rather call it, new-born Gothic art [...] when architecture seems to have taken a sudden leap, and, in fact, to have passed from death to new birth.<sup>1</sup>

This is how William Morris (1834–96) describes the evolution of the arts during the Byzantine era in *Some Hints on Pattern Designing*, his lecture first delivered in December 1881 before the Working Men’s College, Bloomsbury.

Morris and other founding members of the British Arts and Crafts movement, around the end of the nineteenth century, turned their lively interest to Gothic and Byzantine architecture and art as subversive precedents for modernity’s escape from the deathly grip of Classicism and the Neo-Classical values nurtured by the Renaissance. These pioneering figures rehabilitated Byzantium and its art as a direct response to the rapid industrialisation and commercialisation that was transforming Victorian Britain. John Ruskin’s (1819–1900) landmark three-volume *Stones of Venice*, published between 1851 and 1853, had argued convincingly on the social, moral and creative collapse of the arts from the fifteenth century onwards, positioning the Gothic and the Byzantine at the heart of the Arts and Crafts’ ideological and artistic concerns.<sup>2</sup>

Deepening Ruskin’s approach, pioneers of the movement such as Philip Webb (1831–1915) and William Richard Lethaby (1857–1931), masters of the Royal Academy (RA) and/or the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), favoured Byzantine art and architecture not just in artistic terms but also because Byzantine products were perceived to be the result of ethical, joyful craftsmanship. They shifted their interest in Byzantium from the surviving Italian monuments and their mosaic cycles to Byzantine monuments in the southeastern Mediterranean, thus expanding the field’s scope. Their projects, teachings and ethos decisively influenced a series of promising younger architects, such as Edward Schroeder Prior (1852–1932), Mervyn E. Macartney (1853–1932), Ernest Newton (1856–1922), Arthur Beresford Pite (1861–1934), Robert Weir Schultz (1860–1951), Ernest Gimson (1864–1919) and Sidney Howard Barnsley (1865–1926). Practising as apprentices in major architectural offices and organised into unions/bodies such as the Art Workers’ Guild

(f. 1884) and its offshoot, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (f. 1887), they developed the Neo-Gothic and Neo-Byzantine revivals in Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century, promoting the “popular art” and “unified” culture of Byzantium.<sup>3</sup>

### A Growth of Thought

“This art was not a matter of taste, it was a growth of thought cast into a historical mould”, Lethaby concluded in his entry on Byzantine art in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.<sup>4</sup> Arts and Crafts architects and artists admired Byzantine art with an almost mystical awe: for them this was not just a style or pattern of taste, like the predominant, usually highly ornate, ones of their era (the Victorian, Queen Anne styles or even Neo-Classicism) but a common-sense example of true craftsmanship, dignity and beauty that was still alive and remained largely in use through the churches they visited.

The architecture and art of Byzantium, created by and for the people, by largely unknown craftsmen, constituted for these practitioners a most remarkable example of an art that was both impressively inventive as well as notably practical and economical in terms of its execution/production. In the era of the Great Depression (c. 1875–95) and the rootless and restless stirrings of industrial capitalism, Byzantine art and architecture constituted for Arts and Crafts followers a unique example of common labour, full of the spirit of harmonious freedom and joy, a manifestation of the integrity, honesty and humanity of the true craftsman and artist.

The main principles of this art, the defining parameters of this “growth of thought”, were meticulously examined and analysed by Arts and Crafts pioneers. Their approach was mainly influenced by authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle and Walt Whitman and by the associated teachings of American transcendentalism – a philosophical, spiritual and literary movement that developed in New England, U.S. (1820s–30s) which promoted humanism, liberation from corrupted social restraints and a belief in the fundamental goodness of man. In this respect, the Arts and Crafts practitioners tried to establish a new relationship between art, architecture and society, trying to put themselves “into the historical state of the builder” and his world.<sup>5</sup> Following in the footsteps of Ruskin and the Grand-Tourists, they initiated long study trips: besides England and Italy, they soon turned to France to study the Northern Gothic so praised by Ruskin, and to a lesser degree to Germany and Spain, before moving further eastward. Lethaby’s research trip to Istanbul resulted in his much-celebrated monograph on Hagia Sophia (1897) with Swainson, which brought Byzantium to the core of the Arts and Crafts research agenda. Both he as well as the chief architect Richard Phené Spiers (1838–1916), who devoted part of his research to the surviving historical architecture in the East and the West, were also fascinated by the Byzantine churches of what was then Ottoman Thessaloniki which they examined *in situ* during their travels.<sup>6</sup>

“You must do it intelligibly” claimed Weir Schultz “in order to discover, underneath the surface, the reasons for doing things as they did and to learn how to build and create honestly, reasonably, efficiently and, thus, beautifully”.<sup>7</sup> Weir Schultz and Barnsley, active Arts and Crafts architects, RA students and colleagues at Shaw’s apprenticeship, would embark between 1888 and 1890 on a research trip in the eastern Mediterranean with a focus on Istanbul and Greece at Lethaby’s instigation and with the financial support of Edwin Freshfield (1832–1918), solicitor and amateur antiquarian, as well as the Third Marquess of Bute John Patrick Crichton-Stuart (1847–1900), a Scot with a keen interest in Byzantium. The outputs of their endeavours, enriched by later additions from Walter Sykes George (1882–1926) and William Harvey (1865–1926), would result in the Byzantine

Research and Publication Fund (BRPF, founded in 1907) and its Archive, now housed at the British School at Athens, which constitutes a definitive source for the reappropriation of Byzantine art and architecture under the Arts and Crafts lens.<sup>8</sup>

### **“A Moral and Intellectual Criticism on Old Material”**

This is how Lethaby described the achievements of Byzantine architects and artists as they were presented by Auguste Choisy (1841–1909) in his ground-breaking *L'art de bâtir* (1883).<sup>9</sup> Choisy's rehabilitation of Byzantine architecture in structural and material terms, as the inheritor of the Roman engineering system, along with the research of French scholars such as Eugene Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79), Félix de Verneilh (1820–64), Charles Bayet (1849–1918) and Albert Lenoir (1885–1909), particularly influenced the Arts and Crafts architects encouraging them to elaborate further and complete the French rationalistic approach by focusing also on the aesthetic qualities of the historic building such as the ornament or the spirituality of the created space. Equally, monographs that documented and explored, more or less systematically, previously unknown Byzantine material, such as those by André Couchaud and Charles Texier with Richard Popplewell-Pullan, were particularly favoured by scholars of the movement.<sup>10</sup> Part of the Arts and Crafts rehabilitation of the architectural and artistic production of the Byzantines was to elaborate further on the existing French literature in the field, correcting or remedying any inconsistencies.

Their approach defined Byzantine art and architecture according to the following perceived characteristics.

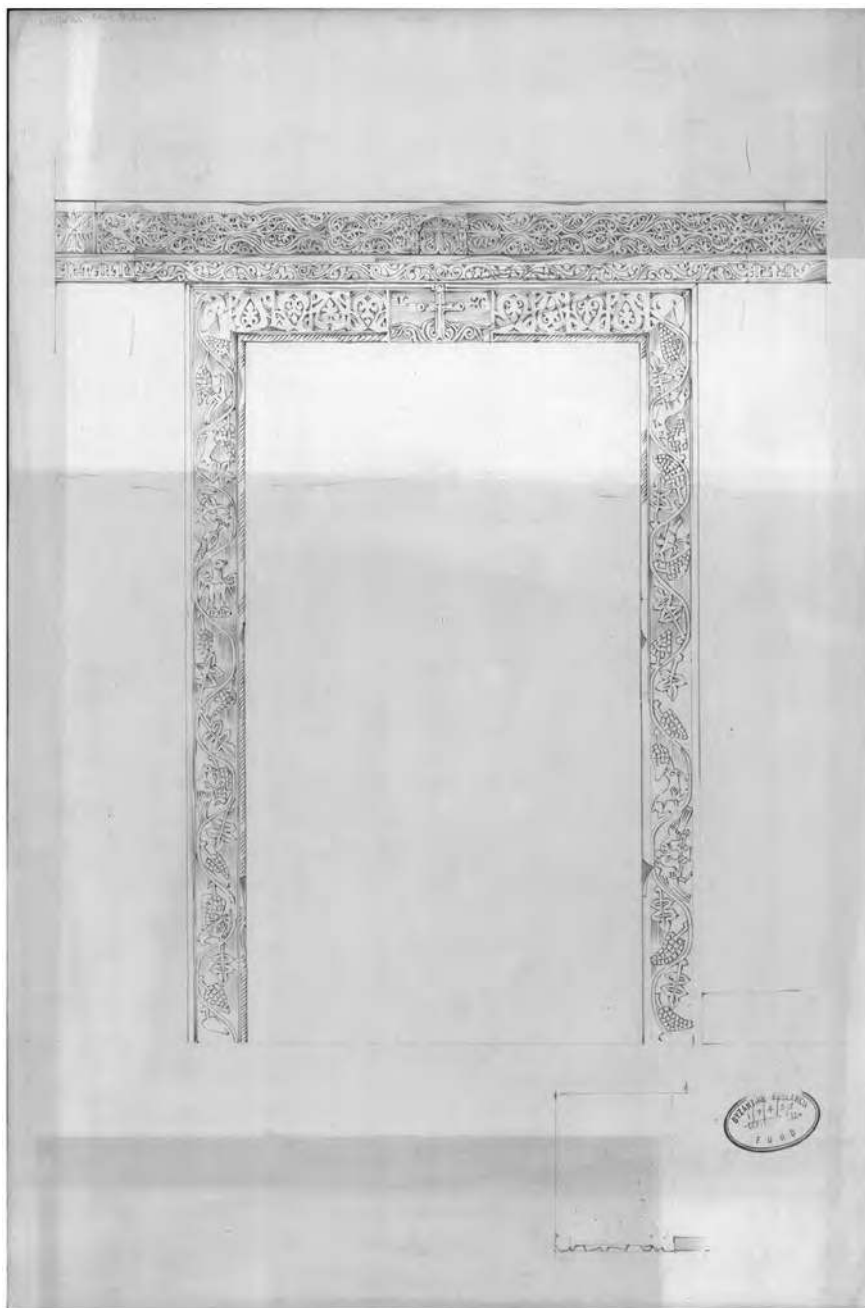
### ***“The Function of Architecture and Art [...] Is to Tell Us about Nature”<sup>11</sup>: The Byzantine Monument and Its Decoration as Natural Elements***

Nature was central to the ideology and aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts. Historical architecture and art – particularly the Gothic Cathedral and its decoration – were admired by Arts and Crafts devotees for their natural forms and their mystical connection to their physical setting. According to the Arts and Crafts approach, the natural elements and the labour of the hands of man collaborated secretly in shaping both secular and religious historical buildings, these were studied and interpreted by followers of the movement “as laboured over by nature and man for a millennium”.<sup>12</sup> Byzantine buildings, both religious and secular, were particularly appreciated as expressions of humanity's interconnection with the natural environment, appearing to spring organically from the stone or the ground in complete harmony, almost as natural formations themselves (Figure 26.1). Metaphysical comparisons were drawn between the development of plants and buildings and their various architectural parts (arches, vaults, floors, walls, halls etc.) which seemed to follow the arrangement of trees or other natural features and, in the best examples, were made exclusively of natural materials.

Equally, the art of the Byzantine church, especially its architectural decoration, was seen to evoke nature and the physical world, “whatever God has created” according to Ruskin.<sup>13</sup> Organic continuous physical growth, limitation, the interplay of light and darkness, flexibility and happy submission to the available surface were among the principal qualities that characterised the architectural relief and mosaic ornament of the Byzantine church, which reflected that of nature both in terms of its decorative patterns, which were mostly inspired by the physical world, plants and animals, as well as the way they developed and grew in continuous friezes almost as living organisms (Figure 26.2a and b). The image of



Figure 26.1 R. Weir Schultz and S. Barnsley, View of the monastery of the Pantanassa, Mistras, Peloponnese, 1888–90, Photograph, BRF 2/1/14/013, Byzantine Research Fund Archive, ©British School at Athens.



*Figure 26.2* (a) R. Weir Schultz and S. Barnsley, Upper part of marble relief lintel over entrance into the Panagia Gorgoepikoos Church (Little Mitropolis) Athens, 1888–90, Drawing, BRF 1/1/1/041, Byzantine Research Fund Archive, ©British School at Athens. *(Continued)*



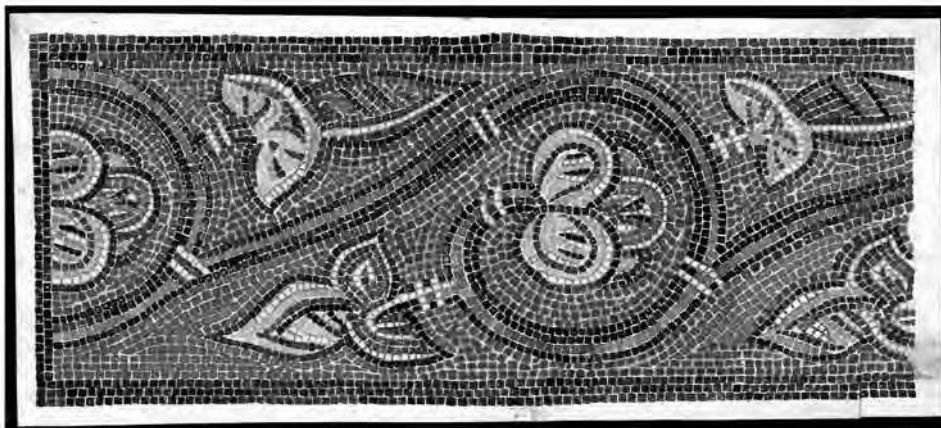


Figure 26.2 (Continued) (b) R. Weir Schultz and S. Barnsley, Mosaic decoration over entrance into the katholicon of the Hossios Loukas Monastery, Phocis, Central Greece, 1888–90, Drawing, BRF 1/1/4/209, Byzantine Research Fund Archive, ©British School at Athens.

the Byzantine capital was emblematic for the Arts and Crafts movement; it was considered “the most natural part” of the Byzantine church, studied in botanical terms and categorised according to leaf types.<sup>14</sup> The development of Byzantine art inside the church was a reflection of natural laws and processes in its order, wisdom and beauty.

*“A Door to Joy”: Reasonable, Intelligible and with  
Pleasurable Craftsmanship*

“The highest art is an expression of rapture: it opens the door to joy” Lethaby claimed, intensifying Morris’s firm belief that art should bring labour and joy together.<sup>15</sup> Byzantine art and architecture were thus favoured by the Arts and Crafts followers in psychological terms. As the result of a guild system of joined labour, with a master architect/artist in charge and a team of apprentices who followed his orders, Byzantine architecture and art were admired as the joyful product of a living art *par excellence*, the work of the hands of the simple stoneman or craftsman who worked freely “by the light of the higher commonsense”.<sup>16</sup> Economy in the method and the materials of this art was considered fundamental. This reasonable artistic method was combined with pleasurable craftsmanship. The Byzantine building and its art, for the Arts and Crafts agenda, was pure in its principles, reasonable in practice and beautiful to the eyes of all men – even the simplest work – as the product of joined pleasure, something that can never exist in any state or society in which men are divided into intellectual castes. The art of pattern-designing in particular began in Byzantium to be really delightful in and of itself: during its process of creation, according to Morris, “the mind of a man is happy in his work and this feeling guides all the hands that wrought it”.<sup>17</sup>

*“Tending to Greatness”<sup>18</sup>: The Byzantine Arch,  
the Capital and Their Decoration*

“The greatest achievement of Byzantine building is domical vaulting” according to Lethaby.<sup>19</sup> From the Arts and Crafts perspective, the dome system of the Byzantines, the vault, the arch, the column and the capital, exemplified their ability to critically revise the

Greco-Roman building tradition in a new light. In this respect, the exploitation of the structural and decorative qualities of the arch and capital by the Byzantines was considered pivotal and meticulously studied by the Arts and Crafts devotees. The “lesson of the column to carry an arch” was firmly supported in Byzantium by the “amazing delicacy” of ornamental decoration.<sup>20</sup> The architectural ornament, mainly the continuous relief friezes as well as the floral and/or animal decoration of the emblematic Byzantine capital, were particularly documented and thoroughly studied following Ruskin’s example in the *Stones*.



Figure 26.3 R. Weir Schultz and S. Barnsley, Capital, Church of St Dimitrios, Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, 1888–90, Photograph, BRF 2/1/7/012, Byzantine Research Fund Archive, Northern Greece, ©British School at Athens.

The recurring interwoven relief patterns and their arrangement made, according to the Arts and Crafts reading, “the stone look ductile” while the “living herbage” of the Byzantine capital transformed this supportive architectural member into a fresh work of fine art of the most thoughtful and profound simplicity (Figure 26.3).<sup>21</sup>

***“Imaginative Types of the Highest Perfection”<sup>22</sup>: Byzantine Mosaic***

Byzantine mosaic – this “magnificent kind of painting” according to Lethaby<sup>23</sup> – was meticulously studied in particular by Morris, who made its materials, pattern and significance central to his theoretical work and projects. For Morris, Byzantine mosaic fulfilled all requirements for the best possible art<sup>24</sup>: beauty, limitation, imagination, wealth of colour, order and arrangement as free choices happily executed and transmitting a certain spirituality. Yet, the “physical act” of arrangement, according to Ruskin, in Byzantine mosaic had the “extraordinary power of consecrating and abstracting the great things of a story into a few elements or symbols”.<sup>25</sup> The Byzantine craftsman working with natural materials and “copying the process never the forms of Nature”, as Spiers and Fergusson had masterfully put it,<sup>26</sup> narrated stories of the highest symbolism. Foliated bands enlivened by figures of animals and/or birds, mainly the symbolic peacock, evoked certain emotions and spiritual qualities, such as peacefulness, grace and tranquillity, elevating the spirit of man and bringing him closer to the physical world and connecting him with his inner essence. The re-invention and not the mere imitation of natural laws by Byzantine craftsmen and artists enhanced the creative power of the human mind and seems to have influenced significantly Arts and Crafts masters such as William Morris (Figure 26.4a and b).



Figure 26.4 (a) R. Weir Schultz and S. Barnsley, Soffit mosaic, Church of Panagia Acheiropoietos, Thessaloniki, Northern Greece, 1888–90, Drawing, BRF 1/1/7/019, Byzantine Research Fund Archive, ©British School at Athens. (b) William Morris (1834–96), Strawberry Thief, 1883, Indigo-discharged and block-printed cotton, V&A Museum no. T.586-1919, London, © Public Domain.

*The Living Art of the Byzantines*

Particularly appealing to Arts and Crafts devotees was the concept of “living history”, a term coined by Morris during his early Oxford studies to describe his approach to the Middle Ages, as opposed to other “formal” disciplines and studies; it was an era that, according to his rather romantic fascination, was still tangible and could be recreated through demonstrations of daily life, its art and crafts, activities and settings in an interactive way.<sup>27</sup> Equally attractive to them was literature, such as George Finley’s *History*, which promoted a continuous national narrative from the Classical era up until Modern times for newly established national states, mainly in the Balkans.<sup>28</sup> In this light, the idea of a “popular culture” and a “living art” were particularly promulgated by the Arts and Crafts pioneers.

The liturgical space of the Byzantine church offered them the most telling example of a building with a specific function that remained largely in use serving the metaphysical needs of the beholder outside any specific religion or dogma, especially in the case of Byzantine churches reconsecrated as mosques. Besides the architecture and architectural decoration with its potentially ever-expanding mosaic and relief patterns that, inspired by the natural world, animated the building infusing it with new life, the icons, ivories, metal work liturgical objects and ecclesiastical furniture and textiles – the material culture of the Byzantine church that was still in use – fascinated the Arts and Crafts intellectuals and they were carefully documented and meticulously studied. Religious feasts and gatherings would be recorded with the same zeal and there was notable interest in the used objects and their function (Figure 26.5). Their keen interest was further fuelled by the



Figure 26.5 R. Weir Schultz and S. Barnsley, Encased skulls from the treasury of the monastery of Hosios Loukas, Phocis, Central Greece, 1888–90, Photograph, BRF 2/1/4/080, Byzantine Research Fund Archive, ©British School at Athens.



introduction, during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, of folklore studies into European research agendas that fascinated many of the Arts and Crafts followers. Morris's daughter, May, would produce fine embroideries inspired by Byzantine and post-Byzantine patterns on secular and ecclesiastical examples as these were recorded and later published by the archaeologist Alan Wace who was based at the British School like Weir Schultz and Barnsley.<sup>29</sup>

Another "mystical ornament", according to Morris, the Holy Tree or Tree of Life with Persian and Assyrian roots – which had entered Byzantine and post-Byzantine art disguised as the Tree of Jesse and the iconography of Mary with the Prophets alluding to the Incarnation – enhanced even further the vigorousness of the church environment for the Arts and Crafts with the arrangement of their iconographic elements in the form of a tree.<sup>30</sup> All these contributed considerably to introducing Byzantine iconography and the religious space it decorated, the Byzantine church, into the world's art history as "vigorously alive" and having "utterly thrown aside all pedantic encumbrances".<sup>31</sup>

### How to Build

"If the architect just sits in his office making picturesque drawings, he may be an accomplished draughtsman, but he is not an architect" claimed Shaw, the master who trained the younger generation of Arts and Crafts architects.<sup>32</sup> The detailed study of the crafts of the Byzantines and their methods had an ultimate purpose for the Arts and Crafts pioneers: they would teach them how to build and create, to become true craftsmen and artists.

Detailed study of their subsequent projects certainly lies beyond the intended purposes of this chapter. However, it is worth just highlighting here the diversity and plurality of their endeavours and the universalism of their projects, since they worked in various countries in buildings of different architectural types destined for diverse religious groups, another principal quality that Arts and Crafts intellectuals assigned to Byzantine art and architecture. In this light, Weir Schultz designed the plan of the All Saints Anglican Cathedral in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Khartoum (f. 1906) based on the transept-basilica plan of the church of St Dimitrios, Thessaloniki, the then Ottoman city in northern Greece whose Byzantine churches were documented with Barnsley in the 1890s. The ecclesiastical furniture in the building recalls the functionality and design of similar types that he recorded during his research trips in southern Greece with Barnsley.<sup>33</sup> Equally, the technique of the ivory inlay pattern that Weir Schultz and Barnsley recorded in a series of post-Byzantine church furniture in Laconia, Mani, Greece, around the same year, provided inspiration for the inlaid stalls in the St Andrew Chapel in the Roman-Catholic Westminster Cathedral (f. 1895) executed by Weir Schultz with the financial support of the Marquess of Bute, sponsor of the Weir Schultz/Barnsley Greek research trip. The same technique was applied to a series of wooden objects created by Barnsley. Studies of the marble floor pavements (opus sectile) in the Panagia Church of the Hosios Loukas monastic complex, Phocis, Greece, recorded also by Weir Schultz and Barnsley seem to have inspired the marble flooring in that very same chapel while they bear impressive similarities to the floor studies of Canterbury Cathedral executed by Ernest Gimson in 1889/90. Finally, the Roman-Catholic church of the Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia) at Lower Kingswood, Surrey (f. 1895), with Barnsley as architect and Freshfield, the other sponsor of the Weir Schultz/Barnsley research trip, as patron, possibly constitutes, both in its details and as a whole, one of the finest manifestations of the admiration of Arts and Crafts intellectuals for Byzantine building. The apse mosaics

recall the Constantinopolitan church of St Irene; its name alludes directly to the Byzantine cathedral of St Sophia (Hagia Sophia), Constantinople, which was much-celebrated by the Arts and Crafts movement; as does the polychromy of the floor and the walls as well as the joyful yet reasonable and focused decorativeness of the interior. The church displays in a prominent position, in the nave, almost in front of the holy bema, a sample of the original capitals from the renowned St John the Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople sourced during the Weir Schultz/Barnsley research trip in the Ottoman city.<sup>34</sup> The masonry at Surrey, executed in alternate courses of brickwork in decorative patterns, recalls most vividly the building technique of the exterior of the Byzantine church of St Vasilios, Arta, western Greece, recorded also during the Weir Schultz/Barnsley research trip. The design was praised as “excellent” by Weir Schultz in his later publications.<sup>35</sup>

“The ‘Decline and Fall’ gave the new life-spring in Byzantium” claims Webb in his correspondence with Lethaby interpreting, after Morris, Byzantine art as the new birth of the degenerated and fallen Greco-Roman art. “Possibly” he continues “this example of the Byzantines, the submerging of commerce and the general purification of England from luxury, might give fresh inspiration to art for us”.<sup>36</sup> Inspiration, reinvigoration and a fresh start were in fact the benefits that British artists and architects were hoping to gain not from the banal copying of Byzantine artistic forms but from close study of the ways the Byzantines managed to reinvigorate Greco-Roman art, making a new start. The produced Neo-Byzantine examples undoubtedly attest to this.

## Notes

- 1 [Morris 1899](#): 15.
- 2 [Ruskin 1851–1853](#).
- 3 [Kotoula 2015](#).
- 4 [Lethaby 1910](#): 909.
- 5 [Emerson 1841](#): Essay I, 10.
- 6 [Lethaby and Swainson 1894](#).
- 7 [Weir Schultz 1909](#): 10.
- 8 [Kotoula 2024](#).
- 9 [Choisy 1883](#).
- 10 [Couchaud 1842](#) and [Texier and Popplewell-Pullan 1864](#).
- 11 Ruskin 1st ed. 1851, Vol. I: Library Edition 1903, Vol. IX: 411.
- 12 From the typewritten notes by Lethaby kept in the Library of the SPBS, London, quote no 35.
- 13 Ruskin 1st ed. 1851, Vol. I: Library Edition 1903, Vol. IX: 265.
- 14 Ruskin 1st ed. 1853, Vol. II: Library Edition 1904, Vol. X: 161.
- 15 From the typewritten notes by Lethaby kept in the Library of the SPBS, London, quote no 190 and [Morris 1893](#): 25.
- 16 From the typewritten notes by Lethaby kept in the Library of the SPBS, London, quote no 243.
- 17 [Morris 1882](#): 165–6.
- 18 Ruskin 1st ed. 1853, Vol. II: Library Edition 1904, Vol. X: 160.
- 19 [Lethaby 1904](#): 38.
- 20 [Morris 1893](#): 19 and 33.
- 21 Ruskin 1st ed. 1869: Library Edition 1905, Vol. XIX: Section III, Part VII, 258 and Ruskin 1st ed. 1853, Vol. II: Library Edition 1904, Vol. X: 160–1.
- 22 [Lethaby 1910](#): 910.
- 23 [Lethaby 1910](#): 911.
- 24 [Morris 1899](#): 6 and 7.
- 25 Ruskin 1st ed. 1851, Vol. I: Library Edition 1903, Vol. IX: 305 and [Lethaby 1910](#): 910.
- 26 [Spiers and Fergusson 1893](#), Vol. I: Part I, Section XV, 40–3.

- 27 Swenarton 1989: 65–7.
- 28 Finlay 1851.
- 29 Wace and Trevor 1914.
- 30 Morris 1882: 143 and 161–2.
- 31 Morris 1882: 127–8.
- 32 Shaw 1892 7.
- 33 Cormack 2013.
- 34 Vanni and Varsalova 2024.
- 35 Weir Schutz 1909: 30.
- 36 Lethaby 1935: 133.

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# GEORGIAN ALTAR SCREENS AND BYZANTINE REVIVALISM 1800–1920

*Irene Giviashvili and Anna Mgaloblishvili*

This chapter explores Georgian Neo-Byzantinism through the lens of altar screens as key architectural elements within eastern Christian churches, with a focus on their development during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Providing a foundational contribution to both Georgian art history and broader scholarship on altar screens, this study introduces a novel perspective by situating these structures within Neo-Byzantine discourse, a previously unexplored subject.

Selected for discussion are two altar screen projects realised in Georgia by Grigory Gagarin (1810–93), one of the founders of the Neo-Byzantine style in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire. These works represent some of the earliest examples of this style within the empire and they carry both programmatic and conceptual significance. In addition, two important altar screens from the early twentieth century are examined, reflecting the specifically Georgian approach to altar screens. Despite their modest dimensions and limited preservation, altar screens from these periods serve as mirrors of their respective eras, reflecting both artistic aspirations and tendencies in Georgian artistic production (art, architecture, sculpture and painting), as well as events that were taking place in the political and spiritual life of the country.<sup>1</sup>

## Historical Overview

The nineteenth century began with Georgia losing both its statehood in 1801 and the autocephaly of the Georgian Church in 1811, reducing it to a peripheral region of the Russian Empire.<sup>2</sup> Church art in nineteenth-century Georgia was largely shaped by Russian and European professional artists and architects, as there were no higher institutions of art in the country at the time. However, groups of local master craftsmen and artels were also active in this field,<sup>3</sup> functioning in many respects as continuators of long-standing artistic traditions from earlier centuries.

Against the backdrop of Slavophile discourse, Russian Orthodoxy in this period connected its sacred mission with the Christian legacy of Byzantium (the “Second Rome”) and Russia (the “Third Rome”), while embracing the popular Neo-Byzantine style that emerged from Romanticism and Historicism in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Russian imperial scholars

developed an interest in the medieval monuments of Georgia, which they envisioned as a Byzantine heritage, with the added significance that Georgia had the oldest Orthodox culture within the empire.<sup>5</sup> Their publications, richly illustrated with drawings and photographs, represented one of the first steps in the systematic study of Georgian antiquities.<sup>6</sup> Notably, the first examples of Neo-Byzantine church murals and altar screens within the Russian Empire were created in Georgia.<sup>7</sup>

The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by two pivotal events: the restoration of the Georgian Church's autocephaly in 1917 and the declaration of Georgian independence in 1918.<sup>8</sup> The turn of the twentieth century heralded a new era in ecclesiastical art led by Georgian professional artists educated in Europe and Russia.<sup>9</sup> Together with the Georgian clergy<sup>10</sup> these artists helped Georgian scholars to initiate a new phase of systematic research and the preservation of national art and antiquities. It is noteworthy that as a result of this movement, intellectual and scholar Ekvtime Takaishvili (1863–1953) brought the Satkhe altar screen (1171) to Tbilisi Museum in 1910,<sup>11</sup> which remains one of the best-preserved examples from the golden era of Georgian architecture. It continues to serve as a significant object of scholarly interest and artistic inspiration for modern altar screens.<sup>12</sup>

### **An Overview of Altar Screens in Georgia**

In eastern Christian churches, the altar screen is a barrier that separates the sanctuary reserved for the clergy from the nave occupied by the laity. It serves as a symbolic boundary between the visible and invisible worlds. In the Georgian language, the altar screen is called *k'ank'eli*, a term derived ultimately from the Latin word meaning "barrier or starting-gate" (cancelli) by means of the ancient Greek *κᾱγκελος* (kangelos).<sup>13</sup>

Medieval Georgian altar screens developed from early Byzantine templons. The earliest surviving examples, dating back to the eighth century, are preserved only in fragments.<sup>14</sup> The greatest formal and stylistic development of the altar screen took place at the turn of the tenth to eleventh centuries, coinciding with the formation of liturgical rites and the political and cultural ascendancy of the Georgian state, which lasted until the thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> It was during this period that the Constantinopolitan rite was introduced into the liturgy in Georgia, replacing the Jerusalem Typikon.<sup>16</sup> Altar screens from this era exhibit several distinctive features, reflecting the specifically Georgian approach to the structure: they are crafted from local stone and medium-height, never tall enough to obscure the apse. Their lower perimeter consists of stone slabs with bas-reliefs of a theological nature, set within wide interlaced ornamental frames.<sup>17</sup>

The screens feature an arcade consistently surmounted by a horizontal entablature, and they have a single entrance, the Holy Doors, which could be decorated.<sup>18</sup> These arched portals were only covered with a curtain during certain moments of the ritual; otherwise, the altar was not hidden from the congregation.<sup>19</sup> Some screens also feature images of saints painted directly onto the altar screen, as well as geometric or floral ornamentation.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the traditional stone screens, wooden and alabaster altar screens also appeared during this period. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, these earlier stone altar screens were gradually replaced by solid wall structures. The lower parapet no longer contained theological reliefs; as a rule, they were adorned solely with ornamental carvings. However, some increased in height, incorporated multiple entrances, and featured icons as part of their decoration. These developments are believed to have originated from a tradition that emerged during the post-Byzantine period on Mount Athos. It is noteworthy that

the Iviron Monastery on Athos maintained strong connections and considerable power over the spiritual and ecclesiastical life of Georgia.<sup>21</sup>

As the Russian Church's influence over Georgian religious practices intensified from 1801 to 1918, the altar screen was gradually replaced by the Russian-style high iconostasis – a multi-panelled wall adorned with icons that almost completely conceals the altar from the congregation.<sup>22</sup> Russian-style iconostases were installed in numerous churches and cathedrals, notably in the country's most sacred sites, including Gelati, Svetitskhoveli and Sioni.

### **Revivalism: The Neo-Byzantine Style**

Gagarin, one of the aforementioned originators of the Neo-Byzantine style in the Russian Empire, was a military general and amateur painter who served in Tbilisi from 1848 to 1855.<sup>23</sup> Having spent much of his life in Europe, particularly in Rome and Paris, he was familiar with Byzantine monuments and European romantic and historicist movements. His interest in Georgian antiquities led him to travel extensively across Georgia, producing numerous sketches.<sup>24</sup> He also worked as an artist and architect.<sup>25</sup> In the early 1850s, Gagarin designed the interior of the Tbilisi Sioni Cathedral (sixth to the seventeenth centuries) (Figure 27.1). He painted

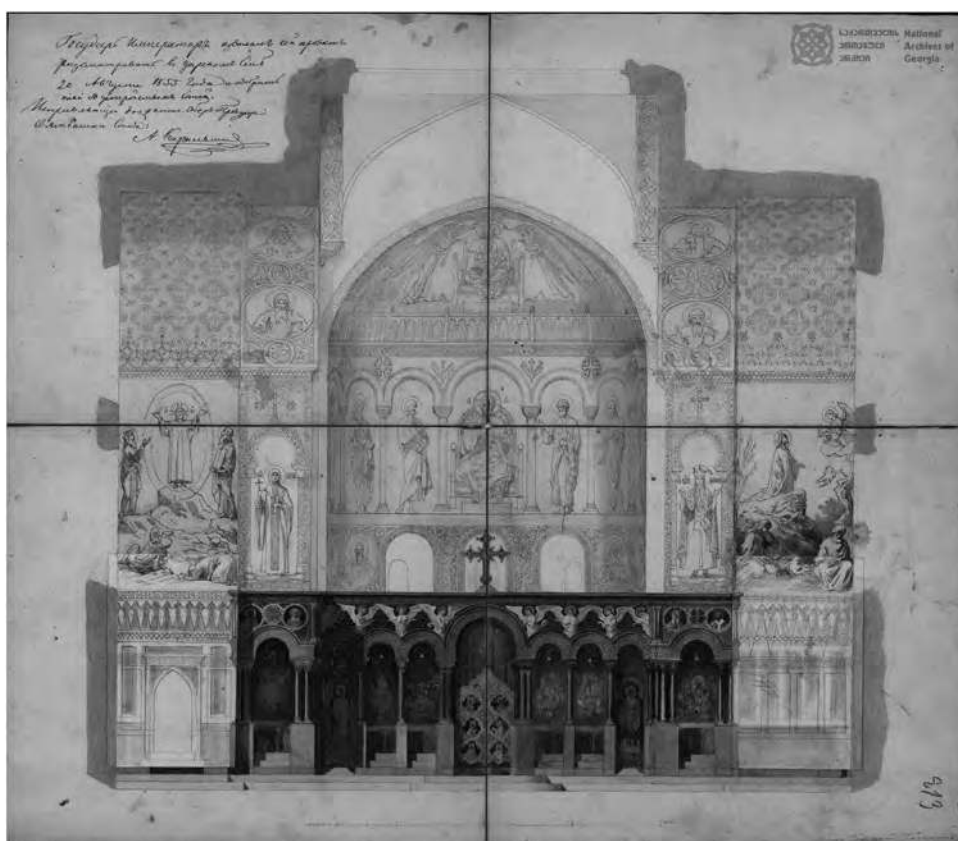


Figure 27.1 Grigory Gagarin (1810–93). The drawing of Sioni Cathedral altar screen, 1855. NAG Tbilisi, CHA, fonds 489, series 1, file 16615, p. 213.

it and installed a new altar screen,<sup>26</sup> providing the pioneering Neo-Byzantine examples within eastern Christian countries.<sup>27</sup> From a conceptual perspective, reviving the Byzantine programme throughout the church was very important to Gagarin, which in turn related to issues of harmony between a low sanctuary barrier, the paintings and the architecture. Through arched openings and segmented visual forms, the screen bore a resemblance to traditional Georgian versions. It is known with certainty that the prototype for the chancel was derived from the medieval Georgian church of Old Shuamta (fifth to seventh centuries).<sup>28</sup> Gagarin's altar screen consisted of seven arches with three entrances and two side niches,<sup>29</sup> one enshrining the cross of St Nino.<sup>30</sup> Four silver-plated and gilded icons sent from Moscow were installed within the arched openings. The icon of Christ was positioned to the left of the Holy Doors, and that of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary to the right, each flanked by representations of saints. In the case of Sioni, the composition includes John the Baptist on the left, and paired icons of St Nicholas and Metropolitan Dimitri of Rostov on the right, respectively.<sup>31</sup> On the royal doors there were the Annunciation and the four evangelists. As a result of extensive discussion in Russia, such an arrangement became practically canonical for Neo-Byzantine low-barrier altar screens.<sup>32</sup> Gagarin's use of monumental scale, diversity of materials and opulence undermined the traditional sense of simplicity in the design of Georgian churches. This provided the basis for the spread of altar screens of the same type throughout the Russian Empire. Unfortunately, his altar screen has not survived, and we rely solely on preserved visual and textual sources.<sup>33</sup>

Another example from Gagarin's works is an altar screen originally created for the chapel of the Orbeliani Palace,<sup>34</sup> which belonged to the Georgian aristocratic family of Grigol Orbeliani (1904–83), a romantic poet and general in the service of the Russian Empire.

Gagarin maintained a friendship with members of the Orbeliani family. The Orbeliani chapel no longer exists, making it difficult to determine the altar screen's original placement. In 1919, the screen was reinstalled in the lower church of Kashveti in Tbilisi, with its sides partially trimmed to fit the existing space (Figure 27.2).<sup>35</sup> The screen's structural composition clearly echoes traditional Georgian examples. Constructed of wood and covered with alabaster, it features interlaced ornamentation based on medieval decorative vocabulary.



*Figure 27.2* Grigory Gagarin (1810–93), The altar screen from Orbeliani Palace church, mid-nineteenth century (at the Kashveti lower church, Tbilisi, since 1919), photograph © Anna Mgaloblishvili.

The pillars are supplied with Byzantine-style basket capitals, while the slabs on the lower perimeter are decorated with Chi Rho monograms incorporating the Greek symbols/ letters “alpha” and “omega” – typical in Byzantine iconography and unfamiliar in Georgian visual traditions. The royal doors, with their “Moorish” Revival forms, display icons of the four evangelists and the Annunciation. The doors are flanked on either side by double arcades, framing painted icons: the *Hodegetria* on the left and Christ Enthroned on the right, followed by standing archangels. Currently, the icons of Olga and Alexander Nevsky (historical persons of the tenth and thirteenth centuries, respectively; both made a saint by the Russian Church in 1547) from the lateral arches are placed inside the sanctuary. Above the Holy Doors was an icon of the Last Supper, following Leonardo da Vinci’s composition, which could not fit under the low ceiling of the church and was later incorporated into the altar screen of the upper church of Kashveti, discussed below. From a contemporary point of view, the overall aesthetic of the images appears to be a stylistic fusion of nineteenth-century Classicism and Art Nouveau. However, in Gagarin’s time, viewers regarded these icons, embellished with gold backgrounds, as unmistakably Neo-Byzantine in character.

### Revivalism: The Georgian Style

Rooted in the continuation of traditional Georgian altar screen design, the altar screen of Tbilisi’s Kashveti St George Church embodies the revival and reinterpretation of native forms within a modern context (Figure 27.3). Commissioned by Georgian patrons,



Figure 27.3 Eduardo Andreoletti (1872–1938?) and Henryk Hryniewski (1869–1938), Altar screen of Kashveti St George Church, Tbilisi, photograph. © Irene Giviashvili.



it was designed by the Italian architect Eduardo Andreoletti (1872–1938).<sup>36</sup> The project consciously drew upon the aesthetic language of medieval Georgian church architecture, while at the same time engaging with Neo-Byzantine and Neo-Classical stylistic currents. Its decorative rendering and division into forms that approximate visual illusions (its horizontal arcade topped by a basilican church-shaped pediment over the Holy Doors, hanging trefoil festoons on the arches over the doors, interlaced geometrical ornamentation and bas reliefs with vine scrolls) reveal a strong connection to eleventh to thirteenth century Georgian architectural elements.<sup>37</sup> Rather than using local stone, the altar screen's external cladding was crafted from costly Italian marble, deliberately evoking luxury and splendour.

Notably this material was widely used across the Russian Empire for Neo-Byzantine altar screens.<sup>38</sup> The spans of the colonnade differ in size, creating a dynamic rhythm that contains the large icons. The stonework was executed by local stonemason N. Agladze (1874–1956), while the icon paintings were commissioned from H. Hryniewski (1869–1938), a Georgian-Polish artist who had trained in Italy and Germany and intensely studied medieval Georgian art. While the arrangement of icons on the Kashveti altar screen follows the Neo-Byzantine system,<sup>39</sup> it incorporates saints of local importance in the Georgian context, including St George and St Nino. The Last Supper appears above the Holy Doors. Though the flanking angels display Renaissance features, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Kalistratus (Callistratus) Tsintsadze (1866–1952), then a priest at Kashveti, noted that the *ripidions* they hold are depictions of liturgical objects from Gelati Monastery.<sup>40</sup> The Gelati church has the only large medieval Georgian mosaic related to Byzantine traditions.

Between 1912 and 1914, the artist Dimitri Shevardnadze (1885–1937), who had recently returned from the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, designed the altar screen for the chapel at the Mining and Technical College in Chiatura.<sup>41</sup> This altar screen no longer exists and our discussion relies on photos and sketches created for the project.<sup>42</sup> For the painting of the Chiatura church, Shevardnadze took photographs of medieval Georgian church antiquities (Figure 27.4).<sup>43</sup> The sketches for the altar screen also reveal the artist's aspiration to echo ancient works of art, or to capture their essence and tone, in both the forms and character of his design. Among his references were images published in Praskovya Uvarova's significant multi-volume series on Caucasian archaeology from 1898.<sup>44</sup>

The wooden altar screen stands on a raised wooden solea, with a protruding ambo, before the sole entrance – the Holy Doors. Slightly projecting and gabled, the structure features an arched doorway framed by a decorative grid reminiscent of a medieval tympanum. This entire design, inspired by medieval porches, simultaneously evokes both the entrance gate of a Georgian church and the sanctuary door.<sup>45</sup> The sequence in which icons are arranged, similar to the arrangement on the altar screen of Kashveti Church, is based on the Neo-Byzantine system. Shevardnadze enhanced this arrangement by adding icons of Georgian Queens Ss Tamar and Ketevan set against gilded backgrounds. The prototype of the St Tamar's representation is undoubtedly her twelfth-century painted portrait in Betania Church, 16 km southwest of Tbilisi, a significant work whose discovery and restoration is associated with Gagarin.<sup>46</sup>

A thorough analysis of the Kashveti and Chiatura altar screens reveals their synthesis of medieval Georgian artistic traditions with elements characteristic of the Russian Neo-Byzantine style. The artists, educated in the leading European art schools, absorbed and reflected stylistic tendencies from nineteenth-century European Realism and Romanticism, while the early twentieth-century modernist context further shaped their formal approach.<sup>47</sup> Yet, among these diverse influences, the search for authentic Georgian medieval origins





*Figure 27.4* Dimitri Shevardnadze (1885–1937), Altar screen of the chapel at Mining-Technical College, Chiatura, 1912–14, photograph. © Anna Mgaloblishvili photo collection.

emerged as the dominant creative direction, all other stylistic borrowings serving merely as means and methods towards this national artistic revival. It should also be noted that, while the altar screens designed by Gagarin depict Russian saints, those at Kashveti and Chiatura prominently represent important saints of the Georgian Church, reflecting a distinct cultural reclamation.

### **Beyond Georgia**

Georgian architectural forms and motifs were widely adopted in Neo-Byzantine projects outside of Georgia. They were supported by publications that served as essential reference materials for imperial architects.<sup>48</sup> A notable example can still be seen in the tenth-century Armenian church of the Apostles (now a mosque) in Kars (Turkey).<sup>49</sup> In 1879, David Grimm (1823–98) was commissioned to adapt this church to serve the needs of a Russian military cathedral, which he accomplished by designing an altar screen.<sup>50</sup> Its lower stone slabs feature geometric ornamentation, while its arches with slender, intertwined columns and capitals clearly reflect motifs from the Georgian cathedral of Manglisi (eleventh

century), which Grimm had documented and published.<sup>51</sup> Constructed in white, grey and pink marble, the screen exemplifies the Neo-Byzantine aesthetic that characterised imperial religious architecture of the period.

## Conclusion

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Georgia, under the Russian tsars, participated in the transnational Neo-Byzantine movement, developing its own distinctive response. Inspired by Romanticism and Historicism, this revival returned to the deeply Christian culture of the country, a development clearly embodied in the period's altar screens. Formally and conceptually, the movement evidenced two distinct trajectories. The first was grounded in Russian Neo-Byzantine approaches: imperial architects adopted medieval Georgian altar screens as primary prototypes, facilitating the establishment of low-barrier altar screens within the Russian Empire and beyond its borders. The second trajectory, supported by the Neo-Byzantine experience accumulated in the nineteenth century, was characterised by a search for Georgian traditions, drawing inspiration from native architectural forms and iconography. This direction was pioneered by Georgian artists who aimed to revive and reinterpret the visual language of the medieval national heritage within a modern context. The altar screens of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries thus represent living examples of unbroken tradition, serving as bridges connecting medieval practices – primarily from the eleventh through thirteenth centuries – with contemporary ecclesiastical design.

## Notes

- 1 Rayfield 2014: 138–49.
- 2 Suny 1994: 56–9.
- 3 Dzutsova 2014: 110–44.
- 4 Bullen 2003.
- 5 Foletti et. al. 2023.
- 6 Grimm 1864; Kondakov 1876; Uvarova 1888–1916; Bakradze 1873: 993–1104; Khoshtaria 2023: 90–6.
- 7 Mgaloblishvili 2017: 98–104.
- 8 Rayfield 2012: 306–38; Rayfield 2014: 159–68.
- 9 Beridze, 2018: 81–123.
- 10 Tumanishvili 2001: 241–65.
- 11 Takaishvili 1951: 153–75; Shmerling 1962: 187–90.
- 12 Burchuladze 2009: 47, 53, 56, 82.
- 13 Liddell and Scott 1940.
- 14 Shmerling 1962: 60–115; Iamanidzé 2010: 103–14; Dadiani 2017: 230–67.
- 15 Rayfield 2012: 73–99.
- 16 Gviashvili 2021: 64–89.
- 17 Volskaya 1957; Shmerling 1962: 116–98.
- 18 Shmerling 1962: 116–98; Iamanidzé 2010: 103–14.
- 19 Shmerling 1962: 3; Patricios 2014: 81–2; Meladze 2023: 65–85.
- 20 Meladze 2023: 66–85.
- 21 Speake 2018: 54–63.
- 22 This form developed in Russia during fourteenth/fifteenth to the seventeenth century. See Melvani 2015: 305–26; Yevseyeva 2020: 413–30.
- 23 Kornilova 2001.
- 24 Gagarin 1847; Gagarin 1897; Gagarin 1900; Gagarin 1903.

- 25 Nedd 2023: 75–98.
- 26 NAG, CHA, fonds. 488, series 1, file. 16009, p. 127.
- 27 Ioseliani, 1866: 103–12; Mgaloblishvili 2020–21: 169–75.
- 28 Gagarin's sketch of the now completely lost Shuamta chancel screen is the only surviving visual evidence. See Gagarin 1847: Pl. LXIII, pic. 20; Gagarin 1900: tab. XXIX.
- 29 Gagarin's project was concluded by the architect Braunmüllem. See NAG Tbilisi, CHA, fonds 489, series 1, file 16615: 3.
- 30 Ioseliani 1866: 123.
- 31 Tkemaladze 1904: 14–6.
- 32 Katson 2000: 689–700.
- 33 NAG Tbilisi, CHA, fonds 489, series 1, file 16615, p. 213; Tkemaladze 1904: 14–6.
- 34 The palace chapel can be found on the maps from 1867, see: Plan 1867.
- 35 Tsintsadze 2019: 171.
- 36 Tsintsadze 2019: 37–46.
- 37 Shmerling 1962: 199–220.
- 38 Katson 2000: 689–700.
- 39 Mgaloblishvili 2007: 42–51.
- 40 Tsintsadze 2019: 45; Khuskivadze and Tumanishvili 2007, 275, ill.123.
- 41 Abesadze and Bagratishvili 1998.
- 42 NAG Tbilisi, KCA, fond 139, series 3, file 44, 1–6.
- 43 Chumbadze 1912: 2.
- 44 Uvarova 1898, vol VII, tab. XII.
- 45 Mgaloblishvili 2023: 91–105.
- 46 Gagarin 1851: 294–5; Eastmond 1998: 154–81.
- 47 Betancourt and Taroutina 2014.
- 48 Khoshtaria 2016: 31–49.
- 49 Gurallar 2020: 254.
- 50 Yermolayev 1902: 10–1.
- 51 Grimm 1864: pl. III.

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## 28

# BEARDEN'S BYZANTIUM

## Two Madonnas

*Alicia Walker*

**“... something other than mere designs”**

The artist Romare Bearden (1911–88) is best known for his innovative collage paintings of the 1960s to 1980s, which explore the complexities of African American experience in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Bearden sought to capture the uniqueness of Black subjectivity and identity while also staking a claim for his oeuvre within a “universal” history of humanity and art. This latter goal is discernible in the recognition he paid to great artists of other cultures and periods, as with his evaluation of Rembrandt (1606–69) in an essay of 1934: “Rembrandt painted the ordinary Dutch people about him, but he presented human emotions in such a way that their appeal was universal”.<sup>2</sup>

Bearden’s collage work grew from several, distinct periods of his earlier aesthetic and technical exploration, from political cartoons and social realist paintings in the 1930s, to Cubist-inspired figural abstraction in the 1940s, to non-figural abstraction in the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> Throughout his career, Bearden engaged in careful study of art historical styles and techniques in diverse media, aiming to portray both milestones and everyday events of African American life in terms that resonated with canonical myths and rituals from across human history.<sup>4</sup> Reflecting on the unifying impetus behind his oeuvre, he wrote in 1972:

In my work, if anything I seek connections so that my paintings can’t be only what they appear to represent. People in a Baptism in a Virginia stream are linked to John the Baptist, to ancient purification rites, and to their African heritage. I feel this continuation of rituals gives a dimension to the works so that the works are something other than mere designs.<sup>5</sup>

Inspired by instructors and colleagues he encountered in New York during the 1930s and 1940s, Bearden attended carefully to art historical antecedents, appropriating aspects of spatial structure, figural composition and emotional charge from diverse traditions. He emulated European *avant-garde* and Old Master paintings, but also Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, African and African American artistic models.<sup>6</sup> Like many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European modernists – such as Vincent Van Gogh

(1853–90), Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and Georges Rouault (1871–1958), among others – Bearden was also inspired by Byzantine art, especially wood panel painting and mosaics as well as the works of “Italian primitive” painters, like Giotto (1267–1337) and Duccio (d. 1319), whose panels and murals were deeply influenced by Byzantine exemplars.<sup>7</sup>

Bearden's innovative use of Byzantine models did not, however, conform to the dominant formalist aesthetics of the mid-twentieth-century American *avant-garde*. In particular, his vision ran counter to the emphasis on two-dimensional, painterly surfaces and the commitment to pure abstraction promoted by the leading mid-twentieth-century New York art critic, Clement Greenberg (1909–94).<sup>8</sup> Both Greenberg and Bearden found inspiration in Byzantine art as a precedent for modernist painting but in different ways. Greenberg's Byzantium was one in which the perceived flatness of the medieval icon offered art historical legitimacy for contemporary painterly abstraction. In contrast, Bearden's Byzantium remained committed to depicting the human figure in space and emphasised structural coherence in painting, even while introducing tensions between representation and abstraction, flatness and depth.

This chapter analyses three examples of Bearden's conversation with Byzantine and Byzantinising art: *Madonna and Child* (1945) (Figure 28.1), *Black Mother and Child* (1970) (Figure 28.3) and *Mother and Child* (1977) (Figure 28.4). Created over the course of more than 30 years, these paintings have in common the appropriation of Byzantine (or Italo-Byzantine) models but Bearden reworked these sources to produce images in innovative stylistic modes that preserve the resonant emotional expression of the original medieval icons.<sup>9</sup> These paintings and prints epitomise Bearden's efforts to locate his work's unique place in art history by, as he attested in 1975, “reaching into your consciousness of black experience and relating it to universals”.<sup>10</sup> However, the later works of the 1970s foreground Black subjectivity and identity more forcefully, such that they not only demonstrate Bearden's understanding of the art historical canon and his place within it but also take up space within that canon, demanding recognition of his oeuvre's unique position in the history of art and the distinct experiences of African Americans within American society.<sup>11</sup>

### “... not to seek surface elements but essences”

Bearden's meticulous study of artistic models began under the tutelage of the German Expressionist artist George Grosz (1893–1959), with whom Bearden trained at the Art Students Union in New York from 1933 to 1935. Bearden credited Grosz with initiating his study of historical exemplars, including the work of Ingres (1780–1867), Holbein (d. 1543), Dürer (1471–1528) and Daumier (1808–79).<sup>12</sup> Bearden's deep engagement with the history of art persisted throughout his career, sustained also through his close friendships with the artists Carl Holty (1900–73) and Walter Quirt (1902–68), whom he met through New York *avant-garde* networks in the late 1930s.<sup>13</sup>

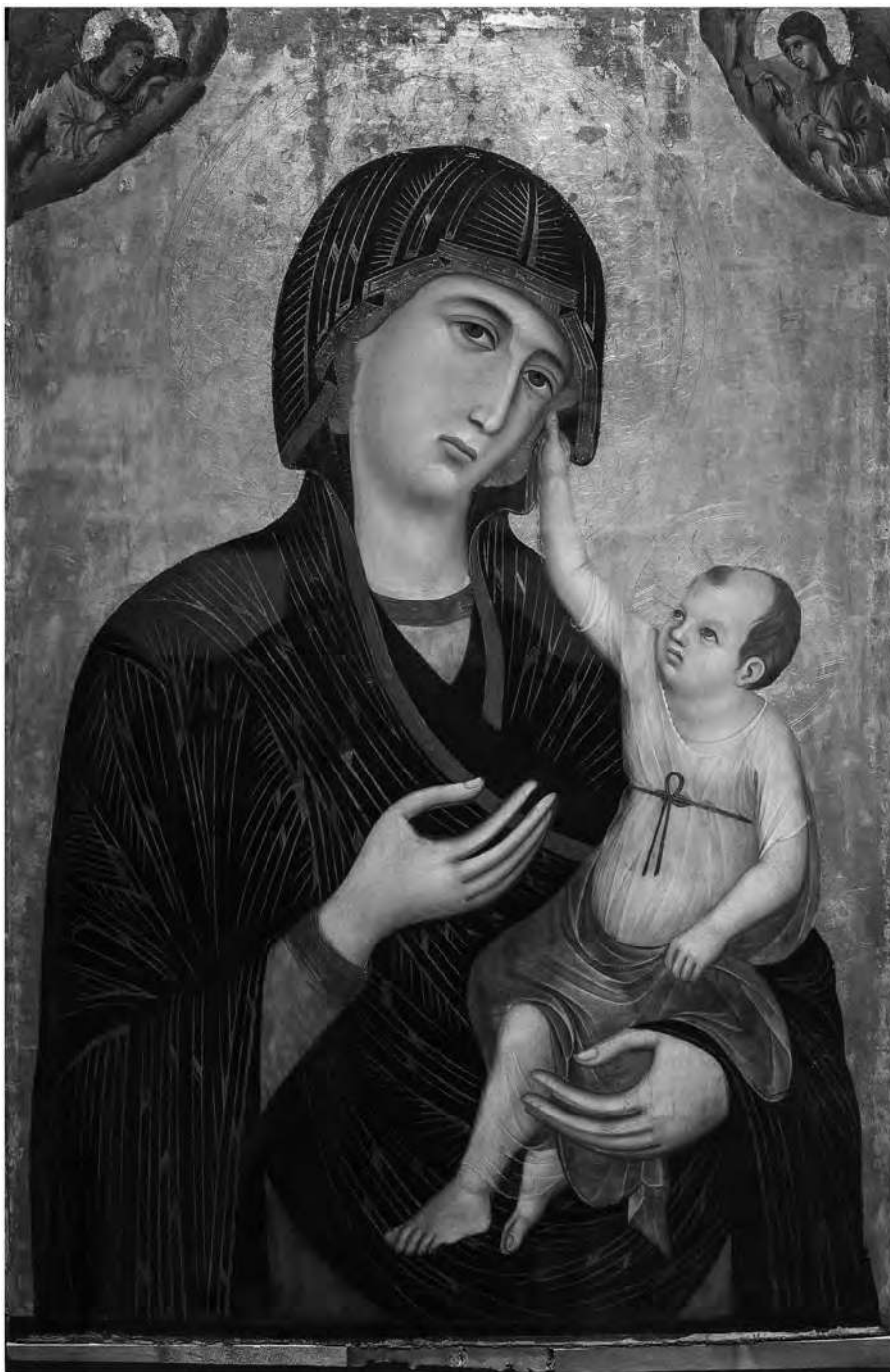
In a series of letters to Quirt c. 1945, Bearden cites Byzantine art among the models that he has been scrutinising:

I honestly believe the new stuff is better than anything before. I've studied space rather hard so that the paintings are more unified now – and the fantasy is held together ... I've tried to learn the design of pictures studying Byzantine painting, and the old Italian primitives, etc.<sup>14</sup>





*Figure 28.1* Romare Bearden (1911–88), *Madonna and Child*, 1945, oil on canvas, 38 × 30 in (95.9 × 76.2 cm), Gift of Roy R. Neuberger and Marie Salant Neuberger, Bryn Mawr College Special Collections, 1948.3. © 2024 Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.



*Figure 28.2* Duccio di Buoninsegna (d. 1319), Crevole Madonna, c. 1283–84, tempera and gold on wood, 34 × 24 in (86 × 60 cm), Museo dell’Opera metropolitana del Duomo, Siena. Photo credit: [imageBROKER.com](https://www.imagebroker.com) GmbH & Co. KG/Alamy Stock Photo.

In a subsequent letter, also of 1945, he expands:

I'm beginning to see what the time sense means in a picture...I'm trying to get these things held together, but lead the eye from section to section – taking the time say as music does – a composition extended in time ... So, now I'm looking hard at Pous-sin, Gozzolli, Byzantine mosaics, but I believe in a good sense – not to seek surface elements but essences.<sup>15</sup>

The emphasis on attempting to distil the “essences” of his models conveys Bearden's intent to avoid merely copying art historical exemplars or producing derivative works. Rather, he aimed to capture the core principles and effects of artistic masterworks and then reinterpret them to create something new.

Bearden had already grappled with the burden of influence in an essay published in 1934, writing:

Practically all the great artists have accepted the influence of others. But the difference lies in the fact that the artist's vision sees his material, chooses, changes, and by integrating what he has learned with his own experience, finally molds something distinctly personal.<sup>16</sup>

Bearden conveyed this goal again in the artist's statement for his first exhibition outside New York, held at G Place Gallery in Washington, DC in 1945, featuring his series *The Passion of Christ*:

I have used as the motive-force of my paintings certain incidents as I have read them in the Chapters of Mark and Matthew. But beyond these surface considerations, my concern is with those universals that must be digested by the mind and cannot be merely seen by the eye.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than crib obvious formal or iconographic elements, Bearden sought to extract subtle effects of compositional coherence and affective force.

In the same period as *The Passion of Christ* series, Bearden completed *Madonna and Child* (1945) (Figure 28.1), in which he captures the standard composition of a medieval Byzantine icon depicting the Virgin and Child in a tender embrace. The composition resonates with the Cubist figural abstractions of Bearden's revered modernist forerunner, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), showing bodies fragmented into prismatic planes, bracketed by dark outlines.<sup>18</sup> Yet, Bearden's palette is brightly illuminated, like a stained-glass window, recalling the alternately smouldering and jewel tones of Georges Rouault (1871–1958), whose work Bearden had the opportunity to examine in the retrospective exhibition mounted by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in April 1945.<sup>19</sup>

While the colour palette and abstract stylistic mode of *Madonna and Child* emulate modernist paintings of the early twentieth century, the composition draws from earlier art historical precedent. A strong candidate is found in Duccio's *Crevele Madonna* (c. 1283–84) (Figure 28.2). While countless portrait icons of the Virgin and Child strike similar poses, several details qualify the *Crevele Madonna* as a particularly close parallel: the positioning of the Virgin's hands, palms upturned; the gesture of the Christ child reaching towards his mother's face and grasping her head covering; the distinctive red scarf framing the Virgin's face; and the angles of the figures' heads. Works by Duccio were favoured models for Bearden at this time. He kept large-scale reproductions of the *Maestà* altarpiece in his studio to allow for extended study and copying.<sup>20</sup>

Bearden turned to abstraction as a means to universalise the themes of suffering and redemption inherent in the *Passion* cycle, marking a conscious move away from the social realist style and representational imagery of his earlier work, which had narrated the struggle and subordination of African Americans in the rural south and industrial north.<sup>21</sup> With his adoption of abstraction, Bearden shed the particularisation of Black representation in favour of a pan-cultural and transhistorical visual vocabulary that could speak to the collective experience of tragic loss and hopelessness in the wake of WWII.<sup>22</sup>

Bearden's figural abstractions of the mid-1940s were critically acclaimed and commercially successful. He lost interest in this mode of painting, however, after being dropped from the roster of artists at Kootz Gallery in 1948. For approximately two years, from 1948 to 1950, Bearden dedicated himself to improving his craft, copying black and white reproductions of Old Masters and other historical paintings in his studio. He then travelled to Europe in 1950 for an extended period of study, during which he familiarised himself with important collections and monuments abroad, including those in Paris, Siena, Orvieto, Rome and Milan. Upon returning to New York City, he launched into a brief period of full abstraction before turning to the collage work that would become the hallmark of his oeuvre.<sup>23</sup>

### “... the richness of the life I know ...”

Bearden's later mother and child series of the 1970s employed not only a different medieval model but also a different stylistic mode that was enabled by an entirely new technique. In the early 1960s, Bearden began experimenting with collage, collecting clippings from newspapers and popular magazines, images from textbooks of art history and personal photos to produce a radically innovative body of work. In addition to assembling multimedia collages, Bearden photographed these composite works, sometimes expanding or contracting scale, or enhancing the reproductions with paint. He also experimented with silkscreen and photolithograph processes. These new techniques allowed him to explore a single collage composition in multiple iterations, sometimes over many years.

*Black Mother and Child* (1970) (Figure 28.3) and *Mother and Child* (1977) (Figure 28.4) exemplify these new possibilities. The collage of 1970 combines fragments of a photostat enlargement of the so-called Vladimir Virgin (Figure 28.5) (a twelfth-century Byzantine panel painting that made its way to medieval Rus' soon after its creation) with one-half of a portrait of an African American boy and bright expanses of coloured paper. The racial markers of the original figures were modified through the black-and-white effects of photostat reproduction and the fragmentation and recombination inherent to collage to produce physiognomies that recall the structure of African masks – a key visual trope in Bearden's collages of the 1960s and later.<sup>24</sup> Racialisation became more pronounced in the 1977 iteration, which incorporates planes of chocolate brown and liquid black over the figures' faces, necks, arms, hands and hair. Despite these manipulations, both images retain their fundamental emotional clarity, generating an affective force that transcends particularities of racial and ethnic subjectivity. The bond of love between mother and child – conveyed through the longing gaze of the eyes and gentle body language of heads and hands – tethers these works to their medieval model.

In a 1987 interview about his inspiration from African art, Bearden contrasted what he perceived to be the ready legibility of western European art (“let us say if you look at a Titian or an El Greco, just two names that come first – the mythology of what they



*Figure 28.3* Romare Bearden (1911–88), *Black Mother and Child*, 1970, printed and coloured paper collage on board, 24 × 18 in (61 × 45.7 cm), Detroit Institute of Art, Founders Society Purchase, Dr. Lula Belle Robinson African Art Fund, 71.3. © 2024 Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.



*Figure 28.4* Romare Bearden (1911–88), *Mother and Child*, c. 1972, screenprint on paper, edition 93/200, 24 1/4 × 16 1/4 in (61.6 × 41.3 cm), Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC, U.S.A. Museum purchase, 1998.14.1. © 2024 Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.





*Figure 28.5* The Virgin of Vladimir, Byzantine, twelfth century, tempera on panel, 41 × 27 in (104 × 69 cm), State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia. Photo credit: World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo.



are talking about, or their intent, the religion, was right there: a virgin holding a baby – motherhood”) and the effort required to make sense of African art:

But this African art was something else that I wanted to look at and see what the philosophy was, discover what were some of the ideas that emanated from this work. I wanted to try and understand the African vision of the world – because there were so many varying African forms: some might be rather realistic like Benin bronze, and some very abstract. But this is the thing: to get a sense, a feeling – not just looking at them and admiring them as décor to put some place. But to discover what is it that motivated the art.<sup>25</sup>

He goes on to celebrate the strength, grace, dynamism and rhythm of the manifold artistic traditions of Africa, explaining that he intentionally mixed elements from the arts of different African peoples in his own compositions so as to embody the diverse origins of African Americans.<sup>26</sup>

Until at least the late 1960s, Bearden actively resisted an overtly social reading of his art. He professed:

it is not my aim to paint about the Negro in America in terms of propaganda. It is precisely my awareness of the distortions required of the polemicist that has caused me to paint the life of my people as I know it – as passionately and dispassionately as Brueghel [*sic.*] painted the life of the Flemish people of his day. One can draw many social analogies from the great works of Brueghel – as I have no doubt one can draw from mine – my intention, however, is to reveal through pictorial complexities the richness of a life I know.<sup>27</sup>

In comparing Bearden's mother and child paintings of the 1940s and 1970s, it is readily apparent that over these decades “the life Bearden knew” became more firmly anchored in the specificities of Black subjectivity, and that Bearden no longer felt obligated to depicularise the representation of this reality in order for his paintings to participate in a “universal” art history or to be meaningful to a broader audience.

### “... to paint the life of my people ...”

In a 1970 interview published in the *New York Times* following the opening of an exhibition of his collages, Bearden restated the goal of his art

to paint the life of my people as I know it – as passionately and dispassionately as Brueghel painted the life of the Flemish people of his day ... I want to show that the myth and ritual of Negro life provide the same formal elements that appear in other art, such as a Dutch painting by Pieter de Hooch.<sup>28</sup>

Or a Byzantine icon of the Virgin and Christ. Like other European and American modernist artists, Bearden understood his work to build from, rather than reject, artistic precedents. Yet, as an African American artist confronting the prejudice and inequities of twentieth-century American society, Bearden's deployment of historical and non-Western models carried a distinctly political valence.<sup>29</sup> Bearden engaged the past to understand and interpret

the present but also to reject the social subordination of that past and, over time, to remake the art historical canon so as to forge a place within it for himself and others.

Attending to Bearden's conception and deployment of Byzantine art facilitates a much needed diversification of the ranks of Byzantium's modernist scions, who are too often limited to Euro-North American – and usually white, male – nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists.<sup>30</sup> Inasmuch as we learn something new about Bearden's art by recognising his emulation and reconfiguration of Byzantine models, we also stand to gain a new perspective on the Byzantine artistic tradition through Bearden's innovative discernment and deployment of its icons.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Carrie Robbins and Amanda Luyster for their excellent comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.
- 2 [Bearden 1934](#); repr. O'Meally 2019: 87–90 at 88. On Bearden's pathway to universalism in his art, first realised in the 1940s, and the use of similar strategies among other American artists of the early to mid-twentieth century, see [Pinder 2011](#).
- 3 For comprehensive overviews of Bearden's oeuvre and biography, see [Fine 2003](#); [Campbell 2018](#). For Bearden's less well-known, fully abstract paintings and collages produced from 1952 to 1963, see [Fitzpatrick 2017](#).
- 4 Regarding Bearden's emulation of historical works of art and André Malraux's crucial influence on Bearden's artistic philosophies, including the importance of universalism, see [Glazer 1994](#); [Kennel 2013](#).
- 5 "Appendix: Romare Bearden, Letters to the Author", 10 May 1972, [Campbell 2018](#): 312–3.
- 6 Glazer characterises this aspect of Bearden's oeuvre as an "improvisation on canonical art history". [Glazer 1994](#): 411. Also see [Fine 2003](#): 9–10, 22–3; [Hills 2011](#); [Elleh 2013](#).
- 7 On the Byzantine inspiration of European *avant-garde* artists, see [Bullen 2006](#); [Lewis 2009](#); [Nelson 2015](#). On Bearden's appropriation of Duccio and Giotto, see [Kennel 2013](#): 141–3.
- 8 On Greenberg's interest in Byzantine icons as a historical precedent that legitimised the artistic claims of Abstract Expressionist painting, see [Greenberg 1958](#); [Batario 2018](#).
- 9 This essay previews a larger study in which I undertake a comprehensive account of the manifold examples of Byzantine imagery and inspiration in Bearden's oeuvre, including a series of paintings produced c. 1971 that incorporate the term "Byzantine" in their titles. On Bearden's appropriation from the canon of medieval and early modern art, see [Glazer 1994](#); [Kennel 2013](#).
- 10 [Glueck 1975](#): D29.
- 11 In this regard, my argument echoes that of [Glazer 1994](#): esp. 412 and 414–5, that Bearden's collages "acknowledge the significance of the art-historical past even as he revised its forms to accommodate new representations of African American identity". Also see [Kennel 2013](#): esp. 153–4.
- 12 Bearden's earliest artistic output included magazine illustrations and cartoons. It is likely that Bearden initially sought to study with Grosz because of his renown as a political cartoonist. [Kirschke 2011](#): 103–7.
- 13 Quirt departed from New York in the mid-1940s to take up a teaching position at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. He and Bearden maintained correspondence until Quirt's death in 1968. Holty taught at Brooklyn College from 1950 until his death in 1973. Holty exchanged letters with Bearden during the latter's studies in Europe ca. 1950, and they co-authored the book *The Painter's Mind: A Study of the Relations of Structure and Space in Painting* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1969; repr. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981), which synthesised their shared philosophy of art formulated over decades of intellectual and artistic exchange.
- 14 Walter Quirt papers, 1928–76. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Letter from Romare Bearden to Walter Quirt, 1945.
- 15 Walter Quirt papers, 1928–76. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Letter from Romare Bearden to Walter Quirt, July 10, 1945.
- 16 [Bearden 1934](#): 371; cited by [Kennel 2013](#): 141.

- 17 Romare Bearden Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, reel N/68–87; cited in [Pinder 2011](#): 145. On the *Passion of Christ* series, see [Pinder 2011](#).
- 18 Bearden's dialogue with Picasso was explored in the exhibition "Bearden/Picasso: Rhythms and Reverberations", organised by the Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC, February 11–May 21, 2023.
- 19 [Fine 2003](#): 17; [Pinder 2011](#): 144–53, esp. 147–8 and 152–3.
- 20 As shown in a photograph of Bearden's studio by Sam Shaw, taken in the 1940s. Duccio's *Maestà* altarpiece provided the compositional paradigms for multiple scenes in Bearden's bullfighter series, also of 1945. Bearden's *You Are Dead Forever* (1945–46) from the bullfighter series drew its structure directly from the *Lamentation* panel in the *Maestà* altarpiece. [Kennel 2013](#): 142 and 152–4; [Aranda-Alvarado 2011](#): 31, 37–8. The 1981 collage *Profile/Part II, The Thirties: Artist with Painting and Model* – a self-portrait of Bearden at work – shows Duccio's *Road to Emmaus* from the *Maestà* altarpiece in the background. Robert G. O'Meally interprets the 1981 painting as a remembrance of the diverse inspirations that coalesced in Bearden's artistic process, with the reproduction of Duccio's painting representing "the study of earlier art" as one among many sources. [O'Meally 2011](#): 82. O'Meally's reading is in keeping with Bearden's own comments in the 1940s, "You draw on the reservoir of fantasy and other unconscious material, but it is conditioned by both your innate and acquired knowledge. Does not one of the main springs of the art impulse come from an artist's admiration of the works of other artists?" Romare Bearden to Walter Quirt, n.d. (ca. 1945), Walter Quirt Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, reel 570, frame 625; cited in [Pinder 2011](#): 146.
- 21 [Pinder 2011](#): 145–50.
- 22 [Pinder 2011](#): 150–4.
- 23 Bearden recounts this middle phase of his artistic trajectory in the essay "Rectangular Structure in My Montage Paintings". [Bearden 1969](#).
- 24 [Hills 2011](#); [Elleh 2013](#). Also see [Weber 1987](#): 67.
- 25 [Weber 1987](#): 67.
- 26 [Weber 1987](#): 67.
- 27 [Bearden 1969](#): 18. Cited in [Glazer 1994](#): 419.
- 28 [Glueck 1975](#): D9.
- 29 [Aranda-Alvarado 2011](#): 29.
- 30 For exceptions to this trend, see [Betancourt 2017, 2020](#); [Mavroudi 2023](#); [Bullen 2006](#): 182–4.

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# USES OF THE “BYZANTINE” IN MODERN ART AND CRITICISM

*Charles Barber*

Byzantine art, particularly the icon, has been a recurrent conversation partner for Modernism, providing a genealogical ground for the flight from academic naturalism.<sup>1</sup> This brief contribution will review some key discussions, seeking to articulate their goals, while also considering how they have come to overshadow our historical enquiry into the art of medieval Byzantium. For it was as our first histories of Byzantine art began to be written that artists and critics turned to the legacy of Byzantium, seeking a language and a set of models with which to legitimate their varied resistance to the still-dominant privileging of naturalism as the ground for evaluating painting.<sup>2</sup>

The “Byzantine” in art has encompassed usages that reach beyond our current narrower understanding of the term. For example, a highly influential use of “Byzantine” art was introduced in a 1908 essay by the English critic Roger Fry (1866–1934), who sought to define the Neo-Impressionist art of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) through a comparison with Byzantine art.<sup>3</sup> For him, these artists were “proto-Byzantines”, a definition that emphasises a common investment in the contours that define figures and the simplified areas of colour that fill the spaces between the lines. It is a profoundly formalist relationship. Notably, it was the fifth-century mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (founded 432) that Fry had used to define his conception of Byzantine art.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, when the painter and critic Aleksei Vasilevitch Grishchenko (1883–1977) published a 1913 study, *On the Connections between Russian Painting and Byzantium and the West*, in which he linked his own explorations of Cubism and Futurism to the models found in the tradition of the Russian icon, he chose to compare such “primitive” works as a fifteenth-century Moscow School Mother of God, with a 1908 head painted by Picasso (1881–1973).<sup>5</sup> It is also in 1908 that we find one of the most extensive early uses of the Byzantine style as a precursor of contemporary abstraction. In his *Abstraction and Empathy: Essay in the Psychology of Style*, the art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965) shaped a strong distinction between abstraction and naturalism and provided arguments for giving fresh value to art that was not governed by naturalism:

Artistic estimation of this art [Byzantine] is of very recent date. Previously its conscious artistic volition was almost completely overlooked and nothing was seen in it

but lack of artistic power, the epithets “schematic” “lifeless” “rigid” were not only statements of fact, but also the expression of unfavorable value-judgment. This was because everyone was completely under the spell of a view of art which had derived its aesthetic from the Antique and the Renaissance, and had consequently made the organic-true-to-life the criterion of its evaluation. The supposition that the goal of art might be sought in the lifeless, in the rigid, was out of the question from the standpoint of the earlier science of art.<sup>6</sup>

In seeking to escape the Vasarian legacy, Worringer and others found a model in the despised and rejected art of the *maniera greca*.

Perhaps the most intense discussion of the icon’s relation to Modernism was found in Russia in the years around the First World War. Following upon a revival of interest in the icon in the last decades of the nineteenth century, modernist artists and critics drew precise links between their art and the tradition of Russian icon painting. The “primitivism” that Grishchenko found in icons not only built upon the primitivistic discourse that framed the emergence of cubism, but it also provided a Eurocentric and nationalistic ground for this new art.<sup>7</sup> It was a definition that had already been endorsed by Henri Matisse (1869–1954), who in 1911 had spoken of Russian icons in these terms: “This is primitive art. This is authentic popular art. Here is the primary source of all artistic endeavour. The modern artist should derive his inspiration from these ‘primitives’”.<sup>8</sup>

The evocation of the icon remained strong in the continuing development of Russian painting during and after the First World War. Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), who was well-versed in icon painting, developed works known as *Corner Counter Reliefs* that the critic Nikolay Nikolayevich Punin (1888–1953) compared closely to icons (Figure 29.1).<sup>9</sup>

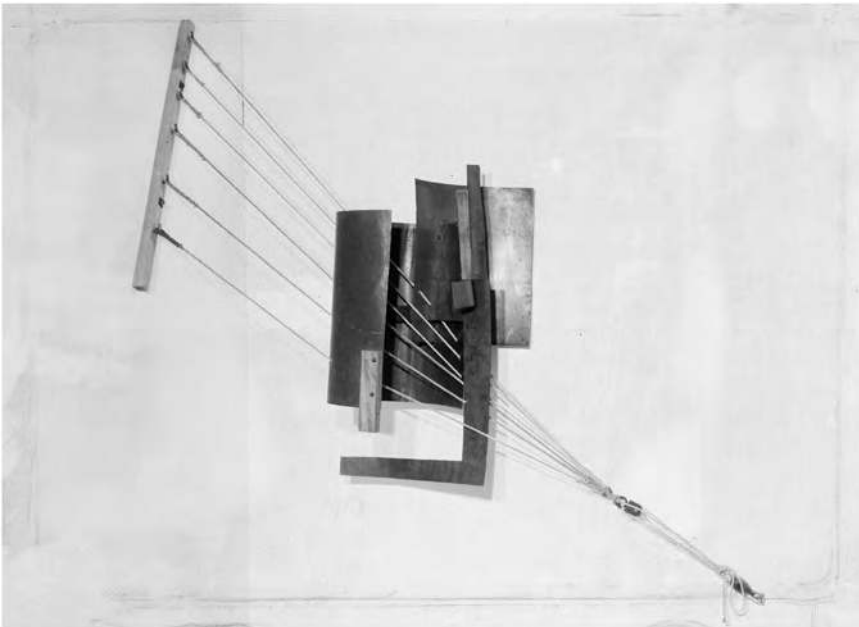


Figure 29.1 Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), *Corner Counter-Relief*, ca. 1915, Iron, Copper, Wood, Wire, 71 × 118 cm, State Russian Museum, Moscow. © Bridgeman Images.

These assemblages of found materials floated their forms into the space in front of the panel that is their support. A more direct citation of the icon can be found in his *First of May* of 1916, in which the board and the use of tempera directly cite the materials of the icon. In his *Tatlin (Against Cubism)*, Punin argued that Tatlin’s particular use of found materials allowed him to escape from any implications of representation, such that his works became presences unto themselves. For Punin, this was akin to how the saints are presented in their icons.<sup>10</sup>

Tatlin’s rival, Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935), also famously evoked the icon in his display of the *Black Square* at 0.10: *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings* in 1915 (Figure 29.2).<sup>11</sup> Here, the wholly abstract form was first exhibited in the upper corner of the gallery, echoing the icon corners found in Russian homes. This correlation was quickly spotted by the critic Aleksandr Benua (Alexandre Benois) (1870–1960).<sup>12</sup> While Benua was deeply troubled by the exhibition, he was nonetheless able to connect the iconic reference in the display with the non-representational ambitions of Suprematism’s anti-naturalism.<sup>13</sup>

This early reference to the icon as the ground for high modernism’s abstraction is amply reiterated later in the American critical tradition.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, it is notable that throughout his career, Clement Greenberg (1909–94) returned to Byzantine parallels to help define his formalist conception of modern art. In particular, Byzantium and its imagery are cited as exemplars of the same spirit of counter-illusionism as may be found in modern art.<sup>15</sup> Such that he invites us to see works such as those by Newman, Rothko, Pollock and Still, as a: “new kind of modernist picture, [that] like the Byzantine gold and glass mosaic, comes



Figure 29.2 anon., View of the room with Malevich’s *Black Square* and other Suprematist paintings, Petrograd, winter 1915–16, b/w photograph. © Bridgeman Images.



forward to fill the space between itself and the spectator with its radiance”.<sup>16</sup> Here, one can suggest parallels with Punin’s understanding of a presence in Tatlin’s use of space. Furthermore, Greenberg notes that in these works,

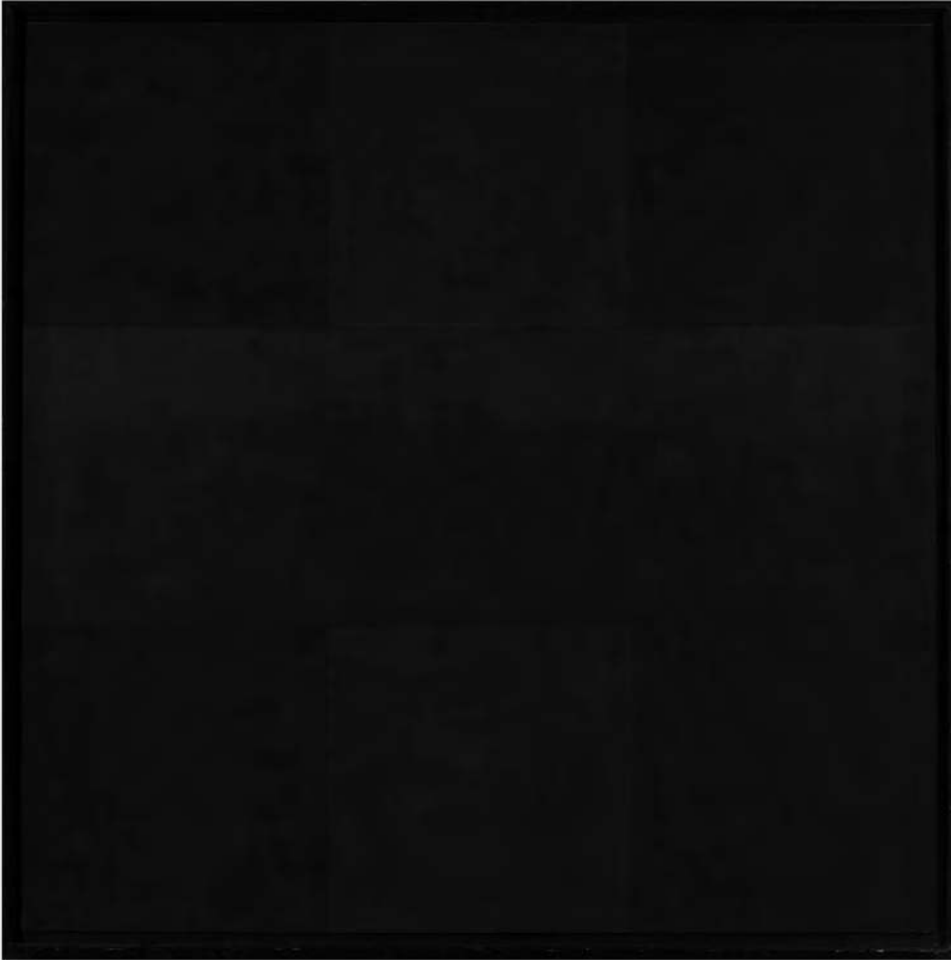
light and shade – the means par excellence of sculptural illusion – were stylized into flat patterns and used for decorative or quasi-abstract ends instead of illusionist ones ... the power of Cubism and of Byzantine mural art alike implies the wrench, the “dialectic”, by which a long and rich tradition has reversed its direction.<sup>17</sup>

Both Cubism and Byzantine art are thereby offered as the opponents of illusionism, framing the age of the academy with their distinct abstractions.

While much of the critical use of Byzantine art has been cast in purely formalist terms, it is important to note that the appropriation of the icon could also be conditioned by decidedly religious impulses.<sup>18</sup> For example, in 1890, the French symbolist painter Maurice Denis (1870–1943) proposed that: “Byzantine painting is certainly the most perfect kind of Christian painting” precisely because it addresses that which is beyond nature.<sup>19</sup> From this premise, Denis felt able to argue that the linear contours found on the face of a Byzantine Christ were a better model for a symbolist painter such as himself, than the more literal painting of the era after Giotto.<sup>20</sup> More recently, Andy Warhol’s (1928–87) indebtedness to his Ruthenian heritage was brought forward by an exhibition, *Andy Warhol: Revelation*, prepared for the Andy Warhol Museum and the Brooklyn Museum (2019–20, 2021–22).<sup>21</sup> Currently, one might note the work of Mark Dukes (now Doox) (1958–), who has used his long commitment to the medium of the icon to shape a powerful response to police violence against black Americans by painting *Our Lady of Ferguson and All Who Have Died by Gun Violence* (2016).<sup>22</sup> These direct evocations of the icon appeal in varying ways to the religious power of that tradition, deploying this to add value to their subjects.

The formalist appropriation of the Byzantine could also be turned to more spiritual ends.<sup>23</sup> The investigation of the spiritual in abstraction undertaken by the art historian and critic Joseph Masheck (1942–) in the late 1970s is notable in this regard. In a series of essays in *Artforum*, one can find Byzantium’s presumed abstraction now becoming a ground for re-articulating the potential for the transcendent and the spiritual within the process of painting in the still significant Modernist tradition.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Masheck finds Ad Reinhardt’s (1913–67) Black Paintings of the 1950s and 1960s: “to be as transcendental as whatever might commonly be considered holy” (Figure 29.3).<sup>25</sup> For Masheck, it is this transcendental quality, an abstraction that exceeds representation and that may admit spiritual values, that links a Russian icon with Malevich’s Suprematism and with Reinhardt’s paintings.<sup>26</sup>

There are two points that I wish to draw from this brief, perhaps familiar set of examples. First, Modernism’s appropriation of the Byzantine has positioned the icon outside of the normative grounds of representational painting. While this provided a genealogy for a disparate movement that defined itself against the narrative of the naturalism that had been privileged in the story of European art, it has also subjected Byzantine art to categorisations that would have been unfamiliar to its medieval producers and consumers.<sup>27</sup> As has often been acknowledged, the Modernist ascription of abstraction to the icon runs counter to the representational, even naturalistic values, ascribed to their images by Byzantine viewers.<sup>28</sup> Second, the use of the Byzantine icon to define this alternative



*Figure 29.3* Ad Reinhardt, Abstract Painting no. 4, 1961, oil on linen, 152.6 × 152.9 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of S.C. Johnson & Son, Inc., 1969.47.71. © Smithsonian American Art Museum.

history also permits the possibility of an ascription of spiritual, perhaps transcendental, values to the formal properties of Modernism's works. Both perceptions have conditioned our understanding of the Byzantine, but neither is a necessary quality for the works of Byzantine art themselves.

### Notes

- 1 The essays gathered in [Betancourt and Taroutina 2015](#) provide a broad introduction to the forms that this conversation can take.
- 2 The historiography of the development of Russian academic research on the icon is particularly rich: [Vzdornov 2018](#) and [Foletti 2017](#). The correlation of an increased knowledge of the Russian icon and the development of the Russian avant-garde is richly discussed in a number of studies: [Gatrall and Greenfield 2010](#); [Spira 2008](#); [Taroutina 2018](#).

- 3 Fry 1908: 374–5. This idea can first be seen in an unpublished 1897 lecture, discussed in Green 1999: 142. Also note: Bullen 1999 and Taroutina 2015: 1–2.
- 4 Richter and Taylor 1904. Fry's case was continued and developed in Bell 1913. A different perspective on this topic can be found in the contemporary art criticism of T. E. Hulme, most notably in a series of essays on "Modern Art" published in 1914 in the journal *New Age*. These can be readily consulted in Csengeri 1994: 263–98.
- 5 Grishchenko 1913. The same year found Aleksandr Shevchenko arguing that the icon represented a non-Western and primitive model for a renewed and "purely painterly" Russian modernism: Bowlt 1988: 41–54.
- 6 Worringer 1953: 98–9.
- 7 In addition to the works cited in Note 5, the nationalistic aspects of the appropriation of the icon by the Russian avant-garde recur throughout Sharp 2006.
- 8 Rusakov 1975.
- 9 Spira 2008: 46–125; Taroutina 2018: 178–217.
- 10 Spira 2008: 108–12; Taroutina 2018: 197–204.
- 11 My discussion of Malevich draws upon the discussions in the works cited in Note 9.
- 12 This translation is from Benois 2015.
- 13 Sharp 1992.
- 14 Peers 2010 provides a compelling account of George Duthuit's role in the reception of Byzantine art in its relation to Modernism.
- 15 Greenberg 1961b, 1961c, 1983. For a thoughtful contextualisation of the "Byzantine Parallels", consult Batarios 2018.
- 16 Greenberg 1961c: 169.
- 17 Greenberg 1961c: 168.
- 18 I will set aside the non-formalist appeal to tradition that can be found in recent Catholic aesthetics. I discuss this in an essay: Barber forthcoming. For the relations between the Byzantine tradition and a range of Christian denominations in the nineteenth century, consult Bullen 2003.
- 19 Denis 1920c: 37. The essay, which was published in 1896, keeps underlining the value of Byzantine art for the practice of religious painting.
- 20 The text was first published in two issues of *Art et critique*, nos. 65 and 66, in August 1890. I am citing the re-publication of the work: Denis 1920b: 10. The passage in question reads: "Un Christ byzantin est symbole: le Jésus des peintres modernes, fût-il coiffé du plus exact kiffyed, n'est que littéraire. Dans l'un c'est la forme qui est expressive, dans l'autre c'est la nature imitée qui veut l'être". For a recent discussion of the essay: Thomson and Thomson 2012.
- 21 Diaz and Lash 2019.
- 22 Insight on the relationship can be read in the following interviews: [https://www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/interview\\_with\\_mark\\_dukes.pdf](https://www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/interview_with_mark_dukes.pdf); <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2010/01/interview-with-coltrane-icon-painter-mark-dukes-and-archbishop-franzo-king/>; <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2010/01/painter-mark-dukes-and-archbishop-franzo-king-part-two/>; <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2010/01/painter-mark-dukes-and-archbishop-franzo-king-part-iii/> (all last consulted June 21, 2023). For a reflection upon *Our Lady of Ferguson*, consult: <https://religionnews.com/2020/06/24/the-n-word-of-god-envisioning-the-image-of-christ/> (last consulted June 21, 2023).
- 23 My concern is with the immediate correlation of abstraction with the Christian tradition, rather than with the broader use of the term "spiritual" in such studies as Tuchman 1986, which follows upon a worthy tradition rooted in such works as Kandinsky 1977, which was first published in 1911.
- 24 Five essays on this topic are gathered together in Masheck 1984a: 141–228. These were originally published in *Artforum* from 1977 to 1979. Of particular note is the essay "Iconicity" (Masheck 1984b), which was first published in *Artforum* 17/5 (January 1979): 30–41. A more extended discussion of Masheck's understanding of the significance of religion for the interpretation of abstract art can now be found in Masheck 2023.
- 25 Masheck 1984b: 223.
- 26 Note the discussion of religion towards the end of Bois 1991. More recent literature on Reinhardt has emphasised the dialogue between the *Black Paintings* and their viewers at the time of their beholding: Corris 2008.

- 27 A recent collection underlines the difficulty of conceptualising abstraction in [Gertsman 2021](#).
- 28 The long debate over the value of Byzantine ekphrases for art historians touches upon the parameters in play. A classic sampling of essays in English includes [Mango 1963](#), [Maguire 1974](#), [James and Webb 1991](#), [Nelson 2000](#) and [Foskolou 2018](#).

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## PART VI

# Display



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# DISPLAYING BYZANTIUM

Art and Politics 1945–2024

*Antony Eastmond*

## The Politics of Byzantine Exhibitions

In his 1964 review of *Byzantine Art, A European Art*, the Greek modernist painter and intellectual Yannis Tsarouchis noted that

For most people, Byzantium is boring, trivial and incomprehensible and those who love it are usually those who love boring and incomprehensible things. There are very few who truly love Byzantium out of love, and not out of a need for self-punishment.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars of Byzantium have long lamented the marginalisation of “their” discipline in academic studies. They have argued that it has been pushed to the edge of the maps of history and art history, despite its crucial role as a link between the ancient and modern cultures of Europe and as a bridge between the worlds of the Mediterranean and western Asia.<sup>2</sup> It stands at the edge of a series of margins: Byzantium plays a marginal role in medieval studies, which themselves lie on the margins of history, which forms just a subset of the Humanities, vastly outweighed by STEM subjects. That professional sense of injustice (and the masochism that attends it, as noted by Tsarouchis) disregards the fact that in terms of exhibitions and public attention, Byzantium has punched way above its weight. Since 1945, Byzantium has been the focus of at least 50 major exhibitions and a major component in a further 50 (see [Appendix II](#)).<sup>3</sup> These exhibitions have attracted millions of visitors, many of them happy to pay for the privilege, and have offered opportunities to present the history, culture and impact of Byzantium on an unprecedented scale: 1997 New York (no. 50) attracted 460,857 visitors<sup>4</sup>; 2000 Saint Petersburg (no. 59): 548,000<sup>5</sup>; and 2008 London (no. 91): 342,726.<sup>6</sup> Byzantine exhibitions have had a greater impact on academic and popular perceptions of Byzantium than any other area of scholarship.

This chapter provides an introduction to the phenomenon of the “Byzantine exhibition”, its politics and significance.<sup>7</sup> In compiling the list of exhibitions that follows ([Appendix I](#): Byzantine Exhibitions before 1945; [Appendix II](#): Byzantine Exhibitions, 1945–2023; [Appendix III](#): Related Exhibitions, 1945–2023), it quickly became clear how large a topic this is. These exhibitions have had a profound influence on how scholars see

the empire and through that how they structure the modern world and present it to wider audiences. Exhibitions have set up rival models for the history of Europe as well as for the ways in which we map connections and discontinuities across the wider Mediterranean world. At different times in its thousand-year long history, Byzantium dominated either politically, militarily or culturally at least 20 modern nation states around the eastern halves of Europe and the Mediterranean reaching as far east as the Caucasus and as far south as Nubia and Ethiopia. Defining the relationship of any modern country to that legacy has been a major issue that historians have faced: whether by acknowledging and embracing that link, by arguing against its importance or by denying its existence. The choices of exhibition curators to include or exclude objects from particular nations (or of those nations to choose to include or exclude themselves) changes the picture of the empire and its modern impact on the shape of the eastern Mediterranean world that emerges.

It is impossible to synthesise all the exhibitions or construct them into a single narrative or argument. I primarily focus on the major “blockbuster” shows, which I take to mean those that were organised on an international level involving multiple lenders from five or more countries (primarily nos. 8, 10, 13, 16, 23, 36, 50, 53, 58, 72, 91, 96, 102, 118). Occasionally, I include smaller shows, where they have had significant impact on the understanding and perception of Byzantium. I have also restricted myself to loan exhibitions rather than a discussion about museums’ permanent collections and their publications, partly for reasons of space, and partly because museums must work within institutional constraints, and so do not have the scope of the loan exhibition to bring objects together to juxtapose them to make new arguments about their subject. Finally, I must note that this essay is necessarily about catalogues rather than exhibitions. Few exhibitions have the memory or documentation to allow us to think about how the actual objects were framed and presented.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Politics of Bedazzlement**

Most exhibitions have focused on high quality art rather than the mundane or archaeological, painting a picture of an elite culture of ostentation and wealth. The allure of Byzantine art is captured succinctly in Priscilla Soucek’s essay on Byzantium and the Islamic East in the catalogue for the *Glory of Byzantium* (1997 New York, no. 50): it is “the politics of bedazzlement”.<sup>9</sup> The technical intricacies and rich materials of Byzantine art – the abundant presence of gold and jewels, the brilliant hues of mosaics and enamels, the exquisite craftsmanship of ivory carving or silk weaving, the intricate painting of manuscripts and icons, often combined with dramatic spotlighting in relatively dark spaces – lend themselves to a visual drama that dazzles and seduces. To western European and American audiences more accustomed to western European traditions of art, the uncanny mixture of recognisable iconographies and alien forms and alphabets simultaneously teases intimacy but rejects familiarity.

The desire to overwhelm can be traced back to the very first of the major international shows, organised by David Talbot Rice (1958 Edinburgh/London, no. 8; [Figure 30.1](#)).<sup>10</sup>

His lead curator John Beckwith set out their vision in an internal document: “Our aim is to create an atmosphere of the emperors – really very swagger”.<sup>11</sup> The attraction of bedazzlement could also be a problem, however. The 2008 exhibition at the Royal Academy, London, (no. 91) was expressly conceived as a 50th anniversary revival of the 1958 exhibition; but reviewers complained that the visual allure of the objects came at the expense of

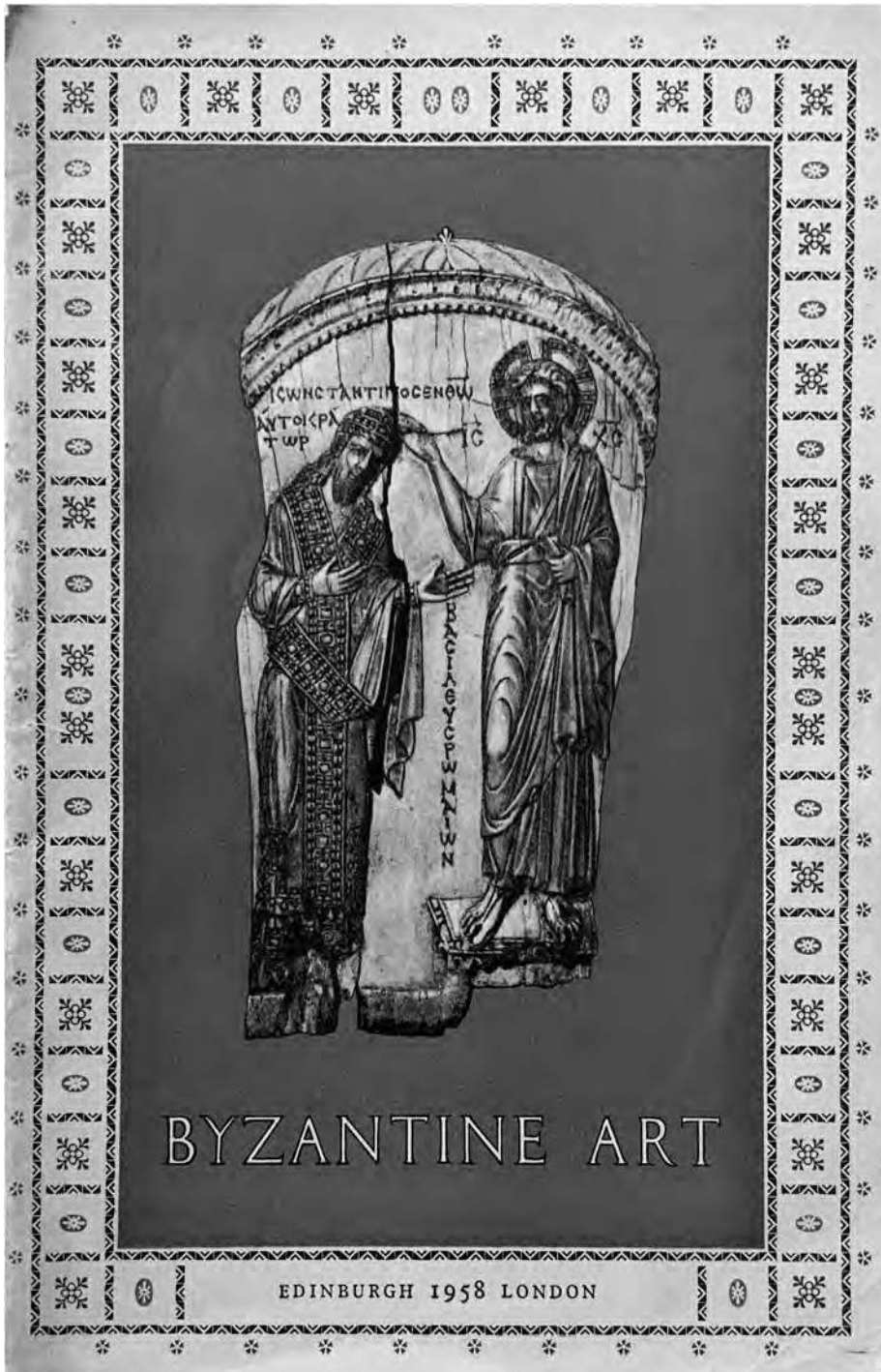


Figure 30.1 *Masterpieces of Byzantine Art*, London: Edinburgh University Press, 1958; no. 8, Catalogue cover. © Fair Use: Edinburgh Festival Society, 1964.

anything deeper: “The Royal Academy is showing a stunning array of Byzantine icons – but do they enlighten, or merely dazzle?”<sup>12</sup>

The promotion of Byzantium primarily through an imperial lens, concentrating on work of the highest quality and technical complexity, of course establishes a popular vision of the empire. The frequent combination of imperial patronage and religious function reinforces the idea of a totalitarian, hieratic state. The exhibitions prioritise the beauty of the empire over the violence required to create and sustain it. This vision has been challenged in more recent exhibitions that look beyond the elite art of the imperial court to focus more on everyday life and recent archaeological discoveries (nos. 60, 66, 70, 88, 89). These are having a profound impact on how scholars understand the social and economic history of the empire; but inevitably it is imperial art that remains longest in popular memory.

The choice of art for Byzantine exhibitions incorporates another form of the politics of bedazzlement: the bedazzlement of the museum. Byzantium has been used by some museums as a proxy for their own ability to bedazzle: the Byzantine exhibition as proxy for neo-imperial clout.

This was most evident in the trilogy of Byzantine shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1977, 1997, 2004 New York, nos. 16, 50, 72). The global power of the Met was most visible in the final two exhibitions, for which the timing was particularly fortunate. Both were organised and exhibited after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and before the fracturing of relations with the Russian Federation (beginning with the war in Georgia in 2008; accelerated by the annexation of the Crimea in 2015, and concluded by the wholesale invasion of Ukraine in 2022). They both took place before the unrest and state clampdowns resulting from the Arab Spring in 2010/2011; and both ended before the rise of populist nationalism across Europe which has discouraged the kind of international cooperation that is inherent in trying to present an empire that spread across many modern national borders. This was the era of Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History”, which – hubristically – celebrated the triumph of liberal democracy; although the period now appears as a 15-year window in which the US and western European states could wield (only ultimately to fritter away) its political and economic might.<sup>13</sup>

The Met shows were one of the places in which that moment of ascendancy was most triumphantly seen. *The Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50) cost around \$3m to stage, and its success encouraged the Met to invest “close to \$4m” in *Byzantium: Faith and Power* (no. 72) seven years later.<sup>14</sup> The New York press celebrated the international reach of the two shows and the triumph of soft power and diplomacy that they represented.

The Met’s clout is evident from the data in the prelims of the catalogue: *The Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50) secured exhibits from 119 institutions in 24 countries. Purely as a feat of logistics, let alone as an expression of cultural, diplomatic and economic power, it is a staggering achievement. We can only imagine the bureaucratic load, the curatorial negotiations, the travel planning, insurance and installation issues. The five densely-packed pages of acknowledgements in the catalogue did not even have space to include the recognition of senior political figures whose interventions were, journalists revealed, crucial to the success of the exhibition: Al Gore as Vice President wrote to the Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, to win his help to overrule the curators and conservators at the Russian Museum and so secure loans of Russian icons; and George Bush, former President, liaised with Egypt to speed up its bureaucracy to enable Sinai icons to leave St Catherine’s monastery for the first time in their history.<sup>15</sup>

The underlying sense of academic colonialism is evident in the cover design of the catalogue (Figure 30.2). This appropriates the eleventh-century be jewelled and enamel book covers that house one of the most precious liturgical manuscripts in San Marco in Venice (Biblioteca Marciana MS Lat. Cl.I,100) – substituting the Word of God with the essays of mostly American scholars.<sup>16</sup> In doing so the Met was simply re-enacting the appropriation of the Venetians in the fourteenth century, who themselves had re-used the Byzantine materials to their own ends.

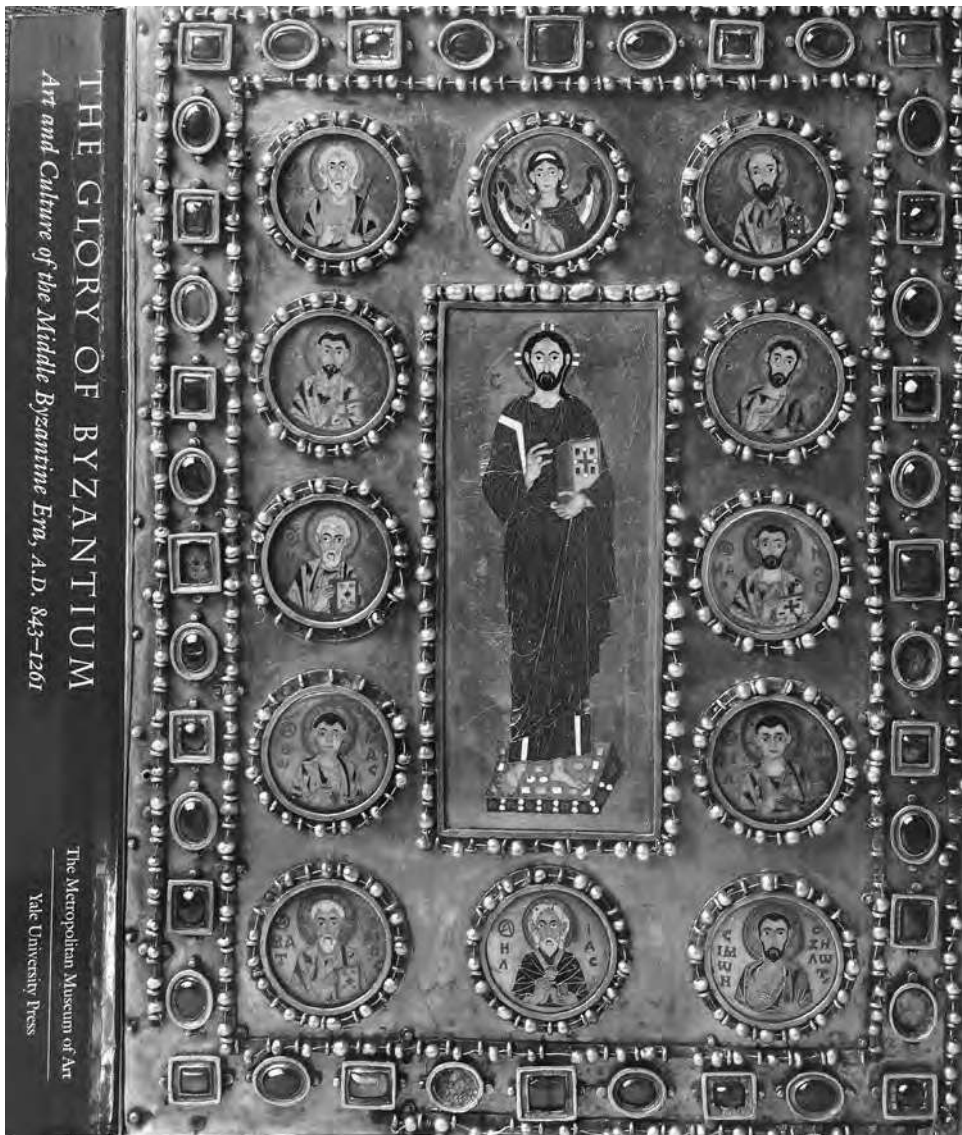


Figure 30.2 *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, New York, 1997; no. 50, Catalogue cover. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



*Byzantium: Faith and Power* (no. 72) built on the success of *The Glory of Byzantium*, and the numbers simply expanded: the curators visited 35 countries in order to secure 355 loans from 137 institutions in 27 of them. This was celebrated in the *New York Times* as “a feat of cultural diplomacy”,<sup>17</sup> and recognised by many as an achievement no other museum could hope to match.<sup>18</sup> Even the Met has hesitated to work at such a multinational level since. The numbers represent a small, but significant increase from those lent to *The Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50), particularly impressive given the background of increased global security concerns that arose after the terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September 2001. Whilst the Met might argue that it was simply continuing the model established by *Masterpieces of Byzantine Art* (Edinburgh/London, 1958, no. 8), which borrowed 247 objects from 88 institutions in 14 countries (reduced to 13 once it was realised loans from Turkey were too expensive), it was altogether more extensive. *The Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50) was also aided by changes in publishing technology since the 1950s (and the comparative willingness of the US and British publics to pay for catalogues). The 1958 show baulked at producing an expensive illustrated catalogue, leaving just an annotated checklist of objects, only 15 of which were illustrated. The full colour catalogue of *The Glory of Byzantium* has proved to be the most enduring and influential publication on middle Byzantine art of the past three decades.

A number of later exhibitions have been conceived on a similarly ambitious level, although all were executed on a slightly smaller scale: the Royal Academy (no. 91) attracted 84 lenders from 21 countries (albeit Georgia withdrew its loans before the exhibition opened); and the exhibition at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum (no. 96) attracted 479 exhibits from 50 institutions in 16 countries.<sup>19</sup> The scope and ambition of the Turkish show raises other questions about Byzantine power which will be explored in the next section.

### Inheriting Byzantium

The politics of bedazzlement has also been accompanied by a second politics: that of inheritance. Whilst Edinburgh/London 1958 (no. 8) does not seem to have had an agenda beyond that of imperial swagger, its immediate successor in Athens in 1964 (no. 10), was perhaps the most overtly political of all Byzantine shows. Its aim was evident from its title: *Byzantine Art, a European Art*, and from its publisher: “the Minister of the Office of the Prime Minister of the Greek Government”.

Manolis Chatzidakis, the chief curator, boldly set out the manifesto of the exhibition in his foreword: “Byzantine art is European, and the only art between East and West which kept alive that spirit of Greek humanism now recognized as pre-eminently the basis of European values”.<sup>20</sup> These ideas were then fleshed out in essays and accompanying lectures by some of the greatest (male) scholars of their age – André Grabar, Steven Runciman, Otto Demus. Grabar argued that Byzantine art must be understood as Greek art and that Byzantine art transcends both Antiquity and the Middle Ages; and so, he concluded, Greek art has a unique status that transcends that of Europe. Runciman and Demus went on to confirm the debt of Western Europe to Byzantium in intellectual and artistic terms.

Like the later Met shows, the exhibition was universal in its loans, and voracious in its appetites. The catalogue lists 18 countries, 158 institutions and 704 objects, but this underplays its extraordinary scale: the 98 coins displayed were compressed into just 21 catalogue entries, and many objects were excluded altogether. Heidi Heimann’s handwritten notes in her copy of the catalogue include notes on objects omitted from the publication,

including icons by El Greco (cat. no. 718) and Angelos (cat. no. 719) and goes up to cat. nos. 733–735 – “*Book bindings; engraved metal! no information!*”.

This was an exhibition designed to overwhelm (and also exhaust?) its visitors. It drew on all the states of the EEC at the time (bar Luxembourg), as well as four of the “outer seven”,<sup>21</sup> as well as the US, Vatican and even Australia, Jordan, Spain, Romania and Yugoslavia. Greece had been made an associate member of the EEC in 1962, and the exhibition sought to build the case for ever closer engagement. That ambition was cut short in April 1967 when the colonels seized power and Greece was ostracized from the Europe it claimed to have created. Ties only resumed in 1974, but it took until 1981 for Greece formally to join the European Community (now the European Union).

Given its political aims, what is perhaps most surprising about the exhibition was its focus on Byzantium. More recent Greek exhibitions have chosen to display art of the classical period as a means to present Greece as lying at the heart of Europe and of Western values. This was the explicit goal of the 1992 show, *The Greek Miracle: Classical Sculpture from the Dawn of Democracy, the Fifth Century B.C.* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (and then at the Met). The sub-title says it all, but the message was rammed home in prefaces by George Bush as US president and Konstantinos Mitsotakis as Greek Prime Minister, who conflated a style of art with values of humanism, self-government and democracy, which they thought combined to become “the spiritual force to ensure that free men live in harmony everywhere”.<sup>22</sup> The two leaders also stressed the particular democratic ties between the US and Greece, ignoring the historic importance of democracy in other European countries: “Only in ancient Athens and in the United States has democracy lasted as long as two centuries on a continuing basis”.<sup>23</sup> The desire of the Greek government to employ Byzantium as part of its diplomatic mission can be traced back to the 1931 exhibition that was held in Paris (no. 3) under the high patronage of the President of the Hellenic Republic during its short life from 1924 to 1935. This established a model for the Greek state to use Byzantium to promote itself abroad, and it is notable how Greek patrons and cultural organisations have continued to support Byzantine exhibitions outside Greece.<sup>24</sup>

The choice of Byzantium in 1964 was a more subtle and more interesting attempt by the Greeks to locate themselves at the heart of Europe conceptually, historically and politically: as a bridge between the ancient and modern worlds, and as a culture that had an enormous impact on other medieval Christian societies. This political aim is evident in the catalogue, in which two absences are apparent, one commented upon, the other not. The one noted was Turkey, with lead curator Manolis Chatzidakis lamenting “the symbolic significance of the absence of Constantinople from an exhibition dedicated to her art”.<sup>25</sup> The absence reflected historic antagonism between the two states (despite their shared membership of NATO since 1952), onto which were overlaid ideological oppositions (a refusal on the part of the Turks to recognise even an historic Greek claim to Istanbul) and contemporary political violence, notably the ugly riots that led to the expulsion of 50,000 Greeks from Istanbul in August 1964 just as the exhibition closed.<sup>26</sup> (In contrast, the 1958 Edinburgh show had clearly expected loans from Turkey, but they failed to appear for more pragmatic reasons: the UK organisers could not afford the costs demanded by the Turkish authorities: £7 a day for a Turkish guard to be present throughout the exhibitions and an additional £1000 in insurance costs.)<sup>27</sup>

The second omission from the Athens exhibition, that goes unmentioned, is perhaps more significant. It is the absence of the Soviet Union. The catalogue proudly proclaims the 18 countries that agreed to lend objects to the exhibition, it regrets the absence of Turkey,



but it makes no comment on the absence of the USSR, despite the wealth of holdings there. Given that the aim of the exhibition was to situate Greece in the West and that the early 1960s were the height of the Cold War (the peak period of organisation for the exhibition took place at the same time as the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962) it clearly made no sense to appeal for support to the USSR. Cold war tensions had certainly caused worries for the Edinburgh-London exhibition of 1958 (no. 8), which had been organised against the background of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Suez crisis.<sup>28</sup> However, Talbot Rice did secure loans from the USSR. Paradoxically, it had nothing from Greece! Rowena Loverance suggests that this was due to the worsening situation in Cyprus during the years leading up to the show.<sup>29</sup> The absence of the USSR in 1964 may also have been linked to wariness of an alternative vision of Byzantium that the inclusion of Russia might have engendered. This is explored below.

The claim of the 1964 show that Byzantine art was a European art was sustained in the exhibition by a relentless focus on the region to the west of the Bosphorus. There is a notable lack of reference to the possessions of the Byzantine empire east of Constantinople and the Aegean littoral. The art made in the cities or monasteries of Anatolia barely features, and even the eastern coast of the Mediterranean is underrepresented. The Byzantium that emerges is very much a westward-looking empire rooted to the west of the Bosphorus.

The European angle was seen as highly contentious at the time. The anonymous reviewer (actually Gervase Mathew) in the *Times Literary Supplement* dismissed the exhibition's title as "possibly tendentious and certainly not true".<sup>30</sup> He argued that "its Greek roots were Hellenistic rather than Hellenic" and concluded that while the "development of European art is unintelligible if the art of Constantinople is left out of account it does not imply that the art of Constantinople is a European art".<sup>31</sup> Most tellingly he was alert to the importance of Byzantine art in the East, particularly in the early development of Islam, and its absence from the show. The Greek artist, intellectual and critic Yannis Tsarouchis was equally suspicious and ended his review: "As for the Greek fanaticism about Byzantium, we must admit that it does not serve at all to complete a national aesthetic".<sup>32</sup>

Tsarouchis also pointed out other ways of defining Byzantine art. He asked: "Why not call Byzantine art an American art? This isn't paradoxical: from a certain point of view Byzantium has much more in common with America than Europe".<sup>33</sup> This was a lesson that *The Greek Miracle* in 1992 seems to have taken to heart. The link was made more explicit by the most recent major loan show in America, *Heaven and Earth* (Washington DC, 2013; no. 106), which presented itself as the sequel to *The Greek Miracle*. It argued that Byzantium was "the continuation of ancient Greek civilization into the medieval period", and that "Byzantine culture is a major, substantive, and above all still-living part of Greece's tangible and intangible cultural heritage".<sup>34</sup>

Tsarouchis also pondered another question: "Are the Russians who copied Byzantium to this day still Europeans or not?"<sup>35</sup> Tsarouchis saw this as a question about Russia's relationship to Europe; but it also raised the problem of Russia's relationship to Byzantium and whether Greece had the sole claim to Byzantium as its heritage. Whilst the Cold War may have placed political obstacles in the way of loans to Athens in 1964, other ideological concerns may have added additional blocks. Marxist art historical doctrine in the 1950s and 1960s reduced the study of Byzantine art to a purely formalist exercise, devoid of political or theological value, but Tsarouchis's comment was a reminder that Moscow could claim to be the successor to Byzantium every bit as strongly as the modern Greek state.<sup>36</sup> That claim was not pushed in the 1960s or 1970s, but by the 2000s the position had changed.

The major Soviet show of Byzantine art in Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) and Moscow in 1975–77 runs to an extraordinary 1042 objects (no. 13).<sup>37</sup> The three-part catalogue is more of a checklist than a full record of each object, and its entries are minimal throughout, but that may well have suited the curators. Viktor Lazarev's introduction to the exhibition concentrates solely on artists and craftsmanship, avoiding any issue about the ideological values of a largely religious art controlled by a small, wealthy elite (a similarly formalist vein is visible in much Soviet scholarship on Byzantium and its neighbours in this period).<sup>38</sup>

The fall of the USSR and the rise of religious nationalism in the Russian Federation opened the way to a re-examination of Russia's roots, and exhibitions provided a means to express this. In particular, exhibitions were able to demonstrate a form of cultural, religious and political continuity between Byzantium and Russia. This was most fully articulated in *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia: Orthodox Art from the sixth to the twentieth century* at the State Hermitage Museum (2000; no. 59; [Figure 30.3](#)). It aimed to demonstrate “the continuity

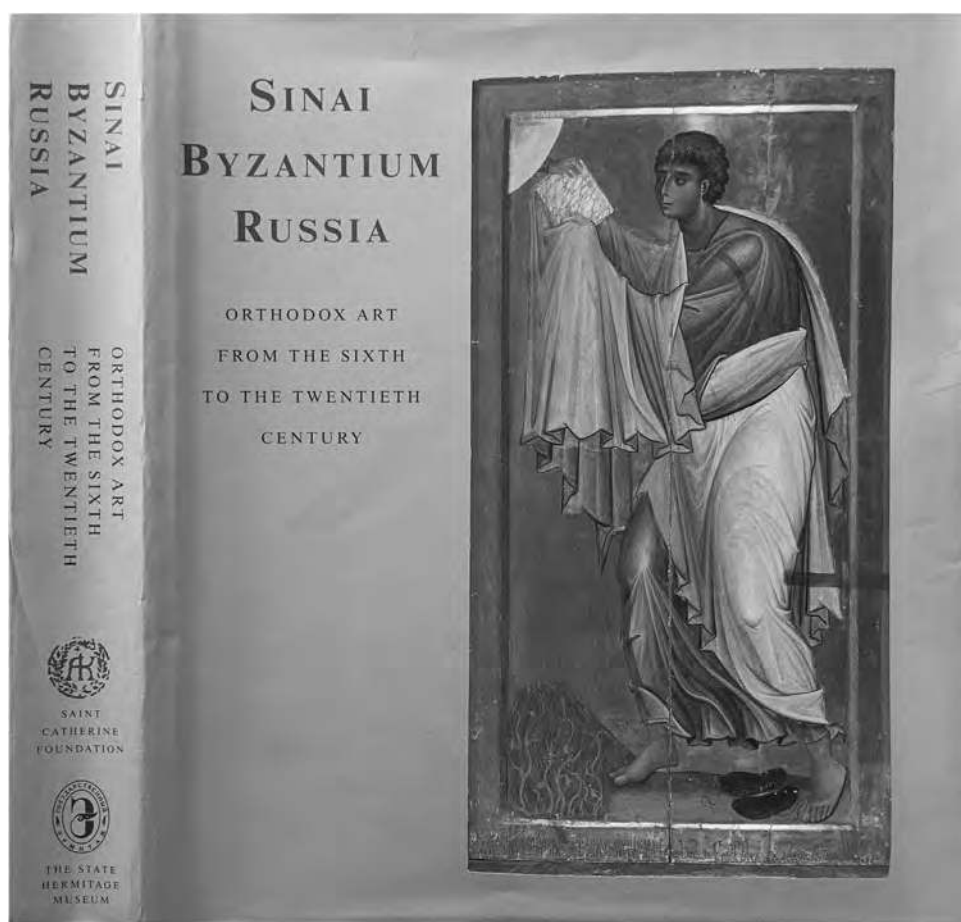


Figure 30.3 *Sinai-Byzantium-Russia: Orthodox Art from the sixth to the twentieth century*, St Petersburg, 2000; no. 59, Catalogue cover. © St Catherine Foundation.

of the Byzantine tradition and the emergence of a Russian style”.<sup>39</sup> It presented the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome as a material reality, rooted in faith.<sup>40</sup>

By using Orthodoxy as the narrative and organising thread throughout the exhibition, it was able to present a single narrative that ran from the sixth century to the twentieth. The exhibition acknowledged the theological strand that tied Byzantium to Greece and included 21 post-Byzantine Greek icons and five other objects; but this was overshadowed by the 262 Russian items that followed. The employment of Orthodoxy as the organising structure also allowed the Hermitage to include its collection of Georgian art from the ninth to seventeenth centuries as a subsection of Byzantium, awkwardly squeezed in between chapters on the *Komnenoi and Angeloi* (1081–1204), and the *Palaeologoi* (1261–1453). Interestingly, other Orthodox states that had come under the sway of the Russian empire in the nineteenth century were not included; and some other peoples of the former Soviet Union, notably Armenia, were also excluded, presumably on the grounds that they were not part of the Orthodox Church.

The claim of the title that this was an exhibition about religious – Orthodox – art was immediately undercut by its structure, which suggested that the political succession from Byzantium to imperial Russia was just as important as the religious union. The chronological order of the catalogue is presented entirely in imperial terms: a succession of ruling dynasties and individuals. Tsar Nicholas II (d.1918) – the eponymous ruler designating the final chapter – is simply the last in a list of chapter headings naming emperors that begins with Justinian (d.565). Byzantium endures in Russia as more than simply a set of religious dogmas. Five years later the director of the Hermitage, Mikhail Piotrovsky, set the claim out more boldly in a small show at the Hermitage in Amsterdam (no. 79): “The masterpieces of Byzantine art now on show in Amsterdam are an inherent part of Russian culture”, “Russian pilgrims ... created a living link, preserving spiritual and material memories of Byzantium”.<sup>41</sup>

The idea of Russia as the natural successor to the Byzantine world has been implicit in other exhibitions, particularly those that focus on icons, such as Antwerp 1988 (no. 30) or Geneva 1996 (no. 48), which presented the history of icons as a seamless narrative that began with Byzantine works, moved on to post-Byzantine icons in Greece, and then concluded with Russian icons. There has been no attempt that I can find to present Russian and Greek icons from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries as parallel developments; rather one is presented with a choice between which nation should be seen as the “natural” or “ultimate” successor.

More recently, a third potential inheritor of the Byzantine mantle has been presented in exhibitions: Turkey. In 1983 a major exhibition in Istanbul on Anatolian Civilisations from the Hittites to the Ottomans (no. 22) included a section on Byzantium, noting that: “A true understanding of Byzantine art begins with the realisation that it is part of the history and culture [*sic*] inheritance of Turkey”.<sup>42</sup> Two closely related shows in 2009 and 2010 (nos. 93, 96) which focused on the long history of the city of Byzantium/Constantinople/Istanbul, potentially sought to follow this up.<sup>43</sup> Both exhibitions presented themselves as biographies of a city under changing rulers over the past 1800 years, and whilst neither makes any explicit comments in their essays, both were decorated with covers that encouraged readers to think of the Ottomans as the direct successors of the Byzantines. *De Byzance à Istanbul* (no. 93; [Figure 30.4](#)) juxtaposed a bronze statue of Constantine the Great (d. 337) with Gentile Bellini’s 1480 portrait of Mehmet II the Conqueror (1432–81), staking a claim for the truth of Mehmet’s proclamation that he was Caesar of Rome (Qaysar-i Rum).

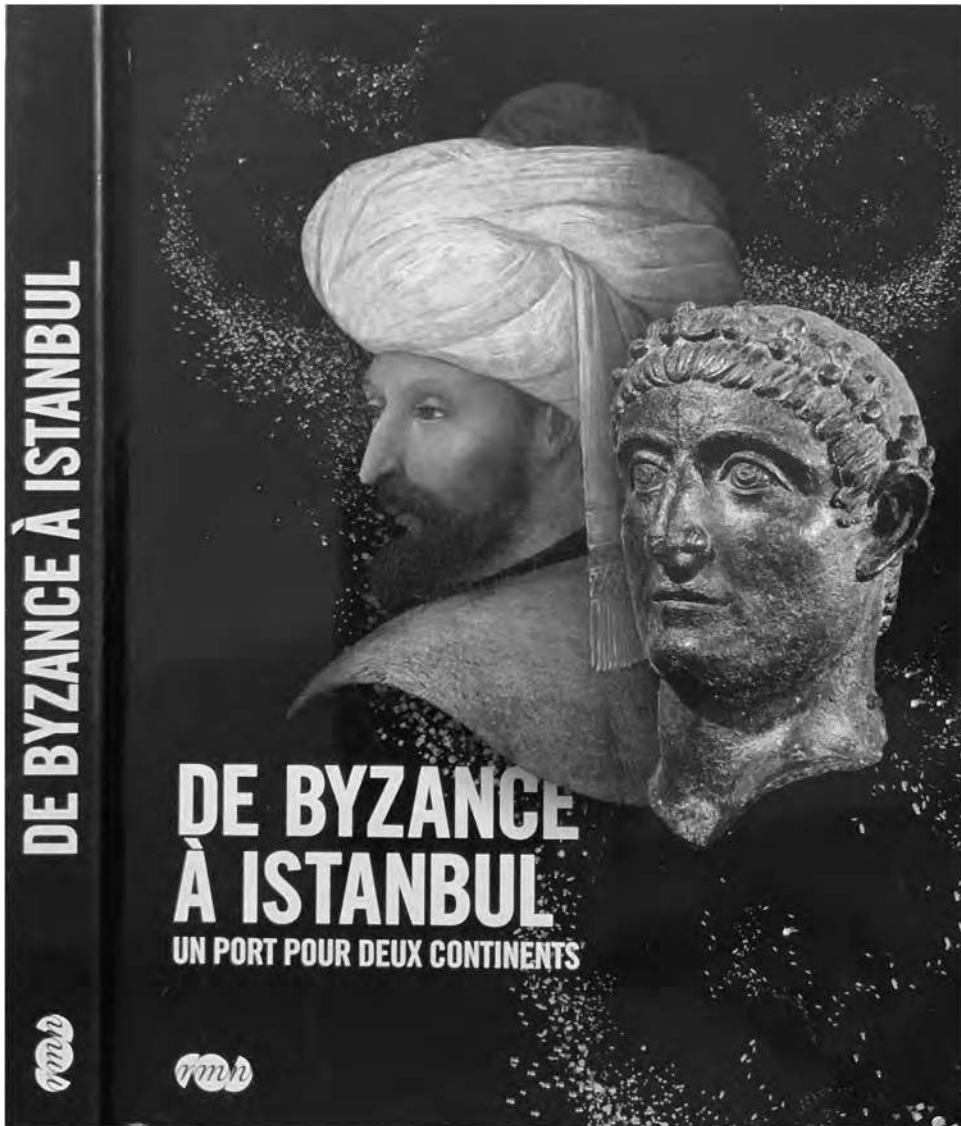


Figure 30.4 *De Byzance à Istanbul. Un port pour deux continents*, Paris: RMN, 2009; no. 93, Catalogue cover. © RMN, Paris.

The cover of *From Byzantium to Istanbul* (no. 96; Figure 30.5) spliced together the domes of Justinian's Hagia Sophia and sultan Abdulhamid II's Yıldız Mosque (the last Ottoman mosque in the city, completed in 1886), again emphasising the longevity of the Ottoman cultural inheritance of Byzantium.

The absence of any overt agenda in the catalogues themselves makes it hard to read these in any more polemical way, but it can be noted that the two exhibitions came at a pivotal moment in recent Turkish history.<sup>44</sup> These were the years in which the Turkish government was most committed to seeking dialogue with the EU as part of its membership bid, and



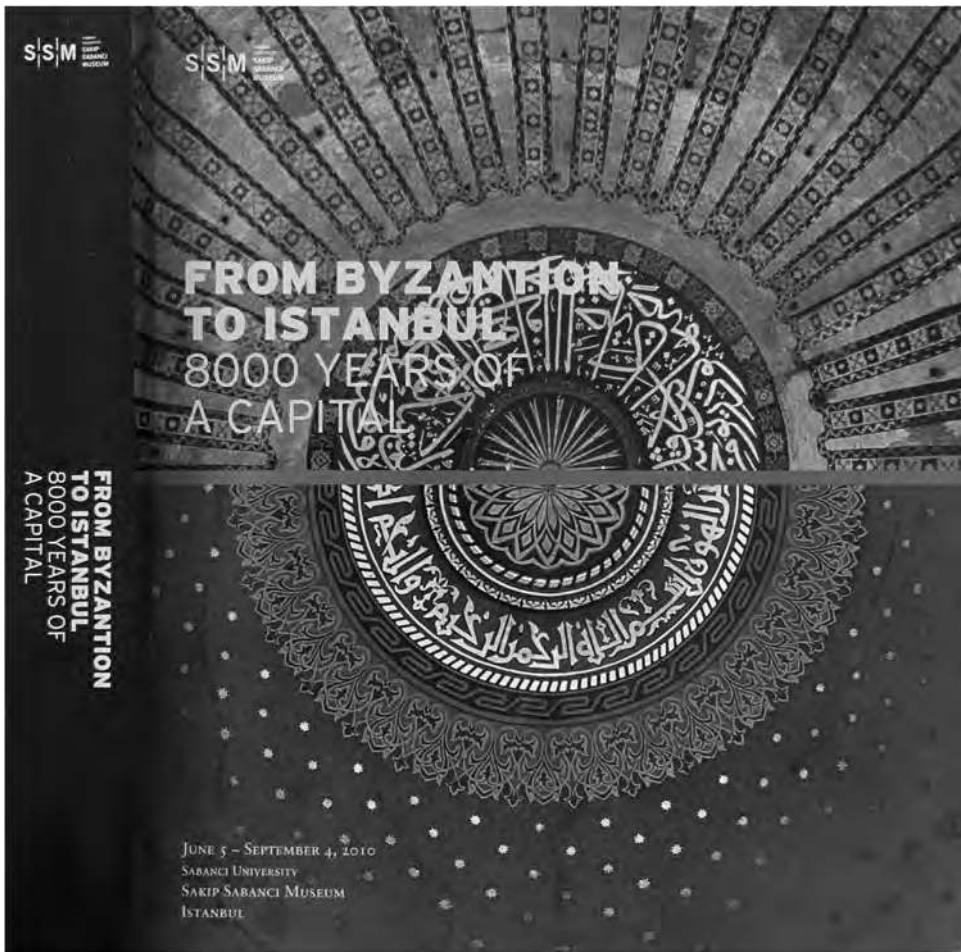


Figure 30.5 *From Byzantium to Istanbul. 8000 years of a capital*, Istanbul, 2010; no. 96, Catalogue cover. © Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul.

that provides a context in which a more sympathetic view of the Byzantine past fitted with the broader aims of the state. Both exhibitions had the support of the ruling AK Party, senior members of which were on their honorary committees. However, with the appointment as president of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2014 the Turkish government decisively changed tack both in geo-political terms and in its advancement of a much more exclusionary view of Turkish history. It has aggressively celebrated the Ottoman (and to a lesser extent the Seljuk) past and sidestepped the Byzantine world that preceded it. Certainly, over the past decade it has become much harder to be seen as an advocate of Byzantium within Turkey.<sup>45</sup> The two exhibition catalogues remain as rather lonely beacons of a different approach to Turkish history that both acknowledged and celebrated the multicultural richness of the region's past.

A parallel development in Turkey has been the private sponsorship of exhibitions by Turkish foundations and museums. These have had a greater freedom to explore Turkey's

relationship to its Byzantine past and have revealed much about the political context of the study of Byzantine monuments in Turkey and the role they played in promoting Atatürk's policies of secularisation during the early years of the republic (see no. 115). They have also been able to exploit Turkey's greatest advantage in displaying Byzantium: the revelations, particularly about trade, that have come from new finds uncovered during excavations in Istanbul (see nos. 88 and 89).

### The Politics in Byzantine Exhibitions – What and Where Is Byzantium?

The greatest challenge all exhibitions have faced is how to define what Byzantium is, and where it is. Decisions on inclusion and exclusion; centre and province or regionalism bedevil attempts to present the empire.<sup>46</sup> The fuzzy lines are clear in the maps.<sup>47</sup> Byzantium's proponents liked to claim the universalism of the empire, epitomised in the numbers of peoples encountered in Constantinople, as captured by a poem by John Tzetzes in the twelfth century.<sup>48</sup> It has been an issue since the earliest exhibitions, such as *Byzance et la France médiévale* (no. 9) which separated manuscripts between those made in the capital and those in the provinces and elsewhere. It was also the approach of *Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50) which juxtaposed sections on the court and luxury with ones dedicated to Kievan Rus' (now reformulated as Kyivan Rus' on the Met's website), the Bulgarians, Georgians, Armenians, and Christians in the Islamic East (as well as Crusaders, the Latin West and Byzantium's relations with the Islamic East). A wall panel in the exhibition even quoted Tzetzes' poem. Those states not included – notably the Serbians – complained vociferously, even though they had chosen not to lend.<sup>49</sup> Some critics accused the exhibition of lacking a central thesis – “spectator neutrality” – but it was clearly there in the overwhelming and imperial vision of Byzantium that was presented.<sup>50</sup> The question remains of how the neighbouring states should be related to Byzantium. Are they “satellites” revolving around a Byzantine centre – culturally dependent, whatever their political or theological relationship, and regardless of their different languages, alphabets, ethnicities and histories? Or can they stand alone as discrete and cohesive entities? Even models that promote greater equality between states, such as the idea of a “Byzantine Commonwealth”, inevitably revert back to an idea of Byzantine centrality.<sup>51</sup> *Byzantium 330–1453* (2008 London; no. 91) followed a similar path, albeit shrinking all Byzantine encounters into two categories – the Latin West and (with oddly Orientalist phrasing) “Beyond Byzantium” – a category that encompassed everything from Serbia to Central Asia.<sup>52</sup> It is easy to conclude from either exhibition that Byzantium's neighbours existed only to reflect Byzantium's glory back on the empire.<sup>53</sup>

*Byzantium: Faith and Power* (2004 New York; no. 72), learning the lessons from *Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50), abandoned ethnic and geographic labels in its organisation, but was still happy to incorporate art from the Balkans (the absence of Georgian and Armenian materials is explored later).

### Excluding Byzantium

Many exhibitions have focussed on Byzantium's neighbours, rivals and successors and these show the political sensitivities that remain vested in juxtaposing other states with the Byzantine empire ([Appendix III](#)). The decisions taken by exhibition organisers have not always been agreed with by the lending countries. Many have sought to fight against the imperialist presentation of the empire. *Bulgarian Icons* (no. 125) lost its introduction

by Robin Cormack when the Bulgarian authorities rejected his argument that Bulgarian culture was influenced by Byzantium (but it was too late to edit the preface by Robert Breen of the Scottish Arts Council that refers to it).<sup>54</sup> In 2011, however, the Bulgarians took a very different line when hosting the XXII International Congress of Byzantine Studies: declaring Bulgaria to be in the Byzantine world: “an enemy, an ally, a rival, and a partner of the Eastern Empire we name Byzantium” (no. 127).<sup>55</sup>

The uneasy relationship between Byzantium and the Caucasus is equally evident. Both modern Christian states (Armenia and Georgia) have been happy to lend ancient and modern works to exhibitions abroad, but both have been much more reticent about lending their Christian art.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the Armenian state has never lent to a Byzantine exhibition abroad. The comprehensive title of the 1975–77 exhibition curated by Alice Bank (*Byzantine art in the collections of the USSR*; no. 13) disguised the fact that it took a much narrower approach to Byzantium – drawing on the museums of the Russian and Ukrainian republics but not those in the Baltics or the Caucasus. As with the Bulgarians in 1978, Armenia has always seen itself as distinct and separate from Byzantium; although the presence of many Armenians within the empire blurs edges.<sup>57</sup> The extent of the Armenian diaspora, compounded by the consequences of the Armenian genocide, has also resulted in the presence of many illuminated Armenian manuscripts in collections outside Armenia; enabling the culture to be well represented whatever the state’s position might be (nos. 119–124). Armenia has been both present and absent in Byzantine exhibitions. Armenia has instead made its presence felt in a series of focused exhibitions to which the state has lent generously, allowing them to make the case for their distinct status.

The Georgians, in contrast, have been in a rather different position. Whilst ethnically and linguistically distinct from Byzantium, its shared theology and close periods of exchange (especially in the tenth to twelfth centuries) make boundaries harder to discern. It loaned five objects to *Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50), but had earlier refused to lend to the 1975 Soviet exhibition in Saint Petersburg and Moscow (no. 13).<sup>58</sup> The proposed loans to *Byzantium 330-1453* (no. 91) were withdrawn between the commissioning of the catalogue and the exhibition, and a decade earlier the focused exhibition *National Treasures of Georgia* (no. 135) failed completely after protests in Georgia.<sup>59</sup> The collapse was primarily determined by internal politics, but it was exacerbated by a widespread belief in Georgia that the physical presence of objects was central to the spiritual integrity of the country. This can be traced back to medieval beliefs that Georgian icons were inviolably tied to particular holy places and their continued success.<sup>60</sup> It is a very different way of conceiving of medieval objects from that presented in most Byzantine exhibitions. In the end the withdrawal of loans was explained in terms of conservators’ concerns about the condition of the objects, but the other allied reasons are a reminder that “Byzantium” is by no means a dead culture to many. The Georgian state did lend generously to exhibitions in Brussels in 2023 (no. 136) and Krakow in 2024 (no. 137) – a display that can be linked with the Georgian government’s confusingly on-off aspirations to join the EU – but icons were conspicuous by their absence: they were still too contested spiritually. The loans in 1979–82 to three exhibitions in western Europe (nos. 132–134), mark a notable exception to these constraints that cannot easily be explained, although it may lie with the international politics of the central Soviet government in Moscow in those years, and their ability to disregard local concerns.

The Georgians’ very different understanding of their historic religious objects continues in debates about the return of icons to the Georgian Church (which currently shares custodianship of historic religious art with the state). An empty case has stood in the Anchiskhati



church in Tbilisi for many years now, in the hope of the return of the miraculous icon from Anchi from the State Museum of Fine Arts. Similar debates continue to affect other predominantly Orthodox states. For a long time Andrei Rublev's *Trinity* (early fifteenth century) was displayed in a chapel within the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow on particular feast days as a means of appeasing both viewers and worshippers, but on 4 June 2023 Vladimir Putin overruled conservators and ordered it to be moved to the cathedral of Christ the Saviour, so reinforcing the mutual reliance between state power and the Church in the current order there.

Other Eastern Christian communities present different problems. Do the Christian communities in the Middle East that have primarily lived under Islamic rule (Copts, Syriacs etc.) belong in the history of the wider Byzantine world, or that of the wider Islamic world? They have tended to be included in both groups of exhibitions but tend to be treated as liminal: not quite Byzantine enough and certainly not Islamic. Only three exhibitions – *The Christian Orient* (no. 17), *Christians in the East* (no. 56), and *Chrêtiens d'Orient* (no. 112) – have attempted to look at them on their own terms.

### National Shows

A large number of exhibitions have taken a different approach to Byzantium. They have sought to view it through the national lens of the country that organised the exhibition. This shifts emphasis away from the empire itself and on to the question of how each country has collected Byzantium – varying between medieval collections built up in churches, the historic collecting of monarchs and rulers, and the colonial purchasing power of private collectors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was the approach pioneered by the first post-war exhibition in Baltimore (no. 6), which praised the enthusiasm and initiative of great private collectors and scholars (similar to the UK, Scandinavian, Swiss and Israeli exhibitions; nos. 45, 47, 61, 107). It would be illuminating to compare this with the strength of church collections in Italy (no. 32) and Germany (nos. 53, 54, 78) as well as Athos (nos. 52, 86, 92). France, in contrast, owes much more to royal collectors.<sup>61</sup> Rather than consider the impact of Byzantium on the host culture, as the Italians had in *Splendori di Bisanzio* (no. 32), *Byzance* (no. 39) in the end showed the importance of France.

### Post-Colonial Exhibitions?

The most recent shows on Byzantium have taken a very different approach to its culture. They have been very much influenced by ideas about postcolonialism that have emerged in academia. It is no coincidence that the impact of these debates has been most evident in exhibitions in the US, where debates have been sharpest. Two recent shows at the Met, *Byzantium and Islam* in 2011 (no. 102) and *Africa and Byzantium* in 2023 (no. 118), have both sought to de-centre the empire but in a more even-handed way than the various exhibitions on western medieval art that include Byzantium as an off-stage extra (nos. 147–152). *Byzantium and Islam* was conceived and installed against the background of the Arab Spring that began in 2011. The promise of liberal change across North Africa and the Middle East was tentatively celebrated in the catalogue alongside the fear that uprisings might prevent the travel of objects.<sup>62</sup> The catalogue stands out for its more balanced and nuanced view of the rise of Islam. It presents the period as a dialogue between the old and new religions, rather than a hierarchical relationship, in which Islam was simply visually

dependent on Byzantium (compare no. 114). *Jerusalem 1000–1400* (no. 110), also at the Met in 2016, took a similarly even-handed approach, now encompassing Jews and Latin Christians alongside Muslims and indigenous Christians, in their interest in the Holy City.

*Africa and Byzantium 2023* (no. 118), as its title makes clear, has sought to take this revisionist approach even further. It is the first exhibition to decentre the empire from the title of an exhibition. In some ways it might be seen as an extension of *The Glory of Byzantium* (no. 50) – extending the visual reach of the empire into Nubia and Ethiopia, fleshing out regions that the earlier catalogue covered in just two pages and with no loans.<sup>63</sup> Foregrounding the African states over Byzantium allows the histories of these nations to emerge in their own right, but the question remains of the extent to which they really are able to escape that off-centre pivot, and emerge as more than just reflections of Byzantium. The most prominent African voices in the exhibition were from contemporary Ethiopian artists. *Africa and Byzantium* can be contrasted with the exhibition just four years earlier on the arts of the Saharan region, *Caravans of Gold*, which avoided the mediation of a more familiar reference point.<sup>64</sup>

A second more recent trend in exhibiting Byzantium has been to bring it into conversation with the modern, breaking away from the chronological boundaries that have been used rigorously to police many exhibitions. Whether through the juxtaposition of Byzantine objects with contemporary artworks at *Byzantine Things in the World* in 2013 (no. 105), or displaying alternative presents that evoke the empire in reality and steampunk fantasy in “*What Byzantinism is this in Istanbul!*”: *Byzantium in Popular Culture* in 2021 (no. 116), these exhibitions seek to make Byzantium familiar, or to make the modern a little more alien.

## Conclusion

No conclusion can do justice to the feats of curatorship and scholarship that are represented by the list of exhibitions and catalogues that follows this essay. The three quarters of a century that it covers shows the continued allure of Byzantium to both scholars and public alike, and the ways in which the empire has been reimagined for new audiences over that period. The survey shows that Byzantium is inherently political, whether it is acknowledged explicitly by organising committees and sponsors, or whether that needs to be insinuated through a study of the budgets offered, the selection criteria applied and the organisation, display and juxtaposition of materials. Although there have been many exhibitions since 1945, it is clear that there is still scope for many more to come in the decades ahead.

## Notes

- 1 Tsarouchis 1964: 388, “Γιὰ τοὺς πρὸ πολλοὺς ἀνθρώπους τὸ Βυζάντιο εἶναι βαρετό, πληκτικὸ καὶ ἀκατανόητο καὶ αὐτοὶ ποὺ τὸ ἀγαποῦν εἶναι πάντα συνήθως αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἀγαποῦν τὰ βαρετὰ καὶ τὰ ἀκατανόητα πράγματα. Εἶναι πολὺ λίγοι αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἀγαποῦν τὸ Βυζάντιο ἀληθινὰ ἀπὸ ἀγάπῃ, κι ὄχι ἀπὸ ἀνάγκη αὐτοτιμωρίας.”
- 2 Nelson 1996: 3–11; Nelson 1997: 28–40.
- 3 On earlier exhibitions: Hanson 2013: 33–48. For a list of exhibitions before 1964: Chatzidakis 1964: 33–4.
- 4 Vogel 2004.
- 5 Piatnitsky 2011: 89.
- 6 Vassilaki 2013: 13.
- 7 Chondrogiannis 2017: 181–232 provides a parallel history of Byzantine exhibitions.

- 8 For an honourable attempt at this: [Loverance 2013](#): 49–68.
- 9 [Soucek 1997](#): 405.
- 10 Talbot Rice had organised one earlier exhibition, the first loan exhibition at the newly opened Courtauld Institute of Art in 1933: *Exhibition of Byzantine and Greek Painting, 18–31 January 1933* (typescript catalogue).
- 11 [Loverance 2013](#): 52.
- 12 [Darwent 2008](#).
- 13 [Fukuyama 1992](#).
- 14 [Vogel 2004](#).
- 15 [Miller 1997](#): C13–14. [Chondrogiannis 2017](#): 196–7 muses interestingly on the implications of choosing 1261 as the end date of the exhibition rather than 1204.
- 16 [Marcon et al. 1995](#).
- 17 [Kimmelman 2004](#).
- 18 [Kimmelman 2004](#).
- 19 And the associated exhibition in Paris was only slightly smaller: 15 states, 53 institutions of which 17 were in Turkey.
- 20 [Chatzidakis 1964](#): 11–2.
- 21 Austria, Denmark, Sweden, UK, but not Norway, Portugal or Switzerland.
- 22 [Buitron-Oliver 1992](#): 6.
- 23 [Buitron-Oliver 1992](#): 9.
- 24 Well observed by [Chondrogiannis 2017](#): 218.
- 25 [Chatzidakis 1964](#): 11–2.
- 26 These political issues also noted by [Chondrogiannis 2017](#): 183.
- 27 [Loverance 2013](#): 55–6.
- 28 This is all admirably explored by [Loverance 2013](#): 62–3.
- 29 [Loverance 2013](#): 55.
- 30 [Mathew 1964](#): 641–2.
- 31 [Mathew 1964](#): 642.
- 32 [Tsarouchis 1964](#): 402: “Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὸν ἐλληνικὸ φανατισμὸ γὰ τὸ Βυζάντιο, πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογήσουμε ὅτι δὲν ἐξυπηρετεῖ καθόλου τὴν ὀλοκλήρωση μιᾶς ἐθνικῆς αἰσθητικῆς”.
- 33 [Tsarouchis 1964](#): 388: “Θὰ ρωτοῦσε κανεὶς, ἀλήθεια γιατί νὰ μὴν ὁμοιάσουμε τὴ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη, τέχνη ἀμερικανικὴ. Ἀὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι καμιά παραδοξολογία γιατί τὸ Βυζάντιο, ἀπὸ μιὰν ἀποψη μοιάζει πολὺ περισσότερο μὲ τὴν Ἀμερικὴ, παρὰ μὲ τὴν Εὐρώπη.” Credit to Anne Marie Weyl Carr who cites this in her review of *Sinai Byzantium Russia*: 2 <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/415>.
- 34 [Andreakadaki-Vlaziaki 2013](#): 10.
- 35 [Tsarouchis 1964](#): 401.
- 36 See the essay by Yuri Pyatnitsky in this Handbook.
- 37 [Lazarev 1977](#).
- 38 [Chondrogiannis 2017](#): 183, also notes the concentration on objects of everyday use. On Byzantine Studies in Soviet Russia, see the essay by Lora Gerd in this Handbook.
- 39 [Piatnitsky 2000](#): 15
- 40 [Ostrowski 2007](#).
- 41 [Piatnitsky 2005](#): 9.
- 42 [Atasoy 1983](#): 138; [Durak 2023](#): 206–8.
- 43 *The Remnants* (no. 89), displayed at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul perhaps represents one earlier attempt; but it is notable that the *Byzantine Collection* and *Istanbul Through the Ages* galleries in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum have been closed for a number of years now.
- 44 For a full account of these exhibitions and the smaller shows organised in Istanbul in the past 30 years, as well as the broader political and social context of Byzantine studies in Turkey, see [Durak 2023](#): 219–50.
- 45 [Dönbekçi et al. 2023](#): 58–72.
- 46 [Cormack 1998](#): 27–39.
- 47 [Eastmond 2010](#): 313–22.
- 48 [Kazhdan and Wharton Epstein 1985](#): 259–60.
- 49 [Miller 1997](#).

- 50 Anne Marie Weyl Carr's review of Sinai Byzantium Russia: <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/415>
- 51 Obolensky 1971.
- 52 On Orientalism: Cormack 2013: 30.
- 53 Anderson and Ivanova 2023: 11–2.
- 54 Cormack 1978: 3; Cormack 2013: 21.
- 55 Vaklinova 2011: 3.
- 56 For example: Georgia to *Wine, worship, and sacrifice: the golden graves of ancient Vani* (Washington DC, 2008) which travelled to the US, UK and Greece in 2008; Armenia to *Luxury and Power: Persia to Greece* (London: British Museum 2023).
- 57 On the Armenian voice on the reception of Byzantium, see the essay by Nazenie Garibian in this Handbook.
- 58 Piatnitsky 2011: 87.
- 59 Serrano 2010.
- 60 Eastmond 2023.
- 61 Cormack 1994.
- 62 Evans and Ratliff 2012: vii.
- 63 Thomas 1997: 368–71.
- 64 Bickford Berzock 2019.

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## Appendix I: Byzantine Exhibitions 1900–1945

|   | <i>Year</i> | <i>Exhibition</i>                                                                                                  | <i>Location</i>                                                 | <i>Notes</i>                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 1905        | <i>L'art byzantine à l'exposition de Grottaferrata</i> , A. Muñoz (Rome: Danesi, 1906)                             | <b>Grottaferrata</b> , Abbey of Grottaferrata, April 1905       | Recognised as the first major show of Byzantine art, with more than 700 exhibits, but see also Pyatnitsky's essay in this Handbook for information about Russian displays of the nineteenth century |
| 2 | 1923        | <i>Catalogue of an Exhibition of Carvings in Ivory</i> , ed. E. Maclagan (London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1923) | <b>London</b> : Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1923                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 3 | 1931        | Exposition internationale d'art byzantine, ed. C. Diehl (Paris: Musée des arts décoratifs, 1931)                   | <b>Paris</b> , Musée des arts décoratifs, 28 May to 9 July 1931 |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 4 | 1933        | <i>Exhibition of Greek and Byzantine Painting</i> , ed. D. Talbot Rice (London: Typescript catalogue, 1933)        | <b>London</b> : Courtauld Institute of Art, 18–31 January 1933  |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

## Appendix II: Byzantine Exhibitions 1945–2023

|    | <i>Year</i> | <i>Exhibition</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <i>Location</i>                                                                                                                                       | <i>Notes</i>                                                                         |
|----|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5  | 1946        | <i>Greek Art. A commemorative catalogue of an exhibition held in 1946 at the Royal Academy, Burlington House, London</i> , eds. J. Chittenden and C. Settman (London: Faber & Faber, 1946)                                                                   | <b>London</b> , Royal Academy, 15 February to 17 March 1946                                                                                           | 67 Byzantine objects among its 583 exhibits (including works by Rublev and El Greco) |
| 6  | 1947        | <i>Early Christian and Byzantine art</i> , eds. D. Miner & M. Ross (Baltimore: Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, 1947)                                                                                                                                    | <b>Baltimore MD</b> , Walters Art Gallery, 25 April to 22 June 1947                                                                                   | Framed around US collectors                                                          |
| 7  | 1951        | <i>Mostra di manoscritti in occasione dell' VIII congresso internazionale di studi bizantini</i> (Palermo: Biblioteca Nazionale, 1951)                                                                                                                       | <b>Palermo</b> , Biblioteca Nazionale 3–10 April 1951                                                                                                 | Accompanying the VII International Congress of Byzantine Studies                     |
| 8  | 1958        | <i>Masterpieces of Byzantine Art</i> , ed. D. Talbot Rice (London: Edinburgh University Press, 1958)                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Edinburgh</b> , Royal Scottish Museum, 23 August to 12 September 1958;<br><b>London</b> , Victoria and Albert Museum, 1 October to 9 November 1958 | David Talbot Rice's exhibition, executed with John Beckwith                          |
| 9  | 1958        | <i>Byzance et la France médiévale: manuscrits à peintures du IIe au XVIe siècle</i> , ed. F. Wormald (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1958)                                                                                                                   | <b>Paris</b> , Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 24 June 1958 to 31 January 1959                                                                      |                                                                                      |
| 10 | 1964        | <i>Βυζαντινὴ τέχνη, Τέχνη ευρωπαϊκή   Byzantine Art, a European Art</i> (Athens: Office of the Minister to the Prime Minister of the Greek Government, Department of Antiquities and Archaeological Restoration, 1964) [effectively ed. Manolis Chatzidakis] | <b>Athens</b> , Zappeion Exhibition Hall, 1 April to 15 June 1964                                                                                     | Timed around Greece's bid to enter the European Economic Community                   |
| 11 | 1973        | <i>Illuminated Greek Manuscripts from American Collections</i> , ed. G. Vikan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973)                                                                                                                                  | <b>Princeton NJ</b> , University Art Museum, 14 April to 20 May 1973                                                                                  | In honour of Kurt Weitzmann                                                          |

(Continued)



|    | Year | Exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Location                                                                                                                             | Notes                                                                                                                                 |
|----|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12 | 1974 | <i>Venezia e Bisanzio</i> , eds. S. Bettini and I. Furlan (Venezia: Electa, 1974)                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Venice, Palazzo Ducale, 8 June to 30 September 1974                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                       |
| 13 | 1975 | <i>Искусство Византии в собраниях СССР   Byzantine art in the collections of the USSR</i> , eds. A.V. Bank and M. A. Bessonova (Moscow: Sovetskiy Khudozhnik, 1977)<br><u>Краткий путеводитель по выставке   Short guide to the exhibition</u> , ed. V. Lazarev (Leningrad, 1975) also published | Leningrad, State Hermitage Museum, 26 September 1975 to 8 February 1976;<br>Moscow, State Historical Museum, 26 April to 5 June 1977 | Comprehensive show of objects in Soviet collections in Russia and Ukraine; minimal catalogue entries, with Alice Bank as lead curator |
| 14 | 1976 | <i>Βυζαντινές εικόνες της Κύπρου   Byzantine Icons of Cyprus</i> , eds. D. Mouriki and A. Papageorgiou (Athens: Benaki Museum, 1976)                                                                                                                                                             | Athens, Benaki Museum, 1 September to 30 November 1976                                                                               | Response to the Turkish invasion of 1974                                                                                              |
| 15 | 1976 | <i>Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες και εικόνες   Byzantine Murals and Icons</i> , ed. M. Chatzidakis (Athens: Ministry of Culture and Science, 1976)                                                                                                                                                     | Athens, National Gallery, September–December 1976                                                                                    | Accompanying the XV International Congress of Byzantine Studies                                                                       |
| 16 | 1977 | <i>Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century</i> , ed. K. Weitzmann (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979)                                                                                                                                   | New York NY, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 19 November 1977 to 12 February 1978                                                    | The Met's first 'blockbuster', organised by religion and medium, curated by Kurt Weitzmann                                            |
| 17 | 1978 | <i>The Christian Orient</i> , ed. G. E. Marrison (London: The British Library, 1978)                                                                                                                                                                                                             | London, The British Library, 5 July to 24 September 1978                                                                             | Small manuscript show drawn from the BL collections                                                                                   |
| 18 | 1978 | <i>The Byzantine World, AD 330–1453</i> , eds. T. Boatswain and L. Knowles (Chichester: District Museum, 1978)                                                                                                                                                                                   | Chichester, District Museum 11 July to 30 September 1978                                                                             |                                                                                                                                       |
| 19 | 1980 | <i>Gifts from the Byzantine Court</i> , ed. G. Vikan (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1980)                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks, 6 February to 1 June 1980                                                                             |                                                                                                                                       |
| 20 | 1982 | <i>Splendeur de Byzance</i> , ed. J. Lafontaine-Dosogne (Brussels: Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1982)                                                                                                                                                                                      | Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 2 October to 2 December 1982                                                            | Belgian national exhibition                                                                                                           |

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|----|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 21 | 1982 | <i>Byzantine Pilgrimage Art</i> , ed. G. Vikan [Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collections Publications: 5] (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1982)                                                               | Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks, 1982                                                                                                     |                                                                                           |
| 22 | 1983 | <i>The Anatolian civilisations, II: Greek/Roman/ Byzantine</i> , ed. F. Edgöl (Istanbul: Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 1983)                                                                                                   | Istanbul, St Irene & Topkapi Palace Museum, 22 May to 30 October 1983                                                                   | First exhibition of Byzantine art in Turkey                                               |
| 23 | 1983 | <i>Spätantike und frühes Christentum</i> , ed. D. Stutzinger (Frankfurt: Liebieghaus Museum, 1983)                                                                                                                                        | Frankfurt am Main, Liebieghaus, Museum alter Plastik, 16 December 1983 to 11 March 1984                                                 |                                                                                           |
| 24 | 1984 | <i>The Treasury of San Marco, Venice</i> , ed. D. Buckton (Milan: Olivetti, 1984)                                                                                                                                                         | London, British Museum<br>New York NY, Metropolitan Museum of Art;<br>Paris, Grand Palais;<br>Cologne, Römish-Germanisches Museum, 1984 | A travelling exhibition of Byzantine and Islamic art from the Tesoro di San Marco, Venice |
| 25 | 1984 | <i>Έκθεση για τα εκατό χρόνια της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (1884–1984)   Exhibition for the centenary of the Christian Archaeological Society (1884–1984)</i> (Athens: Archaeological Receipts and Expropriations Fund, 1984) | Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, 6 October 1984 to 30 June 1985                                                                  |                                                                                           |
| 26 | 1985 | <i>Βυζαντινή και μεταβυζαντινή τέχνη   Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art</i> , eds. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou and Th. Liva-Xanthaki (Athens: Ministry of Culture, Byzantine and Christian Museum, 1986)                                    | Athens, Old University, 26 July 1985 to 6 January 1986                                                                                  | Athens as cultural capital of Europe, following European Union accession in 1985          |
| 27 | 1986 | <i>Byzantium at Princeton: Byzantine art and archaeology at Princeton University</i> , eds. S. Ćurčić and A. St. Clair (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986)                                                                      | Princeton University NJ, Firestone Library, 1 August – 26 October 1986                                                                  | Accompanying the XVII International Congress of Byzantine Studies                         |

(Continued)

|    | <i>Year</i> | <i>Exhibition</i>                                                                                                                                                           | <i>Location</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <i>Notes</i>                                                                                                               |
|----|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 28 | 1986        | <i>Affreschi e icone dalla Grecia (X-XVII secolo)</i> , ed. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou (Athens: Ministero greco della cultura. Museo Bizantino di Atene, 1986)               | <b>Florence</b> , Palazzo Strozzi, 16 September to 16 November 1986                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | A slimmed down version of Athens 1985                                                                                      |
| 29 | 1987        | <i>From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek frescoes and icons</i> , ed. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou (Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture. Byzantine Museum of Athens, 1987)           | <b>London</b> , Royal Academy, 27 March to 21 June 1987                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | A slimmed down version of Athens 1985, but re-curated with a clearer narrative about the development of Byzantine painting |
| 30 | 1988        | <i>Gouden licht: meesterwerken der ikonenkunst</i> , ed. E. Vandamme (Ghent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1988)                                                                    | <b>Antwerp</b> , Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, 1988                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                            |
| 31 | 1988–89     | <i>Holy Image, Holy Space: Icons and Frescoes from Greece</i> , ed. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou (Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture, Byzantine Museum of Athens, 1988)         | <b>Baltimore MD</b> , The Walters Art Gallery, August 21 to 16 October 1988;<br><b>Miami FL</b> , Center for the Fine Arts, 14 November 1988 to 8 January 1989;<br><b>Fort Worth TX</b> , Kimbell Art Museum, 6 February to 7 April 1989;<br><b>San Francisco CA</b> , The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 25 April to 15 July 1989;<br><b>Cleveland OH</b> , The Cleveland Museum of Art, 6 September to 22 October 1989;<br><b>Detroit MI</b> , The Detroit Institute of Arts, 19 November 1989 to 14 January 1990 | A slimmed down version of Athens 1985                                                                                      |
| 32 | 1990        | <i>Splendori di Bisanzio. Testimonianze e riflessi d'arte cultura Bizantina nelle chiese d' Italia</i> , ed. G. Morello (Milan: Fabbri, 1990)                               | <b>Ravenna</b> , Museo Nazionale, 1990                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | An Italian national exhibition drawn from 36 church collections                                                            |
| 33 | 1990        | <i>Von Constantin zu Karl der Grossen. Denkmäler der Heidentums und Christentums aus der Spätantike</i> , ed. W. Binsfeld (Mainz: Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum, 1990) | <b>Speyer</b> , Historisches Museum, 28 September 1990 to 6 January 1991                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                            |

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|----|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 34 | 1991 | <i>Medieval Pictorial Embroidery. Byzantium, Balkans, Russia</i> , ed. N.A. Mayasova (Moscow: Moscow Kremlin State Museums, 1991)                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Moscow</b> , State Museum of the Moscow Kremlin, 8–15 August 1991                | Accompanied the XVIII International Congress of Byzantine Studies |
| 35 | 1991 | *Византия и византийские традиции: памятники из фондов Эрмитажа и Русского музея   <i>Byzantium and Byzantine Traditions: Monuments from the collections of the Hermitage and Russian Museum</i> (St Petersburg: The State Hermitage Museum, 1991)                                    | <b>St Petersburg</b> , State Hermitage Museum, 2 August to 10 September 1991        | Accompanied the XVIII International Congress of Byzantine Studies |
| 36 | 1991 | Византия. Балканы. Русь. Иконы конца XIII - первой половины XV века   <i>Byzantium, Balkans, Rus'. Icons from the end of the XIII to the first half of the XV centuries</i> , comp.: E. Ostashenko et al. (Moscow: Publishing House of the State Museums of the Moscow Kremlin, 1991) | <b>Moscow</b> , State Museums of the Moscow Kremlin, August–September 1991          | Accompanied the XVIII International Congress of Byzantine Studies |
| 37 | 1992 | <i>Ceramic Art from Byzantine Serres</i> , eds. D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi, E.D. Maguire, and H. Maguire (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992)                                                                                                                         | <b>Urbana-Champaign IL</b> , Krannert Art Museum, 1992                              |                                                                   |
| 38 | 1992 | <i>Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Liturgie und Andacht im Mittelalter</i> (Stuttgart: Belser Verlag, 1992)                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Cologne</b> , Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum, 9 October 1992 to 10 January 1993 | Byzantine and Latin manuscripts from the Vatican libraries        |
| 39 | 1992 | <i>Byzance. L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises</i> (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1992)                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Paris</b> , Musée du Louvre, 3 November 1992 to 1 February 1993                  | French national exhibition                                        |
| 40 | 1993 | <i>Venetiae quasi alteri byzantium. Collezioni veneziane di codici greci dalle raccolte della biblioteca nazionale marciana</i> , ed. M. Zorzi (Venice: Il Cardo, 1993)                                                                                                               | <b>Venice</b> , Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 16 September to 15 October 1993      |                                                                   |

(Continued)

|    | Year | Exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Location                                                                                              | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 41 | 1993 | <i>Ikonen. Bilder in Gold. Sakrale Kunst aus Griechenland</i> , eds. H. Egger and R. Wenckheim (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1993)                                                                                                                | <b>Krems-Stein</b> , Kunst Halle, Krems, 20 May to 10 October 1993                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 42 | 1993 | <i>Εικόνες της Κρητικής τέχνης (Από του Χάνδακα ως τη Μόσχα και την Αγία Πετρούπολη   Icons of Cretan Art, from Chandax to Moscow and St Petersburg</i> , ed. M. Borboudakis, introd. M. Chatzidakis (Heraklion: Vikelaia Library, Crete University Press, 1993) | <b>Herakleion</b> , Basilika of Saint Mark-Church of Saint Catherine, 15 September to 30 October 1993 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 43 | 1994 | <i>Byzantine figural processional crosses</i> , ed. J.A. Cotsonis [Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection publications: 10] (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1994)                                                                  | <b>Washington DC</b> , Dumbarton Oaks, 23 September 1994 to 29 January 1995                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 44 | 1994 | <i>Omaggio a San Marco. Tesori dall'Europa</i> , eds. H. Fillitz and G. Morello (Venice: Electa, 1994)                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Venice</b> , Palazzo Ducale, 8 October 1994 to 28 February 1995                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 45 | 1994 | <i>Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections</i> , ed. D. Buckton (London: The British Museum, 1994)                                                                                                                            | <b>London</b> , The British Museum, 9 December 1994 to 23 April 1995                                  | UK national exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 46 | 1995 | <i>*Bizancio: Arte y Espiritu</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Santiago, Chile</b> , 11 May to 11 June 1995                                                       | No catalogue. This was a series of exhibitions organised by the Ministry of Culture of Greece, the Embassy of Greece in Chile and the Centro de Estudios Bizantinos y Neohelénicos “Fotios Malleros” – Universidad de Chile. Each one had its own leaflet/booklet and all were kept together in a folder. |

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| 47 | 1996 | <i>Byzantium: Late Antique and Byzantine Art in Scandinavian Collections</i> , eds. J. Fleischer, Ø. Hjort, and M.B. Rasmussen (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1996)                                                                                        | <b>Copenhagen</b> , Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1 June to 31 August 1996           | Accompanied the XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies; Scandinavian ‘national’ exhibition |
| 48 | 1996 | <i>Lumières de l’Orient chrétien. Icônes de la collection Abou Adal</i> (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997)                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Geneva</b> , Musée d’art et d’histoire, 12 December 1996 to 4 May 1997      |                                                                                                     |
| 49 | 1996 | <i>After Byzantium: The Survival of Byzantine Sacred Art</i> (London: The Hellenic Centre, 1996)                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>London</b> , The Hellenic Centre, 1996                                      | Display of the private Latsis collection                                                            |
| 50 | 1997 | <i>The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261</i> , eds. H.C. Evans and W.D. Wixom (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997)                                                                                      | <b>New York NY</b> , The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 11 March to 6 July 1997   | The second of the Met’s Byzantine Trilogy, following no. 16                                         |
| 51 | 1997 | <i>Η δόξα του Βυζαντίου στο Όρος Σινά. Θρησκευτικοί θησαυροί   The Glory of Byzantium at Sinai. Religious Treasures from the Holy Monastery of St. Catherine</i> , ed. A. Drandaki (Athens: Benaki Museum, 1997)                                                 | <b>Athens</b> , Benaki Museum, 17 September to 24 October 1997                 | Reprints the Sinai entries from <i>The Glory of Byzantium</i> (no. 50)                              |
| 52 | 1997 | <i>Θησαυροί του Αγίου Όρους   Treasures of Mount Athos</i> , ed. A. A. Karakatsanis (Thessaloniki: Sacred Community of Holy Mount Athos, Ministry of Culture, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Organization of Cultural Capital of Europe “Thessaloniki 1997”, 1997) | <b>Thessaloniki</b> , Museum of Byzantine Culture, 21 June to 31 December 2007 | Thessaloniki Cultural Capital of Europe 1997                                                        |
| 53 | 1998 | <i>Byzanz. Die Macht der Bilder</i> , eds. M. Brandt and A. Effenberger [Materialheft des Dom-Museums Hildesheim I] (Hildesheim, 1998)                                                                                                                           | <b>Hildesheim</b> , Dom-Museum, 1998                                           | Collections of Hildesheim brought together with objects from Berlin and the Vatican                 |

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|    | Year | Exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Location                                                                                                                                                                | Notes                                                                                                                                         |
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| 54 | 1998 | <i>Rom und Byzanz. Schatzkammerstücke aus bayerischen Sammlungen</i> , ed. R. Baumstark (Munich: Bayerisches Nationalmuseum & Hirmer Verlag, 1998)                                                                                                                     | <b>Munich</b> , Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, 20 October 1998 to 14 February 1999                                                                                         | Bavarian 'national' exhibition                                                                                                                |
| 55 | 1998 | <i>Oriente cristiano e santità: figure e storie di santi tra Bisanzio e l'Occidente</i> , ed. S. Gentile (Venice: Centro Tibaldi, 1998)                                                                                                                                | <b>Venice</b> , Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 2 July to 14 November 1998                                                                                               | The second of three exhibitions organised by the Ministero per i Beni Culturali and the Vatican leading up to the bimillenary of Christianity |
| 56 | 1998 | Христиане на востоке. Искусство мелькитов и инославных христиан   <i>Christians in the East: The Art of the Melchites and non-Orthodox Christians</i> , eds. V.N. Zalesskaya, Y.A. Pyatnitsky and I.N. Ukhanova (St Petersburg: Slavia, 1998)                          | <b>St Petersburg</b> , State Hermitage Museum, 1998                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                               |
| 57 | 1999 | * <i>Ceremony and Faith. Byzantine Art and the Divine Liturgy</i>   Ιεροτελεστία και πίστις. Βυζαντινή τέχνη και Θεία Λειτουργία, eds. J. Albani and Y. Vitaliotis (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Directorate of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Monuments, 1999) | <b>Melbourne</b> , Immigration and Hellenic Antiquities Museum, May–November 1999<br>Later shown in the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, and on Rhodes           |                                                                                                                                               |
| 58 | 2000 | <i>Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art</i> (also translated into Greek: <i>Μήτηρ Θεού. Απεικονίσεις της Παναγίας στη Βυζαντινή Τέχνη</i> , ed. M. Vassilaki (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2000))                                                   | <b>Athens</b> , Benaki Museum, 20 October 2000 to 20 January 2001                                                                                                       | Celebration of the bimillenary of Christianity                                                                                                |
| 59 | 2000 | <i>Sinai, Byzantium, Russia. Orthodox Art from the Sixth to the Twentieth Century</i> , eds. Y. Piatnitsky, O. Baddeley, E. Brunner, and M.M. Mango (London: Lund Humphries, 2000)                                                                                     | <b>St Petersburg</b> , State Hermitage Museum, 19 June to 18 September 2000<br><b>London</b> , Courtauld Gallery, 19 October 2000 to 4 February 2001 [Sinai icons only] | Despite the title, it was organised by emperor – from Justinian to Nicholas II                                                                |



- 60    2000    1. *Ωρες Βυζαντίου. Έργα και Ημέρες στο Βυζάντιο. Καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο* | *Byzantine Hours. Works and Days in Byzantium. Everyday Life in Byzantium*, ed. D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi (Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2001)    **Thessaloniki**, White Tower, 10 October 2001 to 10 January 2002    Four interlinked exhibitions; among the first to concentrate on daily life. organised to celebrate the bimillennial.
2. *Ωρες Βυζαντίου. Έργα και Ημέρες στο Βυζάντιο. Το Βυζάντιο ως Οικουμένη* | *Byzantine Hours. Works and Days in Byzantium. Byzantium as Ecumene*, eds. H. Papastavrou, M. Evangelatou, and T.-P. Skotti, (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2001)    **Athens**, Byzantine and Christian Museum, 10 October 2001 to 10 January 2002
3. *Ωρες Βυζαντίου. Έργα και Ημέρες στο Βυζάντιο. Η Πολιτεία του Μυστρά* | *Byzantine Hours. Works and Days in Byzantium. The City of Mystras*, eds. P. Kalamara and A. Mexia (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2001)    **Mystras**, Archaeological site, 3 August 2001 to 10 January 2002
4. *Ωρες Βυζαντίου. Έργα και Ημέρες στο Βυζάντιο* | *Byzantine Hours. Works and Days in Byzantium*.    **Thessaloniki**, October 2001 to January 2002
- A) *Επταπύργιο. Η Ακρόπολη της Θεσσαλονίκης* | *Eptapyrgion. The Acropolis of Thessaloniki*, Text of Catalogue: Ai. Tsanana (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 9th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, 2001)
- B) *Δοκίμιο για την Οχυρωματική στο Βυζάντιο. Ο Βορειοελλαδικός Χώρος 4ος – 15ος αι.* | *An Essay on Byzantine Fortification. Northern Greece 4th– 15th c.*, Text of Catalogue: N. Bakirtzis and Ph. Oreopoulos (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 9th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, 2001)

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|    | Year | Exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Location                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Notes                                                                           |
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| 61 | 2000 | <i>Cradle of Christianity</i> , eds. Y. Israeli and D. Mevorah (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2000)                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Jerusalem</b> , The Israel Museum, spring 2000 to winter 2001                                                                                                                                                            | Israeli national show                                                           |
| 62 | 2000 | <i>Antioch. The Lost Ancient City</i> , ed. C. Kondoleon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Worcester MA</b> , Art Museum, 7 October 2000 to 4 February 2001;<br><b>Cleveland OH</b> , the Cleveland Museum of Art 18 March to 3 June 2001;<br><b>Baltimore MD</b> , Museum of Art, 16 September to 30 December 2001 | Focused on the colonial assumptions of the archaeological missions of the 1930s |
| 63 | 2001 | <i>Byzance retrouvée: érudits et voyageurs français (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)</i> , eds. M.-F. Auzépy and J.-P. Grégoire (Paris: Centre d'Etudes Byzantines Néo-Helléniques et Sud-Est Européennes, 2001)                                                           | <b>Paris</b> , Chapelle de la Sorbonne, 13 August to 2 September 2001                                                                                                                                                       | Accompanied the XX International Congress of Byzantine Studies                  |
| 64 | 2001 | * <i>Der Glanz des Himmels. Sakrale Schätze aus byzantinischen Sammlungen und Museen Griechenlands</i>   The splendour of Heaven. Sacred treasures from Byzantine Collections and Museums in Greece, ed. J. Albani (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2001) | <b>Frankfurt</b> , Dommuseum, September 2001 to January 2002                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                 |
| 65 | 2001 | <i>Συλλογή Γεωργίου Τσολοζίδη. Το Βυζάντιο με τη ματιά ενός συλλέκτη</i>   <i>The Georgios Tsolozidis Collection Byzantium through the eyes of a collector</i> (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2001)                        | <b>Thessaloniki</b> , Museum of Byzantine Culture, 29 June to 31 December 2001<br><b>Venice</b> , Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, 2002                                                                | Objects from the Tsolozidis collection                                          |
| 66 | 2001 | <i>Byzanz – Das Licht aus dem Osten. Kult und Alltag im Byzantinischen Reich vom 4. Bis 15. Jahrhundert</i> , ed. C. Stiegemann (Mainz: Diözesanmuseum Paderborn & Philipp von Zabern, 2001)                                                                    | <b>Paderborn</b> , Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum und Domschatzkammer 6 December 2001 to 31 March 2002                                                                                                                     |                                                                                 |
| 67 | 2002 | <i>Byzantine Women and their World</i> , ed. I. Kalavrezou (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003)                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Cambridge MA</b> , Harvard, University Art Museums, 25 October 2002 to 28 April 2003                                                                                                                                     | A feminist approach to Byzantium                                                |

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| 68 | 2002 | <i>Post-Byzantium: The Greek Renaissance, 15th–18th century treasures from the Byzantine &amp; Christian Museum, Athens</i> , ed. G. Kakavas (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Byzantine & Christian Museum, 2002)<br><i>Riflessidei Bisanzio Glimpses of Byzantium 15th–18th Century Masterworks from the Christian and Byzantine Museum in Athens</i> | <b>New York</b> , Onassis Cultural Center,<br>7 November 2002 to 8 February 2003<br><br><b>Rome</b> , Capitoline Museums, Caffarilli Palace, 22 May to 7 September 2003 |                                                                    |
| 69 | 2003 | <i>*Bizancio en España. De la Antigüedad tardía a El Greco</i> , ed. M. Cortés Arrese (Madrid: Secretaría General Técnica. Subdirección General de Información y Publicaciones, 2003)                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Madrid</b> , Museo Arqueológico Nacional,<br>April–July 2003                                                                                                         | Spanish national exhibition                                        |
| 70 | 2003 | <i>*Aspectos de la Vida Cotidiana en Bizancio/Aspectos da Vida Cotidiana em Bizâncio</i> , eds. D. Papanikóla-Bakirtzi and J. Albani (Athens: Ministério da Cultura, 2003)                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Madrid</b> , Museo Arqueológico Nacional,<br>6 February to 15 March 2003;<br><b>Lisbon</b> , Museu Nacional de Arqueologia,<br>4 April to 15 June 2003               | *                                                                  |
| 71 | 2003 | <i>*Východní křesťanství/Eastern Christianity: Post-Byzantine Icons from Greece. Between tradition and renewal</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Brno</b> , Moravské zemské muzeum,<br>25 September 2003 to 31 January 2004                                                                                           | *                                                                  |
| 72 | 2004 | <i>Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)</i> , ed. H.C. Evans (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>New York NY</b> , The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 23 March to 4 July 2004                                                                                            | The third of the Met's Byzantine Trilogy, following nos. 16 and 50 |
| 73 | 2004 | <i>*Mount Athos treasures in Russia: tenth to seventeenth centuries: from the museums, libraries and archives of Moscow and the Moscow region</i> , eds. B.L. Fonkich, G.V. Popov, L.M. Evseeva, and L.I. Antonova (Moscow: Severnyi palomnik, 2004)                                                                                                         | <b>Moscow</b> , Tsentral'nyi muzei drevnerusskoi kul'tury i iskusstva imeni Andreia Rubleva, 2004                                                                       |                                                                    |

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|    | Year | Exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Location                                                                                                                              | Notes                                                                                                                                                         |
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| 74 | 2004 | <i>Byzantium and the West</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Los Angeles CA, J. Paul Getty Museum, 14 September to 5 December 2004                                                                 | No catalogue                                                                                                                                                  |
| 75 | 2004 | <i>Pilgrimage to Sinai. Treasures from the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine</i> , ed. A. Drandaki (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2004)<br><i>Trésors du Monastère de Sainte-Catherine Mont Sinai, Égypte</i> , ed. H. Evans (Martigny: Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 2004) | Athens, Benaki Museum 20 July to 26 September 2004<br><br>Martigny, Fondation Pierre Gianadda, 5 October to 12 December 2004          | Reprints the Sinai entries from <i>Byzantium: Faith and Power</i> (no. 72)                                                                                    |
| 76 | 2004 | <i>Restoring Byzantium. The Kariye Camii in Istanbul and the Byzantine Institute Restoration</i> , eds. H.A. Klein and R. Ousterhout (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, New York, 2004)                                                            | New York NY, Columbia University, 14 April to 12 June 2004;<br>Urbana-Champaign IL, Krannert Art Museum, 24 August to 10 October 2004 |                                                                                                                                                               |
| 77 | 2004 | <i>Mandylion. Intorno al Sacro Volto, da Bisanzio a Genova</i> , eds. G. Wolf, C.D. Bozzo, and A.R. Calderoni Masetti (Milan: Skira Editore, 2004)                                                                                                                | Genoa, Museo Diocesano, 2 April to 4 July 2004                                                                                        | Small focused exhibition on the Mandylion in S. Bartolomeo degli Armeni, Genoa                                                                                |
| 78 | 2004 | <i>Die Welt von Byzanz - Europas östliches Erbe</i> , ed. L. Wamser (Munich: Archäologische Staatssammlung – Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, 2004)                                                                                                            | Munich, Archäologische Staatssammlung – Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, 22 October 2004 to 3 April 2005                           |                                                                                                                                                               |
| 79 | 2005 | <i>Pilgrim Treasures from the Hermitage: Byzantium – Jerusalem</i> (Lund Humphries in association with Hermitage Amsterdam, 2005)                                                                                                                                 | Amsterdam, Hermitage Museum, 1 October 2005 to 26 March 2006                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                               |
| 80 | 2005 | <i>Συλλογή Γεωργίου Τσολοζίδη: Έργα Βυζαντινής και μεταβυζαντινής τέχνης</i>   <i>Georgios Tsolozidis Collection: Byzantine &amp; Post-Byzantine Art</i> , ed. A. Tsakalos (Athens: Hellenic ministry of Culture, Byzantine and Christian Museum, 2005)           | Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, 1 June to 31 August 2005                                                                      | This exhibition drew material from the Tsolozides collections, similar to the 2001 exhibition (no. 65) A catalogue of 45 pages was published to accompany it. |

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| 81 | 2006 | <i>The Road to Byzantium: Luxury Arts of Antiquity</i> , eds. A. Eastmond, R. Cormack, and P. Stewart (London: Fontanka, 2006)                                                                                                          | <b>London</b> , Hermitage Rooms, Somerset House, 30 March to 6 September 2006                                                                 | Primarily works from the Hermitage tracing classical continuity into Byzantium<br>Accompanied the XXI International Congress of Byzantine Studies |
| 82 | 2006 | <i>Encounters: Travel and Money in the Byzantine World</i> , eds. E. Georganteli and B. Cook (London: D. Giles Ltd, 2006)                                                                                                               | <b>London</b> , British Museum, Easter 2006<br><b>Birmingham</b> , Barber Institute of Fine Arts, 14 February 2007 to 15 January 2008         | Accompanied the XXI International Congress of Byzantine Studies                                                                                   |
| 83 | 2006 | <i>Constantine the Great: York's Roman Emperor</i> , eds. E. Hartley, J. Hawkes, M. Henig, and M. Frances (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2006)                                                                                             | <b>York</b> , Yorkshire Museum, 31 March to 29 October 2006                                                                                   | Commemoration of 1700 years since the accession of Constantine the Great                                                                          |
| 84 | 2006 | <i>Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai</i> , eds. R.S. Nelson and K.M. Collins (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006)                                                                                                       | <b>Los Angeles CA</b> , J. Paul Getty Museum, 14 November 2006 to 4 March 2007                                                                | Icons from St Catherine's Monastery, Mt Sinai                                                                                                     |
| 85 | 2007 | <i>Konstantin der Grosse: Imperator Caesar Flavius Constantinus</i> , eds. A. Demandt and J. Engemann (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2007)                                                                                                 | <b>Trier</b> , Rheinisches Landesmuseum, the Bischöfliches Dom- und Diözesanmuseum and the Stadtmuseum Simeonstift, 2 June to 4 November 2007 | Commemoration of 1700 years since the accession of Constantine the Great                                                                          |
| 86 | 2007 | * <i>Athos: Monastic Life on the Holy Mountain</i> , ed. B. Arell (Helsinki: Maahenki, 2006)                                                                                                                                            | <b>Helsinki</b> , Art Museum Tennis Palace, 18 August 2006 – 21 January 2007                                                                  | *                                                                                                                                                 |
| 87 | 2007 | <i>Sacred. Books of the Three Faiths: Judaism, Christianity, Islam</i> , ed. J. Reeve (London: The British Library, 2007)                                                                                                               | <b>London</b> , The British Library 27 April to 23 September 2007                                                                             | Religious Manuscripts from the British Library                                                                                                    |
| 88 | 2007 | <i>Gün Işığında İstanbul'un 8000 Yılı - Marmaray, Metro, Sultanahmet Kazıları   8000 years of Istanbul in Daylight: Marmaray, Metro, Sultanahmet Excavations</i> , eds. B. Öztuncay et al. (İstanbul: Vehbi Koç Vakfı Foundation, 2007) | <b>İstanbul</b> , Archaeological Museum, 25 June to 31 December 2007                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                   |

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|    | Year | Exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Location                                                                                                                                                                   | Notes                                                                                                                                     |
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| 89 | 2007 | <i>Kalanlar. 12. ve 13. Yüzyıllarda Türkiye’de Bizans   The Remnants. 12th and 13th centuries. Byzantine Objects in Turkey</i> , ed. A. Ödekan (Istanbul: Vehbi Koç Vakfı Foundation, 2007)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Istanbul</b> , Archaeological Museum, 26 June to 31 October 2007                                                                                                        | Accompanied the First Sevgi Gönül Symposium                                                                                               |
| 90 | 2007 | <i>Picturing the Bible. The Earliest Christian Art</i> , ed. J. Spier (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Fort Worth TX</b> , Kimbell Art Museum, 18 November 2007 to 30 March 2008                                                                                               | Reconceptualisation of <i>The Age of Spirituality</i> (no. 16)                                                                            |
| 91 | 2008 | <i>Byzantium 330–1453</i> , eds. R. Cormack and M. Vassilaki (London: Royal Academy, 2008)<br>The introductory essays of the catalogue were translated into Greek: <i>Βυζάντιο 330-1453</i> , ed. M. Vassilaki (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2009)                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>London</b> , Royal Academy, 25 October 2008 to 22 March 2009                                                                                                            | Synthetical blockbuster overview of Byzantine art, 50 years after (no. 8)                                                                 |
| 92 | 2009 | <i>Le Mont Athos et l’empire byzantin: trésors de la Sainte Montagne</i> , ed. B. Delanoë (Paris: Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, 2009)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Paris</b> , Petit Palais, 10 April to 5 July 2009                                                                                                                       | Major exhibition of treasures from Mount Athos                                                                                            |
| 93 | 2009 | <i>De Byzance à Istanbul. Un port pour deux continents</i> (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2009)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Paris</b> , Grand Palais, 10 October 2009 to 25 January 2010                                                                                                            | History of Byzantium/Constantinople/Istanbul, drawing heavily on objects from the city; part of the <i>Saison de la Turquie en France</i> |
| 94 | 2009 | <i>Torcello: alle origini di Venezia tra Occidente e Oriente</i> , eds. G. Caputo and G. Gentili (Venezia: Marsilio, 2009)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Venice</b> , Museo Diocesano, 29 August 2009 to 10 January 2010                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                           |
| 95 | 2009 | <i>Η Αρχιτεκτονική ως Εικόνα. Πρόσληψη και Αναπαράσταση της Αρχιτεκτονικής στη Βυζαντινή Τέχνη</i> , eds. E. Hadjistryphonos and S. Ćurčić (Thessaloniki: European Centre for Byzantine and post-Byzantine Monuments, Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2009)<br><i>Architecture as Icon: Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art</i> , eds. S. Ćurčić and E. Hadjistryphonos (Princeton, N.J.: Trustees of Princeton University, 2010) | <b>Thessaloniki</b> , Museum of Byzantine Culture, 6 November 2009 to 31 January 2010;<br><br><b>Princeton NJ</b> , Princeton University Art Museum, 6 March – 6 June 2010 | The catalogue was originally published in Greek for the Thessaloniki run of the exhibition and then in English for the Princeton run.     |

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| 96  | 2010 | <i>From Byzantium to Istanbul. 8000 years of a Capital</i> (Istanbul: Sakıp Sabancı Museum, 2010)                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Istanbul</b> , Sakıp Sabancı Museum, 5 June to 4 September 2010                                                                                                                                                           | 2010 European Capital of Culture                                                                                                  |
| 97  | 2010 | <i>Byzanz: Pracht und Alltag</i> , ed. J. Frings (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2010)                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Bonn</b> , Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 26 February to 13 June 2010                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                   |
| 98  | 2010 | <i>Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe</i> , eds. M. Bagnoli, H.A. Klein, C.G. Mann, and J. Robinson (London: The British Museum Press, 2010)                                                                                    | <b>Cleveland OH</b> , Cleveland Museum of Art, 17 October 2010 to 17 January 2011;<br><b>Baltimore MA</b> , the Walters Art Museum, 13 February to 15 May 2011;<br><b>London</b> , British Museum, 23 June to 9 October 2011 | Exhibition of reliquaries from across Christendom                                                                                 |
| 99  | 2010 | <i>Χειρ Αγγέλου. Ένας ζωγράφος εικόνων στη Βενετοκρατούμενη Κρήτη</i> , ed. M. Vassilaki (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2010)<br><i>The Hand of Angelos. An Icon Painter in Venetian Crete</i> , ed. M. Vassilaki (Farnham: Lund Humphries and the Benaki Museum, 2010) | <b>Athens</b> , Benaki Museum, 16 November 2010 to 16 January 2011                                                                                                                                                           | The exhibition had catalogues in Greek and English. Both catalogues were published by Lund Humphries and the Benaki Museum        |
| 100 | 2011 | <i>Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd-7th Century AD</i> , ed. A. Lazaridou (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation & Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2011)                                                      | <b>New York NY</b> , Onassis Cultural Center, 7 December 2011 to 14 May 2012                                                                                                                                                 | Re-conceptualisation of <i>Age of Spirituality</i> (no. 16); but can be read as a counter to <i>Byzantium and Islam</i> (no. 102) |
| 101 | 2011 | <i>Βυζάντιο &amp; Άραβες   Byzantium &amp; the Arabs</i> , eds. N. Bonovas and A. Tzitzibassi (Thessaloniki: Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2011)                                                                                                                  | <b>Thessaloniki</b> , Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki October 2011 to January 2012                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                   |
| 102 | 2012 | <i>Byzantium and Islam. Age of Transition 7th–9th century</i> , eds. H.C. Evans and B. Ratliff (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012)                                                                                                                      | <b>New York NY</b> , Metropolitan Museum of Art, 14 March to 8 July 2012                                                                                                                                                     | Shift to a postcolonial agenda, decentring Byzantium                                                                              |

(Continued)



|     | Year | Exhibition                                                                                                                                                                                           | Location                                                                                                                                                   | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 103 | 2012 | <i>*Das Goldene Byzanz &amp; der Orient</i> , ed. F. Daim (Schallaburg: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 2012)                                                                                    | <b>Schallaburg</b> , Kulturbetriebsges 30 March to 4 November 2012                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 104 | 2012 | <i>Chypre entre Byzance et l'Occident IVe-XVIe siècle</i> , eds. J. Durand and D. Giovannoni (Paris: Louvre éditions, 2012)                                                                          | <b>Paris</b> , Musée du Louvre, 28 October 2012 to 28 January 2013                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 105 | 2013 | <i>Byzantine Things in the World</i> , ed. G. Peers (Yale: Yale University Press, 2013)                                                                                                              | <b>Houston TX</b> , Menil Collection, 3 May to 18 August 2013                                                                                              | Byzantine and contemporary art in dialogue                                                                                                                                                            |
| 106 | 2013 | <i>Heaven and Earth. Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections</i> , eds. A. Drandaki, D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi, and A. Tourta (Athens: Benaki Museum and Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2013) | <b>Washington DC</b> , National Gallery of Art, 6 October 2013 to 2 March 2014;<br><b>Los Angeles CA</b> , J. Paul Getty Museum, 9 April to 25 August 2014 | Presented as a 'sequel' to <i>The Greek Miracle: Classical Sculpture from the Dawn of Democracy: The Fifth Century B.C.</i> , ed. D. Buitron-Oliver (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1992) |
| 107 | 2015 | <i>Byzance en Suisse</i> , ed. M. Martiniani-Reber (Geneva: Musées d'art et d'histoire; 5 continents, 2015)                                                                                          | <b>Geneva</b> , Musée Rath, 4 December 2015 to 13 March 2016                                                                                               | Swiss national exhibition                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 108 | 2016 | <i>Sicily: Culture and Conquest</i> , eds. D. Booms and P. Higgs (London: British Museum, 2016)                                                                                                      | <b>London</b> , British Museum, 21 April to 14 August 2016                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 109 | 2016 | <i>Византия сквозь века   Byzantium through the Centuries</i> , ed. M.B. Piotrovsky (Saint Petersburg: State Hermitage Publishers, 2017)                                                             | <b>St Petersburg</b> , State Hermitage Museum 24 June to 2 October 2016                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 110 | 2016 | <i>Jerusalem 1000-1400: Every People under Heaven</i> , eds. B.D. Boehm and M. Holcomb (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016)                                                              | <b>New York NY</b> , The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 26 September 2016 to 8 January 2017                                                                   | Multifaith approach to Jerusalem                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 111 | 2017 | <i>Imagining the Divine: Art and the Rise of World Religions</i> , eds. J. Elsner and S. Lenk (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2017)                                                                       | <b>Oxford</b> , Ashmolean Museum, 19 October 2017 to 18 February 2018                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 112 | 2017 | <i>Chrétiens d'Orient. 2000 ans d'histoire</i> , ed. R. Ziadé (Paris: Gallimard, 2017)                                                                                                               | <b>Paris</b> , Institut du Monde Arabe, 26 September 2017 to 14 January 2018                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 113 | 2018 | <i>Gli ultimi giorni di Bisanzio. Splendore e declino di un impero</i>                                                                                                                               | <b>Venice</b> , Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 26 November 2018 to 5 March 2019                                                                            | No catalogue                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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|-----|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 114 | 2018 | <i>To Βυζάντιο και οι άλλοι κατά την πρώτη χιλιετία: Μία αυτοκρατορία σταθερότητας σε περίοδο τριγμών   Byzantium and the Others in the First Millennium: An Empire of Stability in a Turbulent Era</i> | Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, 18 May to 10 October 2018                                                                                             | No catalogue.<br>The exhibition was organized within the framework of the EU project “CEMEC – Connecting Early Medieval European Collections”, co-funded by the Creative Europe Framework, with the coordination of the Allard Pierson Museum and the University of Amsterdam. The project aimed to use digital applications to enhance visitor experience of European museums’ medieval collections. |
| 115 | 2021 | <i>From Istanbul to Byzantium: Paths to Rediscovery, 1800–1955</i> , ed. B. Pitarakis (Istanbul: Pera Müzesi, 2021)                                                                                     | Istanbul, Pera Müzesi, 23 November 2021 to 13 March 2022                                                                                                      | One of a pair of exhibitions with no. 116                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 116 | 2021 | “What Byzantinism is this in Istanbul!”: <i>Byzantium in Popular Culture</i> , ed. E. Alişık (Istanbul: Pera Müzesi, 2021)                                                                              | Istanbul, Pera Müzesi, 23 November 2021 to 13 March 2022                                                                                                      | One of a pair of exhibitions with no. 115                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 117 | 2022 | <i>Bizantini. Luoghi, simboli e comunità di un impero millenario</i> , ed. F. Marazzi (Milan: Electa, 2023)                                                                                             | Naples, MANN Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 21 December 2022 to 10 April 2023;<br>Turin, Palazzo Madama – Museo Civico d’Arte Antica, 10 May to 28 August 2023 | Greek (20 museums) and Italian loans                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 118 | 2023 | <i>Africa and Byzantium</i> , ed. A.M. Achi, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2023)                                                                                                           | New York NY, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 19 November 2023 to 3 March 2024                                                                                     | A post-colonial de-centring of Byzantium                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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### Appendix III: Related Exhibitions 1945–2023

| <i>Armenia</i>  |      |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 119             | 1994 | <i>Treasures in Heaven. Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts</i> , eds. T.F. Mathews and R.S. Wieck (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)                                 |
|                 |      | New York NY, Pierpont Morgan Library, 4 May to 7 August, 1994;<br>Baltimore MD, Walters Art Gallery, 28 August to 23 October 1994                                             |
| 120             | 2001 | <i>Treasures from the Ark. 1700 Years of Armenian Christian Art</i> , ed. V. Nersessian (London: Oxford University Press, 2001)                                               |
|                 |      | London, British Library, 2 March to 28 May 2001                                                                                                                               |
| 121             | 2007 | <i>Armenia Sacra. Mémoire chrétienne des Arméniens (IVe-XVIIIe siècle)</i> , eds. J. Durand, I. Rapti, and D. Giovannoni (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2007)                       |
|                 |      | Paris, Musée du Louvre, 21 February to 21 May 2007                                                                                                                            |
| 122             | 2011 | <i>Armenia. Imprints of a Civilization</i> , eds. G. Uluhogian, B.L. Zekinyan, and V. Karapetian (Milan: Skira, 2011)                                                         |
|                 |      | Venice, Museo Correr, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 16 December 2011 to 10 April 2012                                                          |
| 123             | 2015 | <i>Armenia. Masterpieces from an Enduring Culture</i> , eds. T.M. van Lint and R. Meyer (Oxford: University of Oxford, Bodleian, 2015)                                        |
|                 |      | Oxford, Bodleian Library, 2015                                                                                                                                                |
| 124             | 2018 | <i>Armenia: Art, Religion, and Trade in the Middle Ages</i> , ed. H.C. Evans (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018)                                                 |
|                 |      | New York NY, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22 September 2008 to 13 January 2009                                                                                                 |
| <i>Bulgaria</i> |      |                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 125             | 1978 | <i>Icons from Bulgaria from the 9th to the 19th centuries</i> , introd. K.G. Paskaleva-Kabadaieva, selection of works R. Cormack (Edinburgh: The Scottish Arts Council, 1978) |
|                 |      | Edinburgh, Scottish Arts Council Gallery, 19 August to 24 September 1978;<br>London, Courtauld Institute Galleries, 3 October to 31 October 1978                              |
| 126             | 1992 | <i>Golden Icons of Bulgaria</i> , curated by C. Barber and K. Kavan.                                                                                                          |
|                 |      | Coventry, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, July 1992                                                                                                                             |

- 127 2011 *Bulgaria in the Byzantine World* (Sofia: National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, 2011) Sofia, National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, 24 August to 30 September 2011 Accompanying the XXII International Congress of Byzantine Studies
- 128 2018 *Le Trésor de Preslav. Reflet d'un âge d'or du moyen âge bulgare*, ed. J. Durand (Paris: Somogy. Éditions d'Art, 2018) Paris, Musée du Louvre, 27 June to 5 November 2018

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*Ethiopia*

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- 129 1992 *Le roi Salomon et les maîtres du regard: art et médecine en Ethiopie*, eds. J. Mercier and H. Marchal (Paris: Editions de la réunion des musées nationaux, 1992) Paris, Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, 20 October 1992 to 25 January 1993
- 130 1996 *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, eds. M. Heldman and S.C. Munro-Hay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) Baltimore MD, The Walters Art Gallery, 17 October 1993 to 9 January 1994;  
New York NY, Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1 February to 29 March 1994;  
Houston TX, Menil Collection, 21 April to 19 June 1994;  
Dallas TX, Museum of African-American Life and Culture, 28 September to 30 November 1994;  
Chicago IL, DuSable Museum of African-American History, 23 December 1994 to 26 February 1995;  
Norfolk VA, Chrysler Museum, 7 June to 2 August 1995;  
Los Angeles CA, California Afro-American Museum, 25 September to 20 October 1995;  
Cleveland OH, Cleveland Museum of Art, 14 November 1995 to 1 January 1996  
Baltimore MD, Walters Art Gallery, 2001
- 131 2001 *Ethiopian Art*, eds. G. Haile and J. Mercier (Baltimore: Third Millennium Publishing, 2001)
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(Continued)

| Georgia |      |                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                |                                                                     |
|---------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 132     | 1979 | <i>Orfèvrerie géorgienne du VIIe au XIXe siècle</i> , eds. T. Sanikidzé and G. Abramishvili (Geneva: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1979)                                                     | Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1979                                                                                        |                                                                     |
| 133     | 1981 | <i>Schatzkammer Georgien: mittelalterliche Kunst aus dem Staatlichen Kunstmuseum Tbilisi</i> , eds. W. Seibt and T. Sanikidze (Vienna: Gesellschaft Bildender Künstler Österreichs, 1981) | Vienna, Künstlerhaus, September to 15 November 1981                                                                            |                                                                     |
| 134     | 1982 | <i>Au pays de la Toison d'Or. Art ancien de Géorgie soviétique</i> (Paris: Association française d'action artistique, 1982)                                                               | Paris, Grand Palais, 17 April to 26 July 1982                                                                                  |                                                                     |
| 135     | 1999 | <i>National Treasures of Georgia: Art and Civilization through the Ages</i> , ed. O. Soltes (Baltimore, 1999)                                                                             | Baltimore MD, Walters Art Gallery                                                                                              | Exhibition cancelled before opening, but after catalogued published |
| 136     | 2023 | <i>A Story of Encounters. Georgia's Cultural, Artistic and Historical Heritage</i> , eds. B. Coulie and N. Simonishvili (Belgium: Hannibal Publishers 2023)                               | Brussels, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, 27 October, 2023 to 18 February 2024                                            |                                                                     |
| 137     | 2024 | <i>Golden Fleece: Art of Georgia</i> , ed. M.P. Kruk (Krakow: Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 2024)                                                                                           | Krakow, Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie, 18 April to 15 September 2024                                                              |                                                                     |
| Nubia   |      |                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                |                                                                     |
| 138     | 1978 | <i>Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan</i> , ed. Steffen Wenig (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 2 vols                                                     | New York NY, Brooklyn Museum, 30 September to 31 December 1978                                                                 |                                                                     |
| Russia  |      |                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                |                                                                     |
| 139     | 1998 | <i>The Art of Holy Russia. Icons from Moscow 1400–1600</i> , eds. R. Cormack and D. Gaze (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1998)                                                            | Frankfurt am Main, Schirn Kunsthalle, 26 November 1997 to 1 March 1998;<br>London, Royal Academy 19 March 1998 to 14 June 1998 |                                                                     |
| 140     | 2010 | <i>Sainte Russie. L'art russe des origines à Pierre le Grand</i> , eds. J. Durand, I. Rapti and D. Giovannoni (Paris: Somogy Editions d' Art, 2010)                                       | Paris, Musée du Louvre, 5 March to 24 May 2010                                                                                 |                                                                     |

| <i>Yugoslavia (Kosovo/Northern Macedonia/Serbia)</i>          |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 141                                                           | 1953 | <i>Yugoslav Mediaeval Frescoes</i> , ed. M. Kašanin (London: The Arts Council, 1953)                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                               |      | <b>Edinburgh</b> , Royal Scottish Museum, 1953;<br><b>London</b> , Tate Gallery, 23 October to 13 December 1953                                                                                                                         |
| 142                                                           | 1959 | <i>L'art médiéval Yougoslave: moulages et copies exécutés par des artistes Yougoslaves et Français</i> (Paris: Les Presses Artistiques, 1950)                                                                                           |
|                                                               |      | <b>Paris</b> , Musée des monuments français, 1951<br><b>Dubrovnik</b> , The Art Gallery, July to August 1959                                                                                                                            |
| 143                                                           | 1961 | <i>Icônes de Yougoslavie</i> , ed. V.J. Djurić (Belgrade: Novi Dani, 1961)                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                                               |      | <b>Ohrid</b> , 10–16 September 1961                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 144                                                           | 1971 | <i>L'art en Yougoslavie de la préhistoire à nos jours</i> (Paris: Les Presses Artistiques, 1971);<br><i>Art on the Soil of Yugoslavia from Prehistoric Times to the Present</i> (Jugoslavija, Izdavacki Zavod and Sarajevopublic, 1971) |
|                                                               |      | <b>Paris</b> , Grand Palais, 2 March to 23 May 1971<br><b>Sarajevo</b> , 28 July to 28 October 1971                                                                                                                                     |
| 145                                                           | 1983 | <i>Trésors de l'art serbe médiéval (XIIe-XVIe siècle)</i> , ed. B. Radojković (Paris: Ministère des relations extérieures, Association française d'action artistique, 1983)                                                             |
|                                                               |      | <b>Paris</b> , Ville de Paris, Pavillon des arts, 23 December 1983 to 5 February 1984                                                                                                                                                   |
| 146                                                           | 1999 | <i>Trésors médiévaux de la République de Macédoine</i> (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux RMN, 1999)<br><i>Tesori Medioevali dalla Repubblica di Macedonia</i> (Rome: Edizioni de Luca, 1999)                                         |
|                                                               |      | <b>Paris</b> , Musée national du Moyen âge, Thermes de Cluny, 9 February to 3 May 1999<br><b>Rome</b> , Palazzo di Venezia, 22 May to 4 July 1999                                                                                       |
| 147                                                           | 2013 | <i>Serbian Medieval Art</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                               |      | <b>Athens</b> , Byzantine and Christian Museum, 27 May 2013 to 15 September 2013 [no catalogue]                                                                                                                                         |
| <i>Latin West/Holy Roman Empire – with Byzantine Elements</i> |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 148                                                           | 1950 | <i>Ars Sacra. Kunst des frühen Mittelalters</i> , ed. A. Boeckler (Munich: Gesellschaft für Wissenschaftliches Lichtbild, 1950)                                                                                                         |
|                                                               |      | <b>Munich</b> , Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Prinz Carl Palais, June–October 1950                                                                                                                                                       |
| 149                                                           | 1970 | <i>The Year 1200. I: A Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Catalogue</i> [The Cloisters Studies in Medieval Art: 1] ed. K. Hoffmann (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970)                               |
|                                                               |      | <b>New York NY</b> , Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 12 February – 10 May 1970                                                                                                                                                   |

(Continued)

| <i>Latin West/Holy Roman Empire – with Byzantine Elements</i> |      |                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 150                                                           | 1973 | <i>Rhein und Maas: Kunst und Kultur 800-1400</i> , ed. A. Legner (Cologne: Schnütgen-Museum, 1973)                                                                                           | <b>Cologne</b> , Kunsthalle 14 May to 23 July 1972;<br><b>Brussels</b> , Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 15 September to 31 October 1972<br><b>Stuttgart</b> , Altes Schloss und Kunstgebäude, 26 March to 5 June 1977 |
| 151                                                           | 1977 | <i>Die Zeit der Staufer, Geschichte, Kunst, Kultur</i> , ed. R. Hauss herr (Stuttgart: Württembergisches Landesmuseum, 1977)                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 152                                                           | 1985 | <i>Ornamenta Ecclesiae. Kunst und Künstler der Romanik</i> , ed. A. Legner (Cologne: Schnütgen Museum, 1985)                                                                                 | <b>Cologne</b> , Hosef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle 1985                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 153                                                           | 1995 | <i>Heinrich der Löwe und seine Zeit. Herrschaft und Repräsentation der Welfen 1125-1235</i> , eds. J. Luckhardt and F. Niehoff (Munich: Hirmer, 1995)                                        | <b>Brunswick</b> , Herzog Anton-Ulrich-Museum, 6 August 1995 to 12 January 1986                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>Islam</i>                                                  |      |                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 154                                                           | 2002 | <i>L'Orient de Saladin: l'art sous les Ayyoubides</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 2002)                                                                                                               | <b>Paris</b> , Institut du monde arabe, 23 October 2001 to 10 March 2002<br>Includes some material relating to indigenous Christians under Ayyubid rule                                                                   |
| 155                                                           | 2005 | <i>Turks. A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600</i> , ed. D.J. Roxburgh (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005)                                                                              | <b>London</b> , Royal Academy, 22 January to 12 April 2005<br>An overview of the Turks that largely sidesteps Byzantium                                                                                                   |
| 156                                                           | 2016 | <i>Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs</i> , eds. S.R. Canby, D. Beyazit, M. Ruggiadi, and A.C.S. Peacock (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2016) | <b>New York NY</b> , Metropolitan Museum of Art, 27 April to 24 July 2016<br>Includes some material relating to indigenous Christians                                                                                     |

*Note:* This is a reasonably comprehensive list of exhibitions. It omits catalogues of permanent collections, and some exhibitions that were overwhelmingly concerned with later icons. A number of smaller exhibitions are also omitted, simply to prevent the list from becoming too unwieldy.

\*Exhibition listed in Stamatios T. Chondrogiannis, *Byzantium in the World: Artistic, Cultural and Ideological Legacy from the 19th to the 21st century* (Thessaloniki: Centre for Byzantine Research, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2017), 312–6, but unavailable to me.



## THROUGH AN IMPERIAL LENS

## The First Byzantine Exhibitions

*Yuri Pyatnitsky*

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Russia, the Grand Principality of Moscow at that time, as the only large Orthodox state, became its successor and heiress. In 1472, the marriage of Ivan III (1440–1505) to Sophia (Zoe) Palaiologina, a niece of the last Byzantine emperor, gave Russia the official status of the successor of Byzantium. Sophia's grandson, Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1530–84), steadily demonstrated this succession throughout his reign through policy. In 1547, he acceded to the throne according to Byzantine ceremonies and became a patron and donor to the Eastern Orthodox Church. He sent substantial sums to support the ancient Byzantine monasteries and churches and to all four Orthodox Patriarchates. For several centuries, the role of Russia as the defender of Orthodoxy and the successor of Byzantium was unshakable and undeniable in the eyes of the whole world. In the seventeenth century, the idea of recapturing Constantinople still inspired the Russian tsars, purely theoretically, but in the eighteenth century, it took clearer political outlines. In particular, during his campaigns to the south, Peter the Great (1672–1725) nurtured the idea of erecting a cross on Hagia Sophia. Under Peter's successors, the idea of erecting the Orthodox cross in the capital of the Ottomans was seen as a natural result of a successful military campaign.

The Greek projects of Catherine the Great (1729–96) are widely known, and she even named her second grandson Constantine. In the Tauride Palace, the empress's summer residence in Saint Petersburg, there was the mechanical automaton "Peacock", which was associated with the gilded bronze tree with singing birds that stood next to the throne of the *basileus* in the hall of Magnaura in the Great Palace in Constantinople (founded in 425). This tree was described by the ambassador Liutprand of Cremona, who was received by Emperor Nicephorus II Phocas (r. 963–69) in 968.<sup>1</sup> The Peacock was produced in England in the workshop of the famous British jeweller, goldsmith and entrepreneur James Cox (1723–1800) as a special project of Prince Grigory Potemkin (1739–91), the secret husband of Catherine the Great.<sup>2</sup> The idea of creating such an automaton was related to the thought of the empress, who declared the Russian empire the true successor of Byzantine civilisation. According to her, Russia received the ideas of the Enlightenment directly through Byzantium and owed nothing in this regard to western Europe.<sup>3</sup> In the context of this theory, the spectacular motions of the Peacock automaton, with its three moving birds, which was installed in one of the richly decorated halls of the Tauride Palace can be considered



*Figure 31.1* James Cox (c. 1723–1800), Automaton Peacock, 18th Century, Base: d – 1.9 m, h – 1.35 m, the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Public Space. © Photographed by the Author.

as one of the early and most highly illustrative representations of the Byzantine ideal in the modern era ([Figure 31.1](#)).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a clear understanding of the development of the so-called primitive schools of painting was formed in museum aesthetics. It was distinctly described by the literary critic and writer Pavel Annenkov (1813–87) in his book *A Journey through Europe in 1840–1843* when he talked about the Painting Gallery of the Berlin Museum. Annenkov wrote that “The primitive schools were based on the ‘Byzantine Greeks’ who imitated art more than nature; motionless and picturesquely majestic figures on a golden background lack any expression, and this is the hallmark of this school”. Early Italian painting, according to Annenkov, was born of Byzantine painting but soon separated from it, “following the innate instinct of beauty and aspiration to depict passion...”. He then goes on to say that:

The German school, with the pale and thoughtful faces of its Madonnas, with the motionless, dull gaze of saints and the inexpressive colouring, clearly shows that this painting develops not from the creations of visible nature but from the spirit.<sup>4</sup>

At that time, Russian icons were not presented in the Berlin Museum. However, Annenkov did not miss the opportunity to patriotically remark: “Russia still remains the

representative of the Byzantine school in Europe, where its manner consecrated by the Church has retained to us its distinctive features”.<sup>5</sup>

In Russia, the revival of Byzantine art developed in the 1840s–1850s. The Imperial Academy of Arts, Saint Petersburg, and the Orthodox Church, represented by the Holy Synod, actively participated in this process. The main task was to create modern icons and church murals in the old Byzantine style. An active supporter of the Byzantine mania was Prince Grigory Gagarin (1810–93), the vice president of the Imperial Academy of Arts. Prince Gagarin himself was a gifted artist who, along with secular painting, worked considerably in icons and church painting. For example, in 1850, using the encaustic technique, he painted the interior of the ancient Sioni Cathedral in Tiflis (founded in the sixth or seventh century) while carefully preserving all fragments of the ancient murals. From 1856 to 1860, in the same technique, he decorated the interior of the church in the palace of the Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna (1818–76) in Saint Petersburg in the Byzantine style; these paintings have survived in the Mariinsky Palace to this day. Prince Gagarin recalled that in the 1850s, noble society in Russia’s capital treated Byzantine painting with great irony and disregard; with sarcasm and ridicule, they commented on its “disagreeable proportions”, “clumsy poses” and “awkward and wild compositions”, considering it ugly.<sup>6</sup>

Such a negative opinion was formed for several reasons. One of them was a reaction to the then-existing European interpretation of Byzantine painting, especially in its Bavarian version. Slavophile Aleksey Khomyakov (1804–60) angrily exclaimed:

Whatever you ask, Bavaria is ready to regale everything: Greek and Roman, Gothic and Byzantine. The traveller can enjoy everything if only he has an undemanding taste and a dull sense of beauty. Bavaria is ready to paint in all possible styles.<sup>7</sup>

An example of the Byzantine style in the Bavarian interpretation was the art of Ludwig Tirsch (1825–1909), greatly favoured by King Otto of Greece (1815–67), who made Tirsch the trendsetter for official taste in Athens.

Another reason for the negative attitude towards Byzantinism was that genuine Byzantine painting was unknown not only to noble society but also to most artists. It was not presented in the museum collections in Russia. Moreover, any old painting was often called “Byzantine”, regardless of its style and date of execution, attributing to the Byzantine everything that was “very old”. Such progressive artists as Prince Gagarin and art connoisseurs understood this, as well as the fact that layers of re-painting covered all old frescoes and icons. That is why they turned their attention particularly to Byzantine illuminated manuscripts with miniatures. They primarily envisaged their role in studying Byzantine mosaics, murals and icons in terms of finding these old objects in Greece, Asia Minor and the Balkans, in the territories of the former Byzantine Empire. This goal led to fruitful missions to Mount Athos by the church historian Andrey Muraviov (1806–74), bishop and scholar Porphyrius Uspensky (1804–85) and the statesman and collector Pyotr Ivanovich Sevastyanov (1811–67). It is specifically to Sevastyanov that Russia owes both its best museum collection of ancient icons and the first public exhibitions of Byzantine art.

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Sevastyanov was a lawyer by education. He served in the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of War, made a successful career and was consistently awarded for his excellent service:



*Figure 31.2* Pyotr Sevastyanov. Lithograph, February of 1859, V. Timm's Russian Art Gazette. © Public Domain.

it was his duty as a citizen of the Fatherland and the fulfilment of the moral principles laid down by the family, education and society ([Figure 31.2](#)).

Sevastyanov built an effective career and was awarded, but his intellectual needs were oriented towards continuous self-education, travel and collecting antiquities. In 1851, he retired and took up studying and collecting Christian artefacts. The idea of a scholarly study of the monasteries of Mount Athos came to Sevastyanov as early as 1852. However, he could begin its realisation only in 1857, when the end of the Crimean War (1853–56) stopped military actions between Europe and Russia. In the middle of the nineteenth

century, in the enlightened society of Europe and North America, the ideas of world well-being were greatly popular, due to technological progress, and the conscious work of each member of society for the common good of mankind. Within the internationality of these ideas, a sense of national identity and pride in each nation's achievements was preserved. These ideas were held closely by Sevastyanov. By the nature of his service, he had encountered the darkest and most repulsive sides of human nature. Despite this, he managed to maintain his faith in morality and the high destiny of man. He approached the organisation of his mission to Mount Athos as a true representative of technical progress.

In Paris, he studied photography, tracing and stamping, electroforming, basic topography and cartography. No matter how incredible it may seem today, it was Sevastyanov who was the first to recognise the importance of photography for scholarly research, and he actively applied the photographic fixation of objects of writing and art on Mount Athos from 1857 to 1861. Faced with the lack of light in the churches, he even brought an "apparatus for electric consecration". From the very beginning of his activity on Mount Athos, the Russian traveller was firmly convinced that all of the results of his activities should "go over to the general use" of scholars of all countries. The selflessness of Sevastyanov is of special note: the first two seasons of the mission to Mount Athos in 1857 and 1858 were conducted at his own expense, and later he constantly used his own money for the expedition's work, publications of its materials and popularisation of the treasures of the monasteries at Mount Athos. Moreover, he planned to donate all scholarly materials and his art collection to Russia for the foundation of the Byzantine Museum in Saint Petersburg. Unfortunately, human envy and intrigue did not allow for the materialisation of this project.

At his own peril, based on his knowledge of the history of culture and literature, Sevastyanov spent the first season of his activity on Mount Athos, which lasted from spring to late autumn of 1857. It is not known how his mission would have subsequently developed if the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris had not invited him to give a lecture on her Athonite finds, *Sur le Mont Athos, ses monastères et les manuscrits de leurs bibliothèques* (On Mount Athos, its monasteries and the manuscripts of their libraries). It took place on 5 February 1858 and was a resounding success among scholars, photography enthusiasts and enlightened society. For example, professors from the University of Leipzig made a special trip to Mount Athos in 1858 to meet with the Russian enthusiast. Excited responses quickly reached Russia, which provided Sevastyanov with the support and financial subsidies of the Tsar family, the Imperial Academy of Arts and the Holy Synod. The results of the 1857 and 1858 seasons were shown in 1859 at exhibitions in both capitals of Russia. In Moscow, an exhibition was held at the University from 11 to 17 January and in Saint Petersburg – in the halls of the Holy Synod – from 8 February to 14 March 1859. The lithograph of 1859 published in the editor Vassily Fyodorovich Timms's (born Georg Wilhelm, 1820) *Russian Art Gazette* shows how the exhibition looked in the Synod and what was presented (Figure 31.3).<sup>8</sup>

Life-sized murals of the Protaton copied on tracing paper hung on the walls; numerous partly coloured photographs, drawings and watercolours from manuscripts, icons and objects of applied art with views of churches, *sketes* and monasteries laid out on the tables. Several showcases contained genuine antiquities, whole manuscripts and separate pages, modern rosaries and holy eulogies of Athonite production. Without a doubt, this was the first essential exhibition dedicated to Holy Athos with an emphasis on the art of the Byzantine period. The resonance of the exhibition was stunning; it was visited by representatives of all strata of Russian society, from the imperial couple and the court to merchants





Посещение публикою залъ Святѣйшаго Синода, гдѣ нынѣ помѣщены снимки П. И. Севастьянова, съ древнихъ иконъ, церковной утвари и рукописей Славянскихъ и Греческихъ, хранящихся въ Афонскихъ монастыряхъ. Февраль 1859.

*Figure 31.3* Exhibition of Materials Brought by Peter Sevastyanov from Mount Athos in the Halls of the Holy Synod in Saint Petersburg. Lithograph, February of 1859, V. Timm's Russian Art Gazette. © Public Domain.

and peasants. The exhibition made a particularly great impression on the Old Believers, the Eastern Orthodox Christians who maintained the liturgical and ritual practices of the Russian Orthodox Church as they were before the reforms of Patriarch Nikon of Moscow between 1652 and 1666. In the mentioned lithograph, the artist vividly depicted visitors of all social classes carefully examining the objects.

Owing to the exhibition, in the spring of 1859, a research and artistic mission under the leadership of Sevastyanov was sent to Mount Athos; it included an architect, topographers, artists and photographers. This last season of Sevastyanov's mission on Mount Athos lasted over a year. Its results were fantastic: several thousand photographs of the objects of art and manuscripts, hundreds of life-size drawings and copies from murals and mosaics on tracing paper, several hundred drawings of various objects and icons, architectural sketches, a topographic map of Mount Athos and plans of all monasteries, views of Mount Athos, portraits of monks and hundreds of *estampage* (stamps) of inscriptions and objects of applied art.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Sevastyanov gathered an extensive personal collection of original icons, fragments of murals, manuscripts and church ware. It should be noted that he primarily collected those that were at risk of being destroyed or perishing: as a rule, he acquired icons from storerooms or cemetery churches, where damaged objects no longer

used in the liturgy were placed. Today, reconstructing the list of cultural treasures collected by Sevastyanov, one might be surprised to see that at the dawn of the study of Byzantine art, when there were no developed methods of expertise, he was able to select so many rare and even unique objects.

In the spring of 1861, Sevastyanov returned to Saint Petersburg. Since the imperial couple had given a significant portion of the money for the expedition, it was decided to present its report in the Winter Palace, the residence of the Russian tsars. On 16 March 1861, in the grand White Hall, Sevastyanov presented to Tsar Alexander II (r. 1855–81) and the court an exhibition of the results of his mission and the original antiquities he had collected, and he also handed the emperor the unique Glagolitic Gospel (a gospel in the oldest known Slavic script that dates to the end of the tenth–beginning of the eleventh century), as a gift on behalf of the abbot of the Zographou Monastery, Mount Athos. On tables, chairs and special easels were laid out objects that astonished with their antiquity, rarity, unfamiliarity and informative content. Everything was included: copies on tracing paper, drawings, photographs, prints and, most importantly, authentic Athonite antiquities. Icons darkened by centuries, fragments of murals with stern faces, bronze *choroi* or chandeliers, lamps exuding fragrance and carved wooden crosses made of boxwood and cypress. Eloquent comments by the discoverer accompanied the view of the exhibition. Today, the Winter Palace and its White Hall are part of the State Hermitage Museum, so we can consider that on 16 March 1861, the first Byzantine exhibition was held in this museum, presenting both scholarly materials and ancient works.

Emperor Alexander II and his retinue were delighted with what they saw, especially with the fascinating explanations by Sevastyanov. The admiring emperor wished that “All these treasures should be seen by my nation!”<sup>10</sup> He ordered the organisers to move the exhibition to the halls of the Imperial Academy of Arts, and it was opened to the general public. Less than a month later, at the beginning of April 1861, the capital’s newspapers reported:

An exhibition of various Byzantine sacred objects was organized at the Academy of Arts. Copies and originals of icons, church utensils, manuscripts, architectural drawings, and the like, collected in Mount Athos monasteries by Mr Pyotr Sevastyanov, are on display here.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, this public display should be considered the third Byzantine exhibition in the capital of Russia. Since all the scholarly materials of the mission, such as copies on tracing paper, drawings and photographs (except for photographs of manuscripts) went to the Imperial Academy of Arts, the exhibition was significantly expanded compared to what was shown in the Winter Palace. One hundred fifty original icons and church items collected by Sevastyanov were delivered to the Imperial Academy of Arts. We again have to be surprised by the insight of Sevastyanov, who selected the best icons from his collection. The exhibition was successful and well attended, although already without the enthusiasm that was evident in 1859.

These three Saint Petersburg exhibitions of 1859 and 1861 – at the Holy Synod, the Winter Palace and the Imperial Academy of Arts – were assuredly the first Byzantine exhibitions in Russia and in the world. The recognised international success of Sevastyanov and the benevolent attention of the court aroused envy and caused intrigues among the academic community. The famous Bishop Porphyrius was incredibly successful in his intrigues against Sevastyanov. At the beginning of the twentieth century, academician Nikodim Kondakov



(1844–1925) wrote: “The general unpreparedness of scholarship to perceive the numerous raw and unknown material played its role in the sad and unfair fate of Sevastyanov’s collection and its research materials”.<sup>12</sup> This fair reproach can be attributed not only to Russians but also to the whole European community of the mid-nineteenth century. Sevastyanov was ahead of his time; his ideas about icon painting and his intuition as a collector and *amateur des arts* proved to be more accurate than the ideas of many of the titled scholars of the time. In any case, the Byzantine icons of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries that he brought from Mount Athos are the pride of the Hermitage Collection.

Sevastyanov was too bright and independent not to arouse envy and intrigue. There was a conflict between him and the Imperial Academy of Arts. Sevastyanov rightly considered the original antiquities he acquired with his money during several trips to Mount Athos as his personal property. The Imperial Academy of Arts, on the contrary, perceived them as materials from the expedition of 1859–60 and believed that they should be given to the Academy. The wording of the official documents of the mission allowed for two interpretations, so each party of the dispute considered its position the only right one. As a result, the Imperial Academy of Arts forcibly retained all those original works exhibited in April 1861. Offended, Sevastyanov left for Moscow, where he began actively cooperating with the Rumyantsev Museum. For a long time, he unsuccessfully tried to recover these antiquities. As a result, the objects Sevastyanov gathered on Mount Athos were divided between Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

The icons from Mount Athos in the Museum of Old Russian Art at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg were exhibited in the special Byzantine hall, together with a small but valuable collection of Italian primitives. Russian icons and objects of applied art from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century were widely and broadly displayed in other museum halls. In 1898, the entire Museum was transferred to the newly founded Russian Museum dedicated to the memory of Emperor Alexander III (r. 1881–94). There, in the same way as in the Imperial Academy of Arts, Byzantine icons were shown with the Russian ones. In 1930, Byzantine and post-Byzantine objects were transferred to the State Hermitage Museum. As a result, the museum possesses a unique, comprehensive collection of the best examples of Byzantine painting and applied art.

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In Soviet Russia in the 1930s, there was an active campaign against the Christian religion, which was declared the “opium for the people”; therefore, a comprehensive presentation of icons in museums was not welcomed. In the Hermitage, only a few of the oldest Byzantine icons were added to a gallery exhibition. In 1941, the entire Byzantine collection was evacuated to Sverdlovsk in the Urals. After WWII, new Byzantine halls were opened only in 1956; icon painting was represented there with the best examples and in much greater numbers than before the war. The majority of them were icons from the eleventh to the fifteenth century brought by Sevastyanov from Mount Athos.

The formative International Exhibition of Byzantine Art held in 1958 in Edinburgh and London played a crucially important role in the design of the Byzantine Gallery of the Hermitage. The Soviet Union decided to participate in it, providing some masterpieces from the museums of Leningrad and Moscow under the supervision of Alice Bank (1906–84), the curator of the Byzantine collection of the Hermitage from February 1931 (Figure 31.4).



*Figure 31.4* Alice Bank, Curator of the Byzantine Collection, the State Hermitage Museum, Photo, 1970s, Author's Archive. © Personal Archive of the Author.

Thanks to Tamara (1904–93) and David Talbot-Rice (1903–72), who met Bank in 1935, the Russian specialist was accepted into the Byzantine international community as an equal and highly valued professional member. During this trip, Bank established numerous international contacts and publication exchanges that continued until her death in 1984. The exhibitions in Edinburgh and London made a strong impression on her and helped to form the principal directions of her future work. Realising the impossibility of organising a similar international exhibition in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Bank

concentrated on the Byzantine collection in the Hermitage and Byzantine objects in various museums of the USSR. In 1960, she published an annotated album, *Byzantine Art in the Hermitage Collection*,<sup>13</sup> and in 1966, the seminal publication *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums*.<sup>14</sup> The latter was reprinted several times in different languages and became a reference book for Byzantinists across the world. The title page of reprints often bears an “enlarged and revised” edition statement, but not everyone knows that Bank indeed made significant additions and corrections to each subsequent edition. Thanks to this publication, she revived the name of Pyotr Sevastyanov in the international scholarly community. Another significant result of her trip to Great Britain in 1958 was the magnificent exhibition “Byzantine Art in the Collections of the USSR” shown in Leningrad, in the Hermitage Museum, in 1975–76, and then, in 1977, a version was presented in Moscow. The idea and concept of the exhibition proposed by Alice Bank were so fruitful that they served as an impetus for creating similar projects in various European countries for several decades.

## Notes

- 1 Kremonsky 2012: 106–8.
- 2 Pyatnitsky 2017: 346–70.
- 3 Pyatnitsky 2014a: vol. I: 25–35.
- 4 Annenkov 1983: 254–5.
- 5 Annenkov 1983: 254.
- 6 Gagarin 1856: 3.
- 7 Khomiakov 2011: 505.
- 8 *Russkii khudozhestvennyi* 1859.
- 9 Pyatnitsky 2020: 470.
- 10 Pyatnitsky 2014b: vol. IV, part 2, 263.
- 11 *Sankt-peterburgskie* 1861: 450.
- 12 Kondakov 1902: 11.
- 13 Bank 1960.
- 14 Bank 1966.

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- (1859) *Russkii khudozhestvennyi listok* V. Timma, no. 8, 8 fevralia.
- (1861) *Sankt-peterburgskie vedomosti*, 9 apreliia, no. 81.

# HOW TO DEAL WITH IT?

## The Display of Byzantine Heritage in Türkiye (1846–1950)

*Şule Kılıç Yıldız*

In 2008, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Directorate General for Cultural Heritage and Museums, sent an official letter to all state archaeological museums requesting that the labels of archaeological artefacts belonging to the Byzantine period be replaced with the term “Eastern Roman”. While some museum directors and employees eagerly made this change, others continued to use the term “Byzantine”. The specific impetus behind this policy remains unclear, but this was not the first time that Byzantine heritage had been implicated in Turkish cultural politics. The recent reconversion of the church of Hagia Sophia, which had functioned as a museum since the 1930s, into a mosque is part of a longer history of Türkiye’s complex and often contradictory engagement with Byzantine material culture and heritage.

Although recent scholarship on the Byzantine legacy in Türkiye has engaged with many aspects of this history, few have been concerned with the history of the display of the material remains of Byzantine heritage in Türkiye. This chapter provides an overview of the representation and display of Byzantine material culture and archaeological heritage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the first museums were established as part of the modernisation and nation-building process of modern Türkiye.

### Dealing with Byzantine Heritage in the Imperial Museum: Byzantium in the Late Ottoman Period (1846–1918)

The Ottomans, governing from the former Byzantine empire’s capital city and geographic core, had selectively adopted and appropriated the Byzantine legacy and imperial traditions since the fifteenth century. Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1432–81), who was a seminal figure in the transformation of the Ottomans into an imperial power during the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, was also known for his collection of Christian relics and sculptures held within the precincts of his palace. These antiquities, which were kept in the church of Hagia Eirene (sixth century), located in the imperial court’s outer courtyard, would become the basis of the Ottoman Imperial Museum in the late nineteenth century. However, the idea of displaying antique materials developed in parallel with the emergence of the discipline of archaeology, and the foundation of the first museums was closely related

to the modernisation processes of the empire and the competition with western European empires over the ownership of ancient and medieval patrimonies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a growing western European interest in antiquities in the Ottoman Empire. European diplomats and archaeologists engaged in various activities pertaining to the collection of antiquities in different parts of the empire. Ottoman interest in antiquities and archaeology developed in the late nineteenth century, and it was during this period that the Ottomans began developing new institutional and legal frameworks for preserving and displaying antiquities. The establishment of the first museum in 1846, for example, was a significant development, followed by the issuance of antiquity laws in 1869. Soon, the Ottomans themselves began conducting archaeological research. In these projects, the Ottomans presented themselves as the heir to the ancient civilisations within their imperial territories.<sup>1</sup>

The Ottoman interest was partly a conscious response to the western European scramble for control over antiquities in its lands and western Europe's cultural and political expansion in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century. Growing European imperialism and internal domestic troubles, including proto-nationalist movements, were the backdrop for a range of institutional and cultural transformations. The Ottoman Empire positioned itself as a modern state that preserved and exhibited its antiquities with modern methods. The organisation of the display at the church of Hagia Eirene as a "Collection of Antique Weapons" and a "Collection of Antiquities", in 1846, formed part of the earliest stages of the development of museology in the Ottoman Empire. An inventory of the church's holdings published by French archaeologist Albert Dumont (1842–84) in 1868 reveals that most of the objects in these collections were ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine. The Byzantine collection consisted of 48 artefacts, including imperial busts, column fragments, reliefs, sculptures and bricks stamped with the names of emperors. For this reason, Dumont emphasised the potential of Hagia Eirene as a "Greco-Byzantine Museum".<sup>2</sup>

The Universal Exhibition of 1867 in Paris provided another opportunity for the Ottomans to present themselves as an heir to ancient civilisations. The Ottoman empire selected five architectural drawings of major Byzantine monuments in its capital to be displayed in the main exhibition hall, some of which had been newly restored by the state: namely, the drawing of the restored Serpentine Column (brought to Constantinople in 324); the Tekfur Palace (Hebdomon Palace, fourth century); the Çemberlitaş (Constantine's Column, 328); the restitution of Theodosius' Obelisk (re-erected in the Hippodrome of Constantine, Sultanahmet Meydanı, by the emperor Theodosius in the fourth century); and a plan of the northern part of the city walls.<sup>3</sup> These drawings were prepared by Philip Anton Dethier (1803–81), a German scholar who was one of the members of the Ottoman commission for this exposition and the future director of the Imperial Museum (appointed in 1872). The drawings prepared by him were also included in the exposition book *La Turquie à l'Exposition universelle de 1867*, dedicated to Sultan Abdülaziz (1830–76), who personally visited the exposition.

Ottoman Sultan Abdülaziz was active in the formation of the Imperial Museum. Upon return from the Paris exposition, he renamed the collection of antiquities in Hagia Eirene as the *Muze-i Humayun* (Imperial Museum) in 1869. In 1881, Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910), a painter, scholar and founder of Istanbul's Academy of Fine Arts, was



*Figure 32.1* Sébah et Joaillier, View of the Byzantine section of the Imperial Museum, photograph, ca. 1903, Istanbul University Central Library Rare Works Collection, file 90518/3. © Istanbul University Central Library, İstanbul, Türkiye.

appointed as museum director. Among other reforms, Osman Hamdi initiated the construction of a new museum building. The neoclassical museum building, designed by the French-Ottoman architect Alexandre Vallaury (1850–1921), was inaugurated in 1891.

During the early twentieth century, the Byzantine collections of the Imperial Museum continued to expand with the acquisition of new artefacts from around the empire. When a new wing was added to the northwest of the main building in 1903, one of the halls was dedicated to a permanent display of the Byzantine collections, including sculptures, column capitals and monumental sarcophagi. Two Byzantine statues of lions taken from the Bukoleon Palace (end of the sixth century) flanked the monumental staircase leading to the hall ([Figures 32.1](#) and [32.2](#)). However, after constructing an additional wing in 1907, Byzantine collections were moved to another hall at the end of the wing for a chronological presentation that ended with the Byzantine period.<sup>4</sup>

The museum catalogue prepared by French archaeologist Gustave Mendel (1873–1938) in 1912 is essential to understanding the history of the institution. It provides a plan for the new museum, classifies the artefacts according to the rooms in which they were displayed and describes them in detail. Mendel was brought from Bordeaux University as an



*Figure 32.2* Sébah et Joaillier, View of the Byzantine section of the Imperial Museum, photograph, ca. 1903, Istanbul University Central Library Rare Works Collection, file 90518/6. © Istanbul University Central Library, İstanbul, Türkiye.

expert in ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine antiquities. He recorded that more than 150 Byzantine artefacts, consisting of architectural sculptures, statues, reliefs and inscriptions, were exhibited in the Imperial Museum.<sup>5</sup>

Antiquities that could not be transferred to the Imperial Museum were placed under protection in the regions where they were located, most of which were generally found in school buildings. Such regional buildings were later called branches of the Imperial Museum. The first official provincial branch was opened in Konya in 1899, followed by the Bursa branch in 1904. Mendel, stemming from his research in various regions of Anatolia, also prepared the catalogues of these local museums. Accordingly, the Bursa Museum exhibited 435 Greek, Roman and Byzantine objects, which were displayed in the garden and on the first floor of the museum.<sup>6</sup> Purpose-built modern museum buildings were built only after the 1970s.

The question of how these archaeological objects were obtained is significant in view of the rather marginal status of Byzantine finds in archaeological excavations conducted by both Europeans and the Ottomans. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the lands of the Ottoman Empire became a destination for archaeologists from western Europe. The first archaeological excursions and excavations by British, French and German



archaeologists were primarily conducted in search of vestiges of the Greco-Roman and biblical past, rather than being focused on Byzantine sites.<sup>7</sup> During this period, Byzantine antiquities seemed to be of particular interest only to Russian scholars, due to Russia's cultural and political/ideological affinity with Byzantine heritage as a perceived descendant of the Byzantine empire and protector of Orthodox and Slavic people in the Ottoman empire. One of the first foreign archaeological institutions founded in Istanbul was the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople (RAIK) in 1894, and the institute became an important centre for the study of Byzantine archaeology until it was closed in 1914, with the outbreak of WWI. The Russian Archaeological Institute conducted archaeological projects at several Byzantine sites, including the Stoudios Monastery (Imrahor Mosque, mid-fifth century) from 1907 to 1909.<sup>8</sup>

After the early twentieth century, the Byzantine archaeology of Istanbul became an area in which Europeans were more active. During the Allied occupation of Istanbul (1918–23) after WWI, western archaeologists with Byzantine research interests seized the opportunity to conduct archaeological explorations in Istanbul. For example, the French School at Athens conducted several archaeological explorations and excavations within the French military camps in Istanbul, which resulted in unearthing the Mangana Palace located on the eastern slopes of the acropolis of Constantinople (eleventh century).<sup>9</sup> However, given the political dynamics of military occupation and the legal framework of the Ottoman Law of Antiquities (enacted in 1864 and revised many times since) which aimed at banning the export of the excavated antiquities, both Russia and western European countries tried to exert control over antiquities and, sometimes controversially took ownership of some rather valuable finds.<sup>10</sup>

The first Ottoman archaeological expeditions, which were carried out by the artist and archaeologist Osman Hamdi (1842–1910) on behalf of the Imperial Museum, focused mainly on Hellenistic and Phoenician sites. These sites, such as those at Laguna in Anatolia and Sidon (modern-day Lebanon), had Byzantine layers, however, and thus provided artefacts that belonged to the Byzantine period. Despite these finds, the Byzantine collections of the Imperial Museum remained in the shadow of the “monumental” collections (perceived as such in terms of both scale and perceived significance), such as the sarcophagus of Alexander the Great (late fourth century), which was discovered at the Royal Necropolis of Sidon through Hamdi's excavations and brought to the Imperial Museum.

The other context from which Byzantine artefacts found their way into a museum collection is related to modern urban development. Starting from the 1850s, the Ottoman government initiated large-scale construction and infrastructural projects as part of rapid urban development and modernisation. Such projects led to not only the transformation of the urban landscape of major cities, particularly of Istanbul, but also to the unearthing of significant Byzantine settlements. For example, the construction of railway tracks in Istanbul in 1871 and again during 1909–10 provided an opportunity for the first explorations of the remains of the Great Palace of Byzantium, located behind the Hippodrome and Hagia Sophia in the south-eastern corner of the historic peninsula.

It can thus be said that the majority of the Byzantine artefacts acquired by the Imperial Museum came from different parts of the empire, or they were unearthed incidentally during the excavation and construction of the foundations of urban developments of Istanbul, rather than from specific Byzantine archaeological projects. The archival documents preserved in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum and State Archives include records of such incidents. For example, according to a document dated 1894, a stone sarcophagus was

found during the base excavation of a dervish lodge in the Çarşamba district of Istanbul. After the museum officer realised it belonged to the Byzantine period, it was taken to the museum.<sup>11</sup> Another document discusses three amphoras discovered during the base excavations of a flour mill in the Küçüksu neighbourhood of Istanbul. The document states that “after an examination of the artefacts revealed that they belonged to the Byzantine period, the submission of the artefacts to the Museum was realized”.<sup>12</sup>

The somewhat haphazard nature of Byzantine collections may have partly been related to the limited “value” attributed to the Byzantine artefacts by Ottomans and Europeans alike. Despite renewed interest in the study of Byzantine monuments in Istanbul, aligned to the European “rediscovery” of Byzantium during the nineteenth century, Byzantine artefacts were still perceived as inferior in comparison to Greek, Hellenistic and Roman art. This was evident in the writings of western European scholars who made aesthetic value judgments in their evaluation of the collections of the Imperial Museum. For example, French archaeologist Albert Dumont (1842–84), who published one of the first catalogues of the museum (a rough inventory of holdings), considered Byzantine objects as “aesthetically inferior” compared to other objects.<sup>13</sup> Another leading French archaeologist, who conducted excavations in Ottoman lands, Salomon Reinach (1858–1932), was commissioned by Hamdi to prepare a catalogue of the collections and he also presented the Byzantine section hastily and in a dismissive tone.<sup>14</sup> Similar attitudes were prevalent among nineteenth century western European writers and travellers. Edwin Augustus Grosvenor (1845–1936), an American-born historian with Ottoman research interests, stated that the Byzantine and medieval section of the Imperial Museum does not have any “artistic value”.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Vasily Dimitriyevich Smirnov (1846–1922), a Russian scholar (orientalist), found the museum collections mediocre. For him, the ancient Greek marble sculpture of Medusa’s head, similar to the two that decorated the Basilica Cistern, which was brought to the Museum in 1869,<sup>16</sup> was the only interesting artefact in the collections.<sup>17</sup>

### **From the Imperial Museum to National Museums: Byzantium, Museums and Nation-Making in Early Republican Türkiye (1923–50)**

The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of WWI brought about major shifts in the cultural politics pertaining to Byzantine heritage among the emergent post-Ottoman nations, including Türkiye. The period from the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 to the late 1950s was critical in terms of Turkish national projects and the construction of a nationalist historiography. As in other parts of the post-Ottoman world, particularly in the emergent nation-states of the Balkans, the “nationalisation” of history and the “museumification” of past cultures went hand in hand.<sup>18</sup> The Turkish Republic used historiography, archaeology and museums as major tools in building a modern nation-state. As in other post-imperial contexts, the new nation had to prove both its newness and its ancient roots in history. The first archaeological excavations on behalf of the Ministry of Education focused on the earliest civilisations that developed in Anatolia, like the Hittites and Phrygians, to search for “the roots of the Turks” in the earliest Anatolian civilisations. In the same way, archaeological objects obtained in these excavations were displayed at the newly founded national museums, like the Ankara Ethnography Museum and the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. Both museums were established upon Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s (1881–1938) directive to create a new national and modern Turkish identity.<sup>19</sup> In these early years of the Republican national project, the Byzantine past proved helpful for



*Figure 32.3* The Byzantine section of the exhibition, digital photograph, Turkish Historical Society Library, digital resources. Turkish Historical Society Archive, file, TTK-294-25. © Turkish Historical Society Library, Ankara, Türkiye.

Republican ideology. It could be positioned well within the national historical narrative, which presented a linear development from the prehistory of Anatolia, starting from the Palaeolithic period to the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

The Republican-era historical congresses and exhibitions played a critical role in this process. For example, an exhibition organised in 1937–38 by the Turkish Historical Society on the occasion of the Second Turkish History Congress at the Dolmabahçe Palace, Istanbul, presented material evidence of a deeply rooted Turkish history and culture. The selected archaeological objects, pictures and drawings were arranged chronologically. A section on the “Greek, Roman and Byzantine period” was included in this exhibition, and Byzantine art was represented with a selection of the pieces preserved in the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, such as an inlaid icon of St Eudokia from the Lips Monastery (tenth century), wall mosaics and a few column capitals (Figures 32.3 and 32.4). Aziz Ogan (1888–1956), director of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums between 1931 and 1953, personally accompanied visitors to the exhibition’s Greek–Roman–Byzantine section.<sup>20</sup>

Turkish and foreign scholars and historians actively created the idea of a nationalised Byzantine heritage. Two papers presented to the Turkish History Congress in 1937 by the leading Hungarian philologist and historian Gyula Morawcsik (1892–1972) and Clemens Bosh (1889–1955), the German scholar who emigrated and worked in Türkiye from 1935, were especially noteworthy. While Morawcsik’s paper focused on the importance of Byzantine historical sources for Turkish history, both argued for the Anatolian origin of Roman and Byzantine cultures.<sup>21</sup> This view was also supported by official circulars issued



Figure 32.4 Another view of the Byzantine section of the exhibition, Turkish Historical Society Archive, file, TTK-294-26. © Turkish Historical Society Library, Ankara, Türkiye.

periodically on the protection of the cultural heritage of past civilisations. For instance, a circular issued by the Ministry of Education in 1946 stated, “... Byzantine, Seljuk, Ottoman, whatever name they are given, all of them are Turkish antiquities”.<sup>22</sup>

As in the late Ottoman period, discussed above, Byzantine period archaeological projects were carried out mainly by foreign archaeological schools established in Istanbul, sometimes in collaboration with the Istanbul Archaeological Museums (former Imperial Museum). Some of these sites also opened their doors to school children and the public. For example, the Great Palace excavations in Istanbul conducted by the Walker Trust of the University of St Andrews (1935–55) opened their doors to the public for a day. They attracted visits from school children and adults, who were shown around the excavation area in 1936 and then the site was turned into a mosaic museum in 1952.<sup>23</sup>

As in the late Ottoman period, a significant amount of Byzantine material remains were also unearthed accidentally, often during infrastructural and urban development projects, particularly in Istanbul. The construction of the Palace of Justice on the ruins of a demolished prison led to the discovery of St Euphemia’s church (fifth century) in the Sultanahmet region in 1943. The construction of Istanbul University’s buildings in Bayezıt unearthed the ancient city of Byzantium’s original necropolis. All of these developments led to the discovery of significant remnants of Byzantine buildings, enriching the collections of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums. For example, following the new acquisitions of Byzantine

funerary stelae and inscriptions from the Istanbul University excavations, Aziz Ogan, the director of the museum from 1931 to 1954, decided to open new galleries devoted to these objects. He also reorganised the display of other Byzantine art objects, including ceramics and jewellery, as part of the permanent exhibition.<sup>24</sup>

The expansion of museums as public institutions also involved the comprehensive restoration of major Byzantine churches, some of which were converted into museums and opened to the broader public. The first was the most iconic monument of Byzantium, the Hagia Sophia, which opened as a museum in 1934 following an extensive conservation project from 1931 to 1934 led by the scholar and archaeologist Thomas Whittemore (1871–1950) from the Byzantine Institute of America, which uncovered its mosaics previously hidden under plaster. The building was envisaged as a “Byzantine and Ottoman/Turkish Museum”,<sup>25</sup> where Byzantine stone objects would be displayed in the outer atrium. In contrast, Ottoman-era artefacts such as carpets and lecterns would be displayed in the upper gallery. However, this plan was abandoned with a decision of the Ministry of Education which stated that Hagia Sophia itself was a museum, and that the splendour of the building would be overshadowed by any additional artefacts placed inside.<sup>26</sup> Ali Sami Boyar (1880–1967), one of the leading painters of the period, was appointed as the first director of the Hagia Sophia Museum in 1935. During his leadership, Boyar produced watercolour paintings from various parts of the monument. His *Hagia Sophia and Its History*, published in 1943, includes nine paintings of the building produced by him.<sup>27</sup>

Other significant Byzantine monuments turned into museums were the Fethiye Mosque (Pammakaristos Church, built between the eleventh and twelfth centuries) and the Kariye Mosque (Chora Monastery, restored during the fourteenth century), which opened their doors to visitors in 1945 and 1958, respectively, following comprehensive restoration work to uncover and repair their rich wall paintings.

## Conclusion

One of the most important aspects of the exhibition of Byzantine heritage in modern Türkiye was that it depicted Byzantium from an archaeological perspective. It was no longer a living history; the curatorial arrangement and content of the early Republican exhibitions often framed it as a “civilization that lived long ago” without any reference to cultural and artistic continuities from past to present. There were two factors behind this cultural policy and approach. The first was related to the nature of the collections, which mainly consisted of archaeological objects rather than ethnographic materials. The second and perhaps the more complex factor was the shifting political and ideological contexts that informed the cultural politics of modern Türkiye from its foundation. The Greco-Turkish War (1919–22) in the aftermath of WWI played a critical role in the Turkish national imagination. Modern Greece gradually adopted the Byzantine heritage as a part of its national identity. In the Turkish political and popular imagination, the word “Byzantine” came to be associated with Greece, evoking the Greek claims on Anatolia. This is perhaps why the term “Eastern Roman”, which aims to highlight the Roman identity of Byzantium rather than its Greek identity, has been preferred in the state’s museum displays.

The proliferation of private museums and exhibitions in recent decades is the latest phase in this complex history of Türkiye’s engagement with Byzantium. There has been a boom in exhibitions of Byzantine art at private museums and institutions related to the academic work of a limited number of scholars working in Byzantine studies, and the increased

freedom in organisations that are not state-sponsored. The recent exhibitions organised by the Istanbul Research Institute (an organisation which was established in 2007 and focuses on the Byzantine, Ottoman and Republican periods of Istanbul, supporting relevant research projects), one of which was aptly titled *From Istanbul to Byzantium: Paths to Rediscovery, 1800-1955*, are a case in point. Held at the Pera Museum (November 2021–March 2022), the latter exhibition explored the Ottoman capital’s central role in shaping Byzantine studies. The other exhibition, called *What Byzantinism Is This in Istanbul! Byzantium in Popular Culture* (November 2021–March 2022), on the other hand, questioned perceptions of the Byzantine legacy in popular culture. This recent engagement with the Byzantine past, while not challenging the deeply entrenched national discourses, presents itself as a new way of viewing and representing Byzantium in contemporary Türkiye.

### Notes

- 1 Bahrani et al. 2011.
- 2 Dumont 1868: 237–63; Eldem 2021.
- 3 Salahaddin 1867: 152.
- 4 Eldem 2021: 264.
- 5 State Archives, BEO, 4232/317388 (20 November 1913), Mendel 1912–14, Eldem 2021.
- 6 Mendel 1908: 183.
- 7 Bahrani et al. 2011.
- 8 Gerd 2022: 171–72; Üre 2022: 144–61.
- 9 Ercan-Kynodakis 2022: 312.
- 10 Delouis and Pitarakis, 2022: 10–1.
- 11 State Archives, MF.MKT, 193/62 (18 January 1894).
- 12 State Archives, MF.MKT, 195/89 (12 February 1894).
- 13 Dumont 1868: 262
- 14 Eldem 2021: 262–3.
- 15 Çelik 2016: 94.
- 16 Goold 1871: 17–8.
- 17 Smirnov 1876: 561.
- 18 Turda 2008.
- 19 Ergin 2010.
- 20 İkinci Türk Tarih Kurultayı, Türk Tarih Sergi Programı, İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1937: 7; Kızıltan and Saner 2022: 72–3.
- 21 Bosch 2010: 801–11.
- 22 Ergin 2010: 34–42.
- 23 Kouneni 2022: 256–7.
- 24 Kızıltan and Saner 2022: 68.
- 25 Boyar 1943:17.
- 26 Durak 2023: 99.
- 27 Boyar 1943.

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# GABRIEL MILLET'S (1867–1953) PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE AND THE RECEPTION OF BYZANTIUM

*Catherine Jolivet-Lévy*

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were pivotal in shaping the image of Byzantium in France, both among the general public and in academic circles. Popular works, such as the drama *Théodora* by Victorien Sardou, presented an exotic vision of Byzantium to a wide audience, while the revival and reinterpretation of Byzantine art and architecture provided a rich source of inspiration, influencing various artistic movements and contributing to the development of modernist aesthetics. It was also during this period that Byzantine studies were emerging as a recognised academic discipline.<sup>1</sup> In 1899, the University of Paris Sorbonne established the first chair in Byzantine history, appointing Charles Diehl (1859–1944) to the position. In the same year, Gabriel Millet (1867–1953) was appointed as *maître de conférences* (associate professor) for Byzantine Christianity at the *École pratique des hautes études* (EPHE). In 1906, he became the first incumbent of the chair titled *Christianisme byzantin et archéologie chrétienne*, serving as assistant director. Later, in 1926, he was elected professor at the *Collège de France* to the chair of Aesthetics and Art History.<sup>2</sup>

What do Millet's photographic archive and publications reveal about the reception of Byzantium during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how did they impact both scholarly research and public appreciation of Byzantine heritage? To address these issues, I will cover the following points: the creation of the *Collection chrétienne et byzantine*, known as the *Photothèque Millet*, its influence on teaching and research, its role in shaping the general public's perception of Byzantium, and Millet's thinking on and vision of Byzantine art, contextualised within the intellectual debates of his time.

## Building the Christian and Byzantine Collection

The creation of the Collection, which played such a decisive role in the founding of the discipline, was primarily the result of Millet's travels and photographic campaigns. When Millet arrived in Athens in 1891 as a member of the *École française*, the institution had already begun to expand its scientific orientation beyond classical studies.<sup>3</sup> The new director, Théophile Homolle (1848–1925), aimed to develop Byzantine studies. He guided

Millet, whose initial interest was in the study of “Christian origins” (or early Christianity),<sup>4</sup> towards exploring the legacy of the ancient Greek world and the Byzantine monuments of Greece. This marked the beginning of a series of field trips and photographic campaigns. In 1892, Millet took his first photographs at the monastery of Daphni, in Attica, aiming to exhaustively document its architecture and mosaics. He later used his photographs for his monograph on the monastery.<sup>5</sup>

During his time in Athens, he travelled extensively throughout Greece, with a particular focus on the Peloponnese and the site of Mystras, on a hill to the west of Sparta, where over the course of four campaigns, from 1894 to 1898, he systematically photographed the site, the buildings, their painted and sculpted decorations and inscriptions (Figure 33.1). Published in 1910, the volume of plates featuring architectural surveys by Henri Eustache (1861–1922), along with drawings and watercolours by artists such as Louis Yperman, Sophie Millet, Jules Ronsin and Pierre Roumpos, which complemented the black-and-white photographs, remained the only available documentary source for the churches of Mystras for many years.<sup>6</sup>

Millet then travelled to the Balkans, especially the now Greek regions of Epirus, Thessaly, Macedonia (Thessaloniki), then under Ottoman occupation, as well as to Asia Minor (including Constantinople and as far as Trebizond),<sup>7</sup> and to Venice, Istria and Dalmatia.

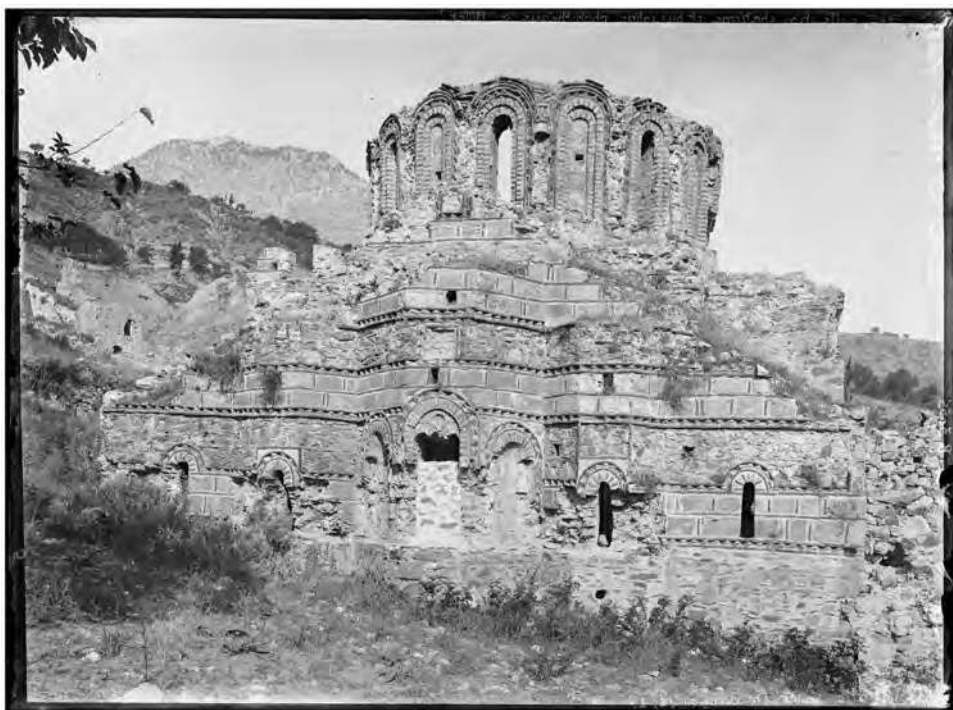


Figure 33.1 Mystras, Sts-Theodoros, 1895–96. © Photothèque Gabriel Millet, *Collection chrétienne et byzantine*, B.03055.



Figure 33.2 Gabriel Millet Arriving at the Monastery of Xenophontos on Mount Athos, s.d.  
© Photothèque Gabriel Millet, Collection chrétienne et byzantine, D 1980.

His photographic harvest is particularly abundant for the Balkans, and especially for Mount Athos. Between 1894 and 1920, Millet conducted five missions to Mount Athos (Figure 33.2).<sup>8</sup> During his later visits, he benefited from the assistance of the Photographic and Cinematographic Section of the Allied Army of the Orient (in 1918)<sup>9</sup> and from civilian photographers (in 1919 and 1920). He brought back considerable documentation encompassing landscapes, architecture, mosaics, wall paintings, manuscripts, icons, ivories, steatites, goldsmith works and religious embroideries. His curiosity extended to religious practices, liturgical ceremonies and monastic life. He also photographed or arranged for the photography of diplomatic documents preserved in monastic archives and various inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> A volume of plates on the paintings of Athos was published in 1927, although the accompanying text volume never appeared.<sup>11</sup> Millet conducted his final campaigns in 1924, 1927, 1934 and 1935 in the Balkan regions (Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro).<sup>12</sup> He was interested not only in the monuments and their decorations but also in the miniatures preserved in libraries and in liturgical objects. Although a considerable portion of his photographs remained unpublished at the time of his death, they have always been available to scholars at the EPHE.

Millet, himself an excellent photographer, was the creator of a large number of photos, but throughout his career, he worked to enrich the collection, trying to cover all areas of Byzantine art. His photographic harvest grew rapidly through the donations he was able to obtain from his international network of scholars, colleagues and archaeologists and from various institutions, as well as through a policy of exchanges and purchases. The earliest photographs from Millet's archive, dating back to 1881, focus on Sinai and were generously donated by Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov (1844–1925). Donors also included Émile Bertaux, Paul

Perdrizet, Jean Ebersolt, Gustave Schlumberger, Joseph Laurent, Jean Clédât, Guillaume de Jerphanion, Gertrude Bell, Sirarpie der Nersessian, Georges Duthuit, among others. And institutions, such as the *École française d'Athènes*, the *Orthodox Society of Palestine*, the *École biblique de Jérusalem* and the *Imperial Ottoman Museum at Istanbul*. Millet also amassed a valuable collection of high-quality photographs depicting churches and monasteries in the Caucasus and Turkey. Photographs of miniatures from Greek psalters and Armenian manuscripts were offered by the Frick Art Reference Library, New York. An exhibition held at the *Jeu de Paume* museum in Paris, in 1925, the *Exposition de l'art roumain ancien et moderne*, attracted Millet's interest on Romanian heritage and he acquired numerous photographs, particularly of religious objects, embroideries and manuscripts.

In 1903, the *Collection chrétienne et byzantine*, housed at the *École des hautes études* at the Sorbonne since 1901, was formally established. The first catalogue of the glass plates contained over 2000 meticulously marked photographs classified by format, with prints carefully arranged in albums.<sup>13</sup> For more than 30 years after the publication of this first catalogue, Millet continued to add to the collection by purchasing new photographs and soliciting donations from French and foreign scholars.

Introducing a substantial volume of new evidence into the field of Byzantine studies, the *Photothèque Millet* provided a comprehensive panorama of Christian and Byzantine archaeology and art across the Mediterranean and Near East, as known in the early twentieth century. Graphic documents, particularly watercolours, were still used to complement black-and-white photographs, but Millet prioritised photography: "Its precision and authenticity, which surpass the finest photogravure, are essential for any new reproduction, making it a true record that should be preserved in archives".<sup>14</sup> Photography provided an accurate, scientific account of works that previous reproductions had reinterpreted, often distorting the judgements made about them in the nineteenth century.

Bequeathed in 1938 to the *École pratique des hautes études*, Millet's collection holds significant value for conservation purposes and serves as a crucial resource for scholars studying Byzantine art and architecture. As Millet wrote in 1901,

This collection will serve the dual purpose of being a tool for scholarly research, where unpublished documents, pending their publication, will be made available to scholars, and as an archive repository where, after their publication, they will be preserved for verification and further in-depth research.<sup>15</sup>

### **A Tool for Teaching and Research**

Millet's initial idea was to create a small museum of Byzantine art, making the collection accessible and providing a stimulating framework for teaching about Byzantium.<sup>16</sup> This project was part of a broader movement to establish university museums that developed in the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Millet's collection included, in addition to photographic plates and prints, architectural plans and surveys, drawings, watercolours, ivory casts and a few archaeological objects. It was displayed in the classrooms of the Religious Sciences Section of the EPHE at the Sorbonne, where Millet conducted his seminars, creating an immersive learning environment (Figure 33.3).

Paul Lemerle eloquently captured the ambience of Millet's teaching space, remarking on its transformative effect: "This unusual setting made me feel all the appeal of a change of scenery. The Divine Liturgy of the Peribleptos revealed to me the beauty of an alliance between ancient Hellenism and Christian mysticism".<sup>18</sup> Newly acquired images were used



*Figures 33.3* Gabriel Millet Lecturing at the Sorbonne, École des hautes études, s.d. © Cliché Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de la Sorbonne-BIS, RBA 4 = 163–1. Pièce 121.

as the basis for conferences on current research topics, such as Jean Clédât's research on the newly discovered Bawit monastery. Millet's teaching and the accessibility of his collection attracted an international audience of students and colleagues.<sup>19</sup> They led to innovative publications that played a crucial role in the evolving methodology and reception of Byzantium, not only in France but throughout the scholarly world. Among his students, a number went on to pursue careers as historians of Byzantine art, including Jean Ebersolt (1879–1933), Anatole Frolov (1906–72) and Sirarpie Der Nersessian (1896–1989).

Millet's photographic archive was the foundation of most of his publications. In his first book on Daphni, which laid the groundwork for monographic studies, he extensively utilised photography to document the monument in a holistic manner. Alongside detailed descriptions and rigorous iconographic and stylistic analyses, he introduced a wide range of comparisons, offering a comprehensive panorama of Byzantine art as it was known at the end of the nineteenth century. This monograph marked a pivotal shift towards the use of photography in the study of Byzantine art and architecture, even though photographic illustration in art books had already appeared shortly after the mid-nineteenth century, as evidenced by Jules Labarte's *Histoire des arts industriels* (1864), in which Byzantine art features prominently.<sup>20</sup>

Although the extensive documentation on the paintings brought back from Mystras, Mount Athos, Macedonia and Serbia was made available in volumes of plates and could be consulted at the EPHE, Millet did not publish the accompanying volumes of text. However, this documentation was used in his lectures and publications, particularly in his *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile* (1916).<sup>21</sup> Richly illustrated and erudite, this book delves into Christian iconography from its origins to the dawn of modern times. Despite an approach and a concept of regional schools that now seem outdated, it remains a mine of references. Like Charles Diehl before him, Millet challenged the prevailing belief that political



decline inevitably led to artistic decadence, rehabilitating the Palaeologan period and its artistic “renaissance”.<sup>22</sup> The comparisons between Byzantine paintings and the frescoes of the early Italian Renaissance highlight their mutual relationships. He also reappraised post-Byzantine art, which was once considered a popular and decadent continuation of the great Byzantine tradition. In *L'École grecque dans l'architecture byzantine* (1911),<sup>23</sup> he introduced, for the first time, the analysis of buildings from Armenia and Georgia into the study of Byzantine architecture, with a significant number of photographs taken by the Tbilisi photographer Dimitri Ermakov (1846–1916).

Although Millet primarily focused his research on monumental art, architecture, mosaics and mural paintings, he also drew on his photographic collection to pioneer studies in other fields, such as liturgical vestments and embroidered veils. As early as 1905, he published a study of the Thessaloniki epitaphios,<sup>24</sup> an embroidered liturgical textile dated around 1300, and in 1939, he released a volume of plates titled *Les broderies religieuses de style byzantine*.<sup>25</sup> Another fertile field developed by Millet was the study of illuminated manuscripts. He photographed or acquired photographs from the great libraries of Europe and the Balkans, as well as from museums and monastery libraries. Regarding icons, they are less prevalent in Millet's archive and research, except for those from Mount Athos. The Sinai icons were largely unknown until 1902, when Dmitri V. Ainalov (1862–1939) published those brought to Kyiv by Porphyrius Uspensky in 1850.

In summary, through his meticulous and methodical documentation and innovative teaching methods, Gabriel Millet significantly contributed to the study and appreciation of Byzantine art and architecture, influencing scholars and students worldwide (Figure 33.4).



Figure 33.4 Gabriel Millet with His Students, 1929. © Sirarpie Der Nersessian Papers and Photographs, Dumbarton Oaks Archives, Washington, DC, AR.PH.Misc.219.

### Reception of Byzantium by a Broader Audience

Millet did not publish a lot for the general public, and his *Collection* initially made Byzantine references available primarily to a limited academic audience. However, through exhibitions, photographs from his archive also contributed to the introduction of Byzantine culture to a broader audience. In the early twentieth century, Byzantine art was primarily known through the most accessible sites of Ravenna and Venice. Millet's photographs revealed lesser-known monuments in the Balkans (especially Greece), Constantinople, Asia Minor and the Near East. In 1900, at the *Exposition universelle* held in Paris, he organised an exhibition featuring high-quality photographs and drawings of Byzantine monuments. Using the latest techniques of the time, some large-format images provided viewers with an immersive experience. It attracted a large international audience and was awarded a gold medal. Another exhibition held in 1925, *L'Art décoratif et industriel dans le Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes*, for which he wrote an introduction, gave Millet the opportunity to introduce the monuments of Serbia. Finally, in 1931, he lent his photographs of churches in Greece and Serbia to the first significant international exhibition of Byzantine art, organised in Paris at the *Musée des arts décoratifs*.<sup>26</sup> The exhibition, which featured nearly 800 catalogue numbers and over a thousand objects, satisfied a broad spectrum of expectations by catering to both the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the increasing appreciation of an art that aligned with contemporary western creation and the aesthetics of modernism.<sup>27</sup>

### Millet's Vision of Byzantine Art

The founding of Constantinople marked, according to Millet, “the political resurrection of Hellenism and, under the guise of Hellenism, the rebirth of the ancient East”.<sup>28</sup> He attributed a synthesising role to the capital of the Byzantine empire and envisioned Byzantine art as a compromise between a predominantly Greek and idealist tradition and a realist, Oriental one. In nineteenth-century France, the notion of Hellenism was crucial to the perception of Byzantine art, and the idea of the superiority of classical Greek art remained prevalent into the early twentieth century. Millet's opinion in this regard aligned with that of Charles Diehl, both emphasising the Hellenistic components of Byzantine art while largely overlooking Roman influences and disregarding the work of Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858–1905). Millet underlined Byzantium's role in preserving the heritage of Greek Antiquity “against the Barbarians and Islam” and transmitting it to the West.<sup>29</sup> This emphasis on Hellenism was part of a philhellenic tradition in France and, within the context of nineteenth-century nationalism, carried significant political implications. Millet took part in the debate sparked by the controversial Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941), author of the 1901 polemical book *Orient oder Rom: Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst* (The Orient or Rome: contributions to the history of late antique and early Christian art), which emphasised the Eastern origins of Byzantine art. Millet provided a more nuanced approach to the influences shaping Byzantine art, presenting a balanced view that recognised both Oriental and Hellenistic elements. He highlighted the interplay between these diverse cultural influences, noting that Hellenism maintained a strong presence in Constantinople, while other regions of the empire exhibited Oriental influences. However, these Eastern influences were often



infused with varying degrees of Hellenistic contributions from the capital. In 1936, Millet's translation of Strzygowski's *L'ancien art chrétien de Syrie* (originally written in German in 1928) marked a departure from his earlier nuanced perspective.<sup>30</sup> In his preliminary study for the work, he defended Strzygowski's thesis, which argued that art originated from the North. Despite the fact that Strzygowski's theories had clearly taken a racist turn, Millet continued to support him.<sup>31</sup>

The concept of regional artistic schools is another crucial aspect of Millet's research about iconography and architecture as well. In his *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile*, he drew on the methods of philologists and linguists to define these regional schools in Byzantine iconography, contrasting the Macedonian school – open to influences from the Orient and Italy – with the more conservative Cretan school. Borrowing from the historiographical tradition on French medieval architecture, he introduced this concept of schools to categorise and understand the diverse variations within Byzantine architecture. In *L'École grecque*, he identified two major schools: the school of Constantinople and the school of Greece. While the Hellenistic tradition persisted in Constantinople, the eastern tradition was upheld in Upper Mesopotamia, the Anatolian plateau, Armenia and the Caucasus. According to Millet, Greece received little from Constantinople and much more from the East, especially from Armenia. It was only in the fourteenth century at Mystras that the influence of Constantinople became predominant in Greece. Millet's concept of a Greek school became a foundational aspect of scholarship in Greece, as the Byzantine past ultimately became a core element of Greek national identity. In *L'ancien art serbe*, Millet highlighted the unique characteristics of Serbian architecture, which integrates both Byzantine and Western elements. He subdivided medieval architecture in Serbia into three schools: the Raška school, the Byzantinised Serbian school and the Morava school – a classification that has since become the foundation for the study of local architecture.<sup>32</sup> Expressing profound admiration for the Serbian people, he praised their art as a testament to the grandeur of their national tradition. Over time, influenced by the ideological values of nation-states, Millet developed a strong appreciation for the national dimension in architectural studies.

Regarding iconography, Millet summed up his vision of Byzantine art as follows:

... this new art, less concerned with beauty than with the transmission of ideas, aimed to express the power of the sovereign and the certainty of dogma through the luxury of its materials and the gravity of its compositions. It was created by a society shaped by the political awakening of the Greek race and the Eastern populations, and it grew alongside Christianity ....<sup>33</sup>

Although the rehabilitation of Byzantine art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely driven by a renewed admiration for its stylistic properties, Millet rejected the aesthetic approach in favour of a rigorous archaeological and iconographic method, grounded in texts and history. He prioritised the monuments themselves, focusing on their structure and the distribution of subjects, which reveal the underlying intentions and guiding ideas. He was interested in the interplay of the images with ecclesiastical literature, theology, dogma and ritual, always considering the artwork in relation to its function. For instance, he placed liturgical textiles within the broader context of Byzantine religious practices, exploring how these objects were used in worship and their theological significance. This emphasis on iconography, rather than the aesthetic value of works, was uncommon

in the nineteenth-century Western world but aligned with perspectives in the Russian Orthodox world.<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion

In the intellectual climate of a period marked by the rediscovery of Byzantine heritage, Millet gave Byzantine studies in art history a new impetus, playing a pivotal role in shaping the reception of Byzantium. He earned the reputation of being the founder of Byzantine art history studies in France. However, his intellectual curiosity extended beyond archaeology and art history to encompass a wider range of disciplines such as history, epigraphy and philology. Additionally, he was among the first to recognise and advocate for the educational potential of photography. Throughout his long career until his retirement in 1937, Millet, in addition to his work as a cabinet scholar, enhanced fieldwork and utilised photography extensively. He was not alone in this approach at the time. From the late nineteenth century onward, photography, through its technical advancements, has established itself as the preferred medium for archaeological missions and heritage documentation campaigns. However, most undertakings, unlike those of Millet, were confined to specific regions: those now part of contemporary Greece by the British architects Robert Weir Schultz (1860–1951) and Sidney Howard Barnsley (1865–1926), the Near East (Turkey, Syria, Mesopotamia) by Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), Anatolia, particularly Cappadocia, by the French Jesuit Father Guillaume de Jerphanion (1877–1948), while the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople documented Byzantine sites in Turkey and elsewhere through photography. Millet's *Photothèque* stands out for its encyclopaedic and interdisciplinary approach, offering a comprehensive and broader scope of documentation available at the dawn of the twentieth century. Millet's work is also situated within the broader context of developing national narratives in the Balkans and eastern Europe. His research has been instrumental in illustrating how Byzantine traditions persisted and evolved within the Orthodox world, particularly among the Greek and Slavic peoples as heirs to Byzantine spirituality.

Despite advancements in photographic technology and the growth of documentation, Millet's archive remains a vital research tool and a significant source in its own right. It provides valuable insights into the former state of monuments that have since deteriorated or been altered. While colour photography has gradually supplanted black-and-white photographs, transforming the appreciation of paintings, black-and-white photographs on glass plates retain their high value, especially for capturing sites, architecture and sculptures with clarity and detail.

Today, the *Photothèque Millet*, housed at the Humathèque (Campus Condorcet, Aubervilliers), includes approximately 130,000 photographs in various media focusing on Christian, Byzantine and Slavic art, religious buildings, icons, manuscripts and "objets d'art". Additionally, it contains a vast range of graphic documents, archaeological items and casts. Efforts are underway to enhance the accessibility of the collection, which holds both scientific and heritage value, through the digitisation of documents. This process, initially undertaken by Princeton University, is now being continued by *Université PSL* and *Collège de France*.<sup>35</sup> Besides the photographs, other archival documents, particularly Millet's correspondence with colleagues and students, as well as his travel notes and lectures, would provide a more comprehensive view of the reception of Byzantium in his time.

## Notes

- 1 Diehl 1905.
- 2 Soria and Spieser 2020.
- 3 Spieser 1996.
- 4 Millet 1903: 3.
- 5 Millet 1899.
- 6 Millet 1910.
- 7 Where he collaborated with a local Greek photographer, Konstantin E. Cacoulis.
- 8 Jolivet-Lévy 2013.
- 9 The French Army of the Orient (AFO) was a unit of the French Army that fought during World War I on the Eastern Front (also known as the Salonika Front or Macedonian Front) between 1915 and 1918. In 1916, the AFO became part of the Allied Armies of the Orient (AAO), which included troops from the British, Serbian, Italian, Russian, and Greek armies.
- 10 Jolivet-Lévy 2021: 77.
- 11 Millet 1927.
- 12 Couson 1988.
- 13 Millet 1903, Millet et al. 1955.
- 14 Millet 1903: 9.
- 15 Millet 1901: 378.
- 16 Soria 2017.
- 17 Such as the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1816); the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (reopened in 1845); the Museum of Classical Archaeology, Cambridge (1884), the Harvard Art Museums (1895) or the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max Planck Institute (1897).
- 18 Lemerle 1990: 247.
- 19 Semoglou 2005, Preradović and Marković 2021.
- 20 Labarte 1864, Aubenas and Smith 2000.
- 21 Millet 1916b.
- 22 “These masterpieces were unknown and it was said that the Crusaders had drained the sap of Byzantine art, whereas, on the contrary, far from the court and grandeur, Greek genius seemed to be reborn in the worship of beauty”. Millet 1903: 3.
- 23 Millet 1916a.
- 24 Millet and Le Tourneau 1905.
- 25 Millet 1939. The accompanying text was published posthumously in 1947. Rapti 2019.
- 26 Duthuit and Volbach 1933.
- 27 Labrusse 2018.
- 28 Millet 1905: 128.
- 29 Millet 1929: LXIV.
- 30 The full title of the French version was J. Strzygowski, *L’ancien art chrétien de Syrie: son caractère et son évolution d’après les découvertes de Vogüé et de l’expédition de Princeton, la façade de Mschatta et le calice d’Antioche, Étude préliminaire de Gabriel Millet*, Paris 1936.
- 31 Spieser 2018.
- 32 For a reassessment of Millet’s concept of regional schools, particularly in the field of architecture, refer to Ćurčić 2013.
- 33 Millet 1903: 1–2.
- 34 Sabatier 1850: 322, 338; Spieser 1991.
- 35 The Index of Medieval Art – Princeton University, <https://ima.princeton.edu/digital-image-collections/collection/millet/location?page=311&utm>. Université PSL, Documentation photographique de la Collection chrétienne et byzantine de Gabriel Millet, <https://bibnum.explore.psl.eu/s/psl/ark:/18469/28hpm>; Paris, Archives du Collège de France, Fonds Gabriel Millet cote 51 CDF 1-96.

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# 34

## A PAVILION AND AN EXHIBITION

Byzantium 1900–1931

*Panayotis Tournikiotis*

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed for the first time the great international and world exhibitions in which nation-states could demonstrate their artistic, technical and scientific ingenuity while confronting their cultural differences and encouraging trade relations and the promotion of industrial development. Starting with the exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851, many exhibitions were organised in Paris, London and elsewhere, in which national pavilions were used to express in their scenography, exhibits and architectural form a synthesis of national identity. Until the end of the century, the architectural design of the pavilions was usually planned centrally under the competence of the organising country, and as far as Greece was concerned, it was expressed according to the models of classical antiquity. However, at the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1900, more than one pavilion with elements of Byzantine church architecture appeared, designed with national responsibility, including the pavilion of Greece.<sup>1</sup>

Large thematic exhibitions with historical content in museums and cultural institutions had not yet begun, only exhibitions of contemporary artistic production in the famous salons. The first major exhibition of medieval art and architecture was held in Bruges in 1902,<sup>2</sup> followed by exhibitions in 1904 in Düsseldorf, Siena and Paris.<sup>3</sup> These exhibitions, organised by major institutions with political support, explicitly referred to “primitive” arts, and they were primarily intended to demonstrate the early phases of development of national styles in the arts. In both Bruges and Paris, reference was made from the outset to Byzantine influences in European medieval art, mainly attributed to the calls put out for artists from Constantinople<sup>4</sup> and the interaction of the crusaders with the Byzantine Orient, which accelerated in the Île-de-France “the most original [activity] known since Hellenic activity in the 5th century BC”.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Byzantine art was absent from these exhibitions and would remain absent until 1931, when the great exhibition of Byzantine art at the *Musée des arts décoratifs* in Paris took place, which attempted to bridge the gap between national identity and the artistic avant-garde. In 31 years, a cycle had been completed: nascent connections made between the Byzantine past, the medieval West and modernity, which were emergent in the 1900 pavilion, were confirmed in the 1931 exhibition.

The pavilions of Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria at the 1900 Universal Exhibition of Paris were adjacent in the rue des Nations, on the Seine, and they had Byzantine-inspired

architecture, revived as a national tradition. Next to them was the Greek pavilion, designed by the French architect Lucien Magne (1849–1916), which also had references to Byzantium, but not only to Byzantium, because it expressed at the same time a modernity that transcended national identity. This ambiguous appearance was the first emblematic presence of Byzantine reference in the modern West, and it deserves our attention.

Lucien Magne, architect and professor of the history of architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, and Inspector General of the Historic Monuments Commission, was the protagonist of a singular relationship of influences between modern architecture and archaeology, both ancient and medieval, in France and Greece at the turn of 1900. Magne had developed a keen interest in religious and fortified buildings of the French Middle Ages, having been influenced by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79), and he had made significant restorations as well as modern works when he began teaching the history of architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1891. Summing up the achievements of nineteenth-century French architecture both at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889, known also as the Centenary Exhibition since it commemorated the 100th anniversary of the start of the French Revolution,<sup>6</sup> and in his book *L'architecture française du siècle*,<sup>7</sup> he highlighted Guillaume Abel Blouet (1795–1853) and Henri Labrousse (1801–75), along with Viollet-le-Duc and Charles Garnier (1825–98). That is, architects who had studied ancient Greek architecture or the French Middle Ages and operated in a modernity that wanted to be of its time, but with a knowledge and awareness of history.

In 1894 and 1895, he travelled twice to Greece, on a mission of the French Government to contribute to the restoration of the Parthenon. In Athens, he worked systematically, installing scaffolding to make detailed measurements and careful observations, with the support of the French School and its director Théophile Homolle (1848–1925). He participated in the international committee of experts, along with Josef Durm (1837–1919) and Francis Penrose (1817–1903), who represented the German and British Schools of Archaeology, and presented his proposals on the restoration of the Parthenon publicly in Athens, to the French School and the Archaeological Society in the presence of the Greek Prime Minister, Nikolaos Deligiannis (1845–1910). In 1895, he published officially in Paris *Le Parthénon*, a comprehensive report in French.<sup>8</sup> In addition to photographic documentation, he drew the Parthenon in large-scale watercolour representations, which are little known because they were not published after the report and their exhibition in Paris in 1896. Magne wrote that the Parthenon “sums up all perfection with the simplicity of its design, the ingenuity of its structure, the purity of its forms, and the richness of its material”. More generally, he says, “the ancient monuments of Greece have for us the attraction of absolutely beautiful works, which characterise one of the most fertile civilisations, and still form the basis of our teaching today”.<sup>9</sup>

Fitted in around his studies in Athens, Magne also travelled throughout Greece, to other places of historical and archaeological interest. He went to Delphi, where excavations were in progress, and to Olympia, Epidauros, Aegina, Hosios Loukas, Daphni, Eleusis, Acrocorinth and Mystras. The photos and written comments from this trip are of great interest. Most important, however, is his division of the sites into two sections – Greek antiquity and late Byzantium; the latter pertaining to religious and fortified architecture incorporating French influence in Greek lands as a result of the Frankish occupation of most of the Peloponnese during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Mystras was a special destination for Magne. Gabriel Millet (1867–1953) was already working there as part of a mission of the French School at the time of Magne's visit. Magne's photographs show the castle city before restoration work began, and his observations were based on the ruins as found (Figure 34.1).





*Figure 34.1* Lucien Magne, photo of the thirteenth-century church of the monastery of St Theodore of Vrontochion at Mystras, c. 1895. © Ministère de la Culture (France), Médiathèque du patrimoine et de la photographie, diffusion Grand Palais RMN photo.

Returning to Paris, he organised an exhibition in 1896, in which he presented photographs, drawings and watercolours from the two journeys to Greece and published a catalogue entitled *Etudes sur l'art grec et sur l'art français*.<sup>10</sup> In the catalogue, he points to the first establishment of Mystras as a Frankish castle by Guillaume II de Villehardouin (1211–78) in 1249 and discusses “the original characteristics of Byzantine architecture in the Morea” at the time when cathedrals were erected in France, concluding with the “temporary rapprochement of two arts having the same origin”. In his eyes, the monastery of Peribleptos seemed related to the thirteenth-century architecture erected in Burgundy and Aquitaine under Byzantine influence. The fleur-de-lis of France, he says, still exists carved between two rosettes on the main apse. This “fusion” was also the subject of a seminal article published as a follow-up to his 1896 exhibition in Paris.<sup>11</sup> This discovery of the Byzantine past by French scholars was of a singular modernity and stood in contrast to the ideals of Greek independence, which was fought for under the sign of classical antiquity.

Aware of both his studies for the restoration of the Parthenon and his explorations in Mystras, Nikolaos Deligiannis, the Greek ambassador in Paris at that time, contributed to the assignment of the Greek pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of 1900 to Lucien Magne.<sup>12</sup> The architect proposed the form of a Byzantine church, following typology from Mystras, built with prefabricated iron elements and standardised terracotta blocks, the whole suited to being assembled or disassembled at will, like the marble structures of Greek temples and the iron edifices of modern times ([Figures 34.2](#) and [34.3](#)).



Figure 34.2 Lucien Magne, Watercolour design of the Greek pavilion in the 1900 Universal Exhibition of Paris, Archives Nationales de France, 534 AP 36. © Public domain.



Figure 34.3 The Greek pavilion in the 1900 Universal Exhibition of Paris, postcard. © Author's collection.

Speaking in Viollet-le-Duc's terms, this was the third era of rationalism after the Parthenon and the cathedrals, a very modern construction of the industrial era (materials and structure) that consciously spoke to the language of historical forms but did so in the present and was aimed at the future.

Inside the pavilion were the national products of Greece: raw materials, mostly marbles and products of the soil, sultanas, wine and olive oil, handicrafts and woven fabrics, together with interesting pieces from the recent archaeological excavations at Delphi and Olympia (Figure 34.4).

Paul Gers noted that "In this respect, we know how rich Greece is and how intelligently it manages the treasures that the accumulated years of the most refined ancient civilisation have deposited in its soil".<sup>13</sup> In addition, a large equestrian statue by Lazaros Sochos (1862–1911) was placed in front of the pavilion, as the culmination of this layering of materials, products, forms and ideas: the leader of the Greek war of Independence, Theodoros Kolokotronis (1770–1843), pointing his hand towards the pavilion. The heroic personification of Independence was the banner of the Greek pavilion on the banks of the Seine.

For Magne, there was no question of imitating a thirteenth-century church, but in this case "one of the most important monuments of Mystras, the church of the monastery of St Theodore of Vrontochion" provided a model<sup>14</sup> (cf. Figure 34.1). He affirmed,

Each building has its place in a particular civilisation, born of a combination of circumstances that can never be repeated twice, because two peoples have never had the same customs, the same institutions, or the same beliefs at two different times.

The construction of the pavilion was completely modern, belonging to Paris in 1900, and it had an equally modern function as the pavilion of an exhibition. For Magne, as he explained to his students, "architecture is like a language, an expression of ideas".<sup>15</sup> After the exhibition, both the pavilion and the equestrian statue were transferred to Athens. The pavilion, recomposed dry without mortar like an ancient Greek temple, became the Church of the Saviour (of King George), Syggrou Avenue. The statue of Kolokotronis was used to mark the entrance to the Greek Parliament (the "old Parliament") by French architect François Louis-Florimond Boulanger (1807–75) on Stadiou Street and it is still in place.<sup>16</sup> Intersections and chiasms defined the relations between France and Greece at the turn of 1900 in a unique fusion of state, culture and identities, passing from the Parthenon to Mystras, from rationalism to historicism, from the War of Independence to the Universal Exhibition and from the banks of the Seine to the streets of Athens.

The pavilion's reception was divided. What in Paris expressed contemporary Greece and its relationship with France, in a manner that connected the present with the past but referred to the future, could only be perceived in Athens as the architecture of a church that invoked ideological identification with a specific past. In fact, the Paris pavilion was viewed in Greece by the press and some prominent people with reservations and rather negatively, because its form did not refer to antiquity. In Athens, it was not an exhibition pavilion in the form of a Byzantine church but only a church, and even at that, its functional design was somewhat in tension with its liturgical tradition. On the contrary, in France it was perceived as "très moderne":

In the midst of so many fake palaces, so much made-up architecture and fake stone and marble, this interpretation of a small Byzantine church using processes recently made available to builders, this transposition, so to speak, of a classical style into a new world, appeared to be a masterpiece of sincerity and reason.<sup>17</sup>



LE PAVILLON GREC. *Vue prise sous la coupole.*

*Figure 34.4* The Greek pavilion in the 1900 Universal Exhibition of Paris, interior, L'Exposition de Paris 1900, Encyclopédie du siècle, vol. 3, 120. © Public domain.

The *Exposition internationale d'art byzantin* organised in 1931 in Paris was definitely a unique and inaugural event. The exhibition was held under the high patronage of the President of the Hellenic Republic and the President of the French Republic. The chair of the organising committee was Charles Diehl (1859–1944) and the vice-chair Gabriel Millet, leading personalities in Byzantine studies, together with many more or less important figures, including from Greece the collectors Antonis Benakis, Dionysis Loverdos and the Byzantinists Georgios Sotiriou and Andreas Xygopoulos. Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and the ambassador of Greece to France, Nikolaos Politis, as well as modern artists such as Henri Matisse, participated in the honorary committee. Undoubtedly, Greece played a leading role, at least institutionally, in an exhibition that included more than 700 objects from 14 countries. In the very first sentence of the introductory text, in the published catalogue, Diehl was explicit: “The International Exhibition of Byzantine Art opening at the *Pavillon de Marsan* is, I believe, the first of its kind to have been organised to date”.<sup>18</sup> He was right. Only a few of the exhibits had represented Byzantium in previous years in smaller cities and smaller exhibitions with broader themes. The focus on Byzantine art was obviously the result of research initiatives that had begun at the end of the nineteenth century, but along with them, the conditions of its reception and interpretation had changed across Europe. Byzantine art still belonged to the primitive arts, but now it was also of interest to modern art.

In contrast to the Greek pavilion at the Paris Exhibition in 1900 – which was dominated by architecture with obvious references to late Byzantium but did not include any exhibits relating to Byzantine art or Byzantine culture – in 1931, at the Louvre, architecture was absent. This was not due to a lack of appreciation. Diehl writes in his preface:

You can't bring to Paris Saint Sophia of Constantinople or Saint Mark of Venice, or those charming little churches you see in Stamboul or Salonika, Athens or Mistra. The beautiful mosaic decorations, the long cycles of frescoes that adorn the interiors of Byzantine buildings with a singular magnificence, cannot be removed from the walls and displayed here.<sup>19</sup>

In this, he reveals the geography of Byzantium to which he refers. It is extremely interesting that he places Constantinople and Venice with Thessaloniki on the same level as Athens and Mystras, studied by Millet and Magne. On the same page, he attributes to Byzantium a simultaneous connection with Greek antiquity and the East:

An art where very different influences and qualities meet and combine: the never-forgotten memory of ancient Greece, to which Byzantine art owes the taste for beautiful order, nobility, sobriety and high idealism that can be found in some of its creations, and the profound influence of the Eastern tradition, which gave it that realistic, sometimes vigorous and dramatic turn, which contrasts so strongly with the Hellenistic grace and picturesqueness, and above all that love and sense of colour, which is one of the most characteristic features of Byzantine art.<sup>20</sup>

This view concerning Byzantium's inheritance from classical antiquity and the East is confirmed by Jean Ebersolt (1879–1933), one of the main contributors to the exhibition, in his article “Byzance et l'art décoratif”, in the same catalogue:

From Antiquity, they had received that sense of moderation, that feeling of reserve, elegance, nobility, that accent of idealism, which gives an inestimable value to many of

their works. From the Asian East, which represented an indigenous tradition hostile to Hellenism, they borrowed a taste for colour, a sense of decoration and a love of the most dazzling luxury. (...) They strove to unite these two different spirits, these two rival traditions, and to reconcile them with the ideal of the new world, which had been born in Palestine under the sign of the Cross.<sup>21</sup>

Byzantium is antiquity and the Cross, the East and the Merovingian and Carolingian west, as the French curators had insisted. All this emerged in Paris at a time when modernity was flourishing. For, as Rémi Labrusse writes,

The organisers' ambition was not just historical; it was also to offer a new reading of Byzantium, in tune with contemporary western art. Symbolist Byzantium, marked by post-Hellenic decadence and iconic sacredness, was to give way to a modernist Byzantium.<sup>22</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that alongside the exhibition a richly illustrated article was published in Christian Zervos' *Cahiers d'art* with the same title as the exhibition, written by the American historian, diplomat and art connoisseur Royall Tyler (1884–1953), who also participated in the organising committee of the exhibition.<sup>23</sup> His article is the first in this issue of *Cahiers d'art*, followed by articles from Zervos and the French surrealist Roger Vitrac (1899–1952) on contemporary young painters and the relationship between abstraction and figuration, and the Swiss architectural historian Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968) on the modern Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (1898–1976). Even if we recall that Zervos had defended a doctoral thesis in Paris on Michael Psellos,<sup>24</sup> the prominence of Byzantium in this celebrated review of the artistic and architectural avant-garde is revealing.

This Byzantium, more secular than religious, connected to Greek antiquity, medieval Europe and the East, primitive and modern at the same time, was not the ideal Byzantium of the Greeks. Despite the institutional participation of Greece, the Byzantium of the Paris exhibition – the international Byzantium – did not respond well enough to the “Hellenism” to which the Greek political and cultural scene aspired. The 1931 exhibition did not have the repercussions one would have expected in Greece. Nevertheless, Byzantium was at the same time acknowledged on the international scene as established history and as part of modernity.

Considering from our time, the exhibition at the 1900 pavilion in Paris seems conventional and contradictory. It presented the marketable products of modern Greece together with exclusive finds from the foreign archaeological expeditions, mostly images, in a paradoxical architectural environment, which was both historical and industrial, and which was and was not a church since it proposed an architecture that was both erudite and innovative. The exhibition at the Louvre was conventional, in an environment that was politically similar to the former but now architecturally alien to Byzantium, and consisted mainly of small objects, many of which were of utilitarian, religious and decorative value (Figure 34.5).

Art, as such, as an autonomous creation of the artist, as it was understood in the twentieth century, was obviously absent. Yet, it was precisely pioneering artists who became interested in Byzantium, along with historians and archaeologists. A difficult coexistence of the avant-garde and medieval history that could be resolved in modern Paris was radically unresolvable in Athens, where Byzantium represented a correlation between historical origins





*Figure 34.5* A room at the Exposition Internationale d'art byzantin, Paris 1931, Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs, Paris, Album Maciet 309bis. © Paris, Les Arts décoratifs/Album Maciet.

and national identity. The Byzantine industrial pavilion of Paris became a conventional church in Athens, and the Louvre exhibition was lost in the silence of a neo-Byzantine Greekness that claimed to emerge as a national identity. Byzantium proved to be subversive and irresistible, constantly alive and evolving, as Diehl claimed in 1931:

Byzantine art was a living art and, like all living organisms, it evolved over the course of its thousand-year existence; it changed and, like all art, experienced periods of dazzling magnificence and, after periods of decadence, marvellous and unexpected rebirths.<sup>25</sup>

Byzantium is constantly mutating in our intellectual and creative work, and in this sense, Byzantium never ends.

## Notes

1 Hajdu 2016.

2 *Exposition* 1902, Hayum 2014.

3 *Exposition* 1904.

4 *Exposition* 1902: IX.

5 *Exposition* 1904: XII.

6 The 1889 Universal Exhibition was the tenth and was held in Paris. Its theme was the French Revolution, to mark the centenary of this event. Among the objectives of the Exhibition was to



confirm the democratic form of government and to promote technological innovation. The Eiffel Tower was built for this commemorative Exhibition.

- 7 [Magne 1889](#).
- 8 [Magne 1895](#).
- 9 [Magne 1896](#): 3.
- 10 [Magne 1896](#): 3.
- 11 [Magne 1897](#)
- 12 [Magouliotis 2018](#); [Magne 1895](#): V.
- 13 [Gers 1901](#): 123.
- 14 [Magne 1897](#): 144.
- 15 [Magne 1892](#): 54.
- 16 In fact, the equestrian statue that was shown in Paris and awarded first prize was the plaster model. After the exhibition, the statue was cast in two bronze copies in Paris, where Sochos lived, one of which was moved to Athens and the other to Nafplio. This was the first equestrian statue in Greece, introducing an old Italian and French tradition.
- 17 [Gers 1901](#): 121.
- 18 [Diehl 1931](#): 19.
- 19 [Diehl 1931](#): 21.
- 20 [Diehl 1931](#): 21.
- 21 [Ebersolt 1931](#): 42–43.
- 22 [Labrusse 2018](#).
- 23 [Tyler 1931](#).
- 24 [Zervos 1919](#).
- 25 [Diehl 1931](#): 19.

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# 35

## BREAK IT LIKE THE ICONOCLASTS

### Byzantium and the Case of Iconoclasm Exhibitions

*Stacy Boldrick*

The word iconoclasm originates from iconoclast, from the Greek *eikon* (image) and *klastes* (breaker). It first came into common use in sixteenth-century England during the Reformation, when policies against religious images were issued, to refer to iconoclasts as image breakers, destroyers of dangerous or forbidden religious images or objects.<sup>1</sup> Its application since then has expanded to encompass not only physical forms of iconoclasm, iconoclastic events that damage the material integrity of a contested image or object, but also conceptual or metaphorical iconoclasm, acts that subvert or change the form or meaning of an idea, convention or expressive mode. By the twenty-first century, iconoclasm came to appear as a key term in exhibitions in western Europe and North America that addressed both image breaking and the dismantling of established ideas and artistic practices, citing (while also othering) monument toppling and the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and sculptures in the Mosul Cultural Museum, Baghdad (Iraq), while seldom referencing Byzantine iconoclasm.

This case study explores the increasing interest in the modern concept of iconoclasm in contemporary exhibitions in the early twenty-first century and examines their associations with Byzantine iconoclasm through three lines of enquiry. First, I assess references to Byzantine iconoclasm in a foundational iconoclasm exhibition, *Iconoclash*. Second, I review a range of curatorial approaches to the concept of iconoclasm and attacks on art. Finally, I consider the role of the artist and their use of acts of iconoclasm as resources for new artworks. I demonstrate that, while contemporary exhibition references to Byzantine iconoclasm are infrequent, sparse and superficial, contemporary debates about contested images and their interpretation have led to the generation of new images and new meanings, a result common to significant iconoclastic acts and periods of iconoclasm.<sup>2</sup>

#### Iconoclasm Past and Present: *Iconoclash*

The first major exhibition to bring together historic and contemporary art and artefacts under the umbrella of iconoclasm was *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* (Center for Art and Media/ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany) in 2002. With its

invention of the term “iconoclash”, the exhibition aimed to critique and complicate thinking around image agency and intentionality in iconoclastic events and the interpretation and effects of both.<sup>3</sup> One member of the curatorial team, art historian Dario Gamboni, had, a few years earlier in his book *The Destruction of Art* (1997), proposed the use of the word “iconoclasm” over the more derogatory term “vandalism” to describe attacks on artworks. Alongside Horst Bredekamp, David Freedberg, Martin Warnke and other art historians examining the relationship between the agency of artworks and acts of damage or destruction, Gamboni significantly expanded a field of study that had been neglected (or repressed).<sup>4</sup>

*Iconoclash* provided a place to explore the complicated and contradictory dimensions of image breaking across subject-specific chronological periods, geographically distinct categories and disciplinary silos, with its inclusion of transhistorical subjects, scientific images, artworks and artefacts. Philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour, historian of science Peter Galison and theoretician and artist-curator Peter Weibel led the curatorial team to make the selection of almost 300 artworks. Latour defined “iconoclash” as “what happens when there is *uncertainty* about the exact role of the hand at work in the production of a mediator”, identifying the ways in which the intentions of destructive and positive actions may be misunderstood or unknown, and pointing out the instability of the image or artwork’s capacity for being “dangerous”, innocent or both.<sup>5</sup>

The term “iconoclash”, and the exhibition, was devised to counteract wholly negative or limited views of the modern understanding of iconoclasm as a fixed, consistent type of iconoclastic act (material or conceptual): devastating and revolutionary. In his introductory catalogue essay, Latour used terms such as *acheiropoiete*, the image not made by human hands, to distinguish between human and non-human creative acts and to draw parallels between holy images and religious belief, and visual data and the sacrality of scientific objectivity; he also referenced other ideas labelled as “Byzantine”. In his classification of types of iconoclastic attitudes, he identified one group, “those who are against all images”, consisting of “Byzantine iconoclasts”, “Lutheran iconoclasts” and the Taliban, described as “idol smashers”, citing the Taliban founder Mullah Omar’s (c. 1960–2013) denunciation of the Bamiyan Buddhas (Bamiyan valley, Afghanistan, sixth century) as “mere stones”.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, another group type included “Byzantine iconophiles”, whose approach to images Latour described as “economic”: “the word meaning at the time a long and carefully managed flow of images”.<sup>7</sup> Despite acknowledging Byzantine iconoclasm and *iconophilia*, Latour did not address either specifically in the exhibition. Here, none of the history or complexity of Byzantine iconoclasm was defined or addressed, neither its complex theoretical positions about “representation, real presence, animation and worship of images” nor its relationship with systems of lawful image breaking and polytheism in antiquity.<sup>8</sup> Thus, with its main aim to examine “the worship of iconoclasm itself”, *Iconoclash* laid the foundations for scholarship and curatorial projects expanding the field of iconoclasm, but without significantly engaging with any fundamental aspect of Byzantine iconoclasm.<sup>9</sup>

### From Image Wars to Defaced Coins: Iconoclasm Exhibitions 2000–23

*Iconoclash*’s transhistorical and transdisciplinary approach to the subject of iconoclasm was ground-breaking in 2002, unsettling fixed, polarised views of iconoclasm, such as those Latour critiqued in the period-specific historic exhibition *Bildersturm: Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille? (Image Wars: Madness or God’s Will?* Bern, Switzerland and Strasbourg,



Figure 35.1 Room 1: “Disastrous Consequences”, in the exhibition *Surviving the Iconoclasm: Medieval Sculpture* (*Ontsnapt aan de Beeldenstorm: Middeleeuwse beeldhouwkunst*) (16 November 2012–24 February 2013), 2012, installation view Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht. Photograph: Ruben de Heer. Courtesy of Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht/Ruben de Heer.

France, 2000), which explored Reformation-related destruction in Bern and Strasbourg.<sup>10</sup> However, period-specific exhibitions have also explored new curatorial approaches to iconoclasm, as in the installation of *Ontsnapt aan de Beeldenstorm: Middeleeuwse beeldhouwkunst* (*Surviving the Iconoclasm: Medieval Sculpture*) at the Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, Netherlands (2012–13), which considered as protagonists both damaged and surviving late medieval religious sculpture in Utrecht over 1566–80 (Figure 35.1).

Other period-specific exhibition projects approached theoretical and political concepts of iconoclasm through modern and contemporary art, including the art historian and critic Sven Lütticken’s complex and important *The Art of Iconoclasm* (BAK basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2009), which used historic, political, religious and contemporary iconoclasm as a starting point to interrogate and redefine the image and the non-image and to critique the term “iconoclasm”.<sup>11</sup> Comprised of two parts, “From Idol to Artwork” and “Attacking the Spectacle”, the exhibition presented historic and contemporary artworks by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1924), Hans Haacke (b. 1936), Rosemarie Trockel (b. 1952) and others.

Additionally, the term “iconoclast” has been consistently applied to artists testing the limits of a canon or convention, as in Saatchi Gallery’s *Iconoclasts: Art Out of the Mainstream* exhibition (2017–18) and in the controversial exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (Royal Academy, London, 1997). A blockbuster survey of work by “the younger generation of British artists” with origins in Damien Hirst’s

(b. 1965) exhibition *Freeze* (London Docklands, 1988), *Sensation* gained media notoriety with contentious artworks such as Marcus Harvey's (b. 1963) portrait of child murderer Myra Hindley (an enlarged mugshot portrait comprised of child handprints), Chris Ofili's (b. 1968) painting *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996) with its incorporation of elephant dung, and Tracey Emin's (b. 1963) *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995). The 42 exhibiting artists included Hirst, Michael Landy (b. 1963), Yinka Shonibare (b. 1962), Gillian Wearing and others known by 1997 as Young British Artists (YBAs). By contrast, the exhibition *Iconoclasts* did not chronicle a canonical moment in art history, but rather simply brought together 13 artists, including Renee So (b. 1974) and Douglas White (b. 1977), engaging in a variety of experimental practices concerned with transforming materials and questioning conventional expectations of subjects.

The use of the modern definition of the term iconoclasm continued in transhistorical exhibitions that aimed to explore the damage and destruction of art and *in* art practice. Like *Iconoclash*, these exhibitions also contributed to the expansion of the field of iconoclasm. At Tate Britain, London in the Duveen Galleries, *Image and Idol* (2001), a curatorial collaboration between the artist Richard Deacon (b. 1949) and art historian Phillip Lindley, brought together medieval sculpture, English Reformation iconoclasm, and Deacon's sculptural supports, with catalogue essays noting in passing the Bamiyan Buddhas (sixth century), Pope Gregory the Great (in office 590–604) and the Second Council of Nicaea (325).<sup>12</sup> By 2013, Tate Britain presented a longer history of British iconoclasm in the exhibition *Art under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm* (2013–14) curated by Tabitha Barber and myself.<sup>13</sup> Although the exhibition interpretation acknowledged the Greek etymological origins of the term iconoclasm, attacks on British art over 500 years were presented in a chrono-thematic narrative, and Byzantine iconoclasm was not explored. Structured according to iconoclasm in religion, politics and aesthetics, it reviewed policies and practices against religious images in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; acts against cultural property and contested monuments responding to or inciting political change from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries (from monument toppling to the suffragettes' attacks on artworks); and aesthetic iconoclasm, which encompassed attacks against modernism and misogyny, destruction as a creative force in the 1960s, and forms of transformation in contemporary art practice.

Modern understandings of iconoclasm continued in transhistorical exhibitions throughout the 2010s. In 2012, the contemporary art exhibition curated by the writer and art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev *Documenta* (13) established parallel exhibition sites beyond its historic base in Kassel (Germany), in Alexandria and Cairo (Egypt), Banff (Canada) and Bamiyan and Kabul (Afghanistan), hosting projects and seminars there to expand its geographical reach and to consider the curatorial themes of trauma, collapse and recovery, with iconoclasm as a substantial thread.<sup>14</sup> One such project led to the production of the Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz's (b. 1973) installation *What Dust Will Rise?* (2012), incorporating museum vitrines featuring fragments of the Bamiyan Buddhas and historic fragments from the Second World War damage in Kassel, alongside new artworks made in Kabul from Bamiyan travertine.<sup>15</sup> Substantial references to Byzantine iconoclasm did not appear in the three accompanying publications.

Neither is Byzantine iconoclasm acknowledged in other transhistorical exhibitions from this period. *Damage Control: Art and Destruction since 1950* (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, 2013–14) addressed destruction as a subject and practice in North Atlantic art from the Cold War to contemporary periods; *Ravaged: Art and*

*Culture in Times of Conflict* (M – Museum Leuven, Belgium, 2014) explored depictions of first World War conflict alongside Reformation period damage and destruction in contemporary art; *I Object: Ian Hislop's Search for Dissent* (British Museum, London, 2018–19), tackled forms of protest and subversion in their collections; and the section *What Remains* in *Culture under Attack* (Imperial War Museum, London, 2019–20) considered historic and contemporary attacks on cultural heritage during wartime; *Defaced: Money Conflict Protest* (The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 2022–23) examined international historic and contemporary acts against capital and authority through the medium of currency.<sup>16</sup> Most of these exhibitions took as their subject debates between positive and oppositional attitudes to images and the long history of such conflicts.

### **Breaking and Remaking Attacks on Art: Artists and Artworks**

Alongside large-scale exhibitions tackling the subject of the destruction of art, artist-led projects which explore attacks on artworks are also important to review. Since the 1960s artists have scrutinised the integrity of museum collections, their hidden histories and curatorial systems, also known as institutional critique, or critical practice, but this can take different forms, from autonomous archival research projects to residencies supported by the institution to produce an exhibition as an outcome.<sup>17</sup> Two such approaches are discussed in this section: Kate Davis's (b. 1977) research into the attack on The Rokeby Venus and Ali Cherri's (b. 1976) National Gallery residency which explored attacks on five paintings at the National Gallery.

One of the most cited acts of modern iconoclasm is suffragette Mary Raleigh Richardson's attack on Diego Velázquez's (1599–1660) *The Toilet of Venus* ("The Rokeby Venus") (1647–51) at the National Gallery, London. Richardson struck the painting with a cleaver on 10 March 1914 in a strategic, carefully planned act aligned with the Women's Social and Political Union's wider campaign for women's suffrage, which called for attacks on cultural property, and her additional personal protest against the imprisonment of fellow suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. Like most iconoclastic events, it has been both superficially misunderstood and subjected to in-depth analysis and theorisation.<sup>18</sup> The action, and Emery Walker's (1851–1933) photograph of the damaged painting, has also attracted the attention of artists, and again, like many iconoclastic events, has generated more images and expanded artistic practice, despite the conservation of the painting rendering the damage invisible.<sup>19</sup>

Walker's photograph was a starting point for Kate Davis when she conducted research into the National Gallery's archival material on Richardson's attack on the Rokeby Venus, leading her to make a seven-part artwork entitled *Curtain I–VII* (2011) (Figure 35.2).

She made a photocopy of Walker's photograph, isolating the damaged section of the painting, and then copied each photocopied image of Richardson's cuts into the canvas, until she had a copy of a copy of a copy to a total of seven images. To recover Richardson's marks of protest from the conserved painting, Davis "re-inscribed" in pencil the lines of the cuts onto each photocopy, with the image of the lines of the cuts becoming increasingly abstract over the series of photocopies.<sup>20</sup> She then overlaid each of the seven photocopies onto one of seven poster prints of the Rokeby Venus. Davis has proposed that her "re-inscriptions" of Richardson's cuts might be understood simultaneously and paradoxically as additions, removals and reparations.<sup>21</sup> Since 2011, *Curtain I–VII*'s installation in a variety of settings, from historic houses to galleries, has become a kind of performance of remembering, marking and remaking Richardson's act.



Figure 35.2 Kate Davis (b. 1977), *Curtain I–VII*, 2011, one of seven digital pigment fine art prints, 7 cm × 64 cm × 84 cm, installation view 10 Jahre Sammlung Rheingold Exhibition, Schloss Dyck, Germany, 2012. Courtesy of Kate Davis.

By contrast, in his 2021 residency at the National Gallery in London, Ali Cherri undertook archival research into attacks on five paintings, including the *Rokeby Venus*, in his exhibition *If you prick us, do we not bleed?* (2022). He approached the material effects of the attacks as wounds and remade them in sculptural assemblages of disparate objects in historic museum vitrines placed in the Sainsbury Wing. Cherri's vitrines drew upon the language of *wunderkammers* (cabinets of curiosity) and museological "othering" (the use of museological display formats which objectify and distance the artefact from the viewer). One sculpture, *The Toilet of Venus* ('*The Rokeby Venus*') after Velázquez, 2022 (2022) incorporated a "Paleolithic-styled" wooden sculpture referencing the slashed reclining Venus, a nineteenth-century marble head, glass eye and mirror on a red velvet base, which Cherri described as commenting on the act of violence by returning it to a "more archaic form of representation".<sup>22</sup> Installed at a distance from their source paintings, the sculptures were in dialogue instead with different paintings that produced new aesthetic, formal associations, as seen in the placement of Cherri's wooden Venus in front of Botticelli's (d. 1510) reclining figures in *Venus and Mars* (c. 1485).

In these artworks, although both Davis and Cherri recovered iconoclastic damage erased by conservation, they see in the act of iconoclasm different proposals: where Davis transforms Richardson's marks of protest into abstract additions and amendments, Cherri recalibrates traumatic effects in new assemblages of surrogate objects. These two examples show how artists can critically analyse iconoclastic acts to generate new artworks and new understandings of iconoclasm.



## Conclusion

As this case study suggests, over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the emergence of modern and contemporary exhibitions exploring the destruction of art responded to modern forms of iconoclasm and the modern definition of iconoclasm, with citations of historic and contemporary events such as monument toppling, Richardson's attack on the Rokeby Venus, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and Mosul Museum sculptures dominating academic discussion and artistic practices. References to Byzantine iconoclasm are superficial and rarely appear in contemporary art exhibitions, exhibition catalogues and artworks. However, broader debates around contested images and objects persist. So too does the tendency of iconoclastic events to generate images, images that disseminate and can be "tapped", to be used for and against each other, as scholar of the ancient Middle East Aaron Tugendhaft suggests, in order to better question and understand iconoclastic acts.<sup>23</sup> Future research requires new thinking about iconoclasm and digital image dissemination, its contexts and global reach.

One final example of this image generation and dissemination can be seen in Sam Durant's (b. 1961) project *Iconoclasm*, a series of drawings which brought a series of international images of monument toppling to urban locations in Detroit, Michigan (in 2019) and Glasgow, UK (2021) (Figure 35.3).

Durant began the project in search of "a deeper understanding of how representations can evoke such strong emotions" after his public sculpture for the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (USA), *Scaffold* (2012), a structure comprised of gallows, was removed due



Figure 35.3 Sam Durant (b. 1961), *Iconoclasm* (Fort-de-France, 1991), 2021, print, 170.2 cm × 142.2 cm, installation view, London Road, Glasgow, Scotland. Photograph: Isobel Lutz-Smith. Courtesy of the artist and The Common Guild, Glasgow.

to formal protests from members of the Dakota people for representing the tool of their ancestors' executions in 1862.<sup>24</sup> With *Iconoclasm*, Durant presented large-scale pencil drawings of documentary photographs of historic monument depositions at diverse sites, from Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), to Durham (USA) to Fort-de-France (Martinique) to Tehran (Iran) – snapshots of iconoclasm's long history and extensive geographies. Treated with a water-resistant protective layer and fixed at different locations across Detroit, the drawings remained physically vulnerable. In Glasgow, an expanded series of drawings was reproduced as billboard posters across the city; in both cities, the images could have been tagged or destroyed, but were not.<sup>25</sup> As a response to the destruction of *Scaffold*, Durant's drawings became objects that took on the role of a monument in public space, an offering to audiences and the unpredictable nature of human hands.

Durant's *Iconoclasm* made collective acts of historic destruction contemporary, remaking images of breaking into new, complete wholes, and raising important questions. Which conflict narratives survive, and how do they inform understandings of contested images, long after iconoclastic events have passed? With historic and contemporary acts of iconoclasm serving as a global resource for, and informing, artistic practice, and the persistence of debates around attitudes towards images featured in exhibitions, is the early twenty-first-century finding value in a different kind of "image struggle"? Or has iconoclasm's generation of images simply led to its wider acceptance as an essential part of artwork biographies? Certainly, there is growing awareness that iconoclasm belongs to no single culture or period and is integral to culture itself. Byzantine iconoclasm is one of a multitude of iconoclasm which require close, careful analysis to be fully understood.

## Notes

- 1 Clay 2007: 5–11; Bremmer 2008: 1–17; Elsner 2012: 368–9.
- 2 Elsner 2012: 372–5; Brubaker 2013: 22–3.
- 3 Latour 2002.
- 4 Gamboni 2018: 17–20; Freedberg 1991.
- 5 Latour 2002: 20.
- 6 Latour 2002: 21, 27.
- 7 Latour 2002: 28.
- 8 Elsner 2012: 369.
- 9 Latour 2002: 17.
- 10 Latour 2002: 17, n.5.
- 11 Lütticken 2009: 11–25.
- 12 Deacon and Lindley 2001: 9, 30.
- 13 Barber and Boldrick 2013.
- 14 Christov-Bakargiev 2012.
- 15 Scharrer 2012: 110–1; Rakowitz 2012.
- 16 Brougher et al. 2013; Tollebeek and van Assche 2014; Hislop and Hockenhull 2018; Kelleher 2022.
- 17 Marstine 2017: 6–13.
- 18 Boldrick 2020: 1–9; Gell 1998: Fig. 4.4/4, 64–5.
- 19 Boldrick 2020: 7–9.
- 20 Boldrick 2020: 180–2.
- 21 Davis 2011: 2.
- 22 Mistry et al. 2022; Cherri 2022.
- 23 Tugendhaft 2020: 98–101.
- 24 Durant 2020: 2; Nickleson 2020.
- 25 Alonzo 2020: 5–6.

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# 36

## CURATING EXHIBITIONS ON BYZANTIUM AND BEYOND

*Maria Vassilaki*

As an academic who had the privilege to curate four exhibitions in European museums on Byzantium and beyond, I take the opportunity to share with you my insights, thoughts and afterthoughts on how Byzantium can be exhibited today. However, I do not want this chapter to be taken as a general assessment of how to curate a Byzantine exhibition, as it is not. It works better if you read it as a very personal note by someone who has curated exhibitions on Byzantium and its aftermath.

Each one of these exhibitions was completely different in subject to the others. The first had the title *The Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, and it took place at the Benaki Museum, Athens, between 20 October 2000 and 20 January 2001 (Figure 36.1). The second, *Byzantium: 330-1453*, was held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, between 25 October 2008 and 22 March 2009 (Figure 36.2). The Royal Academy exhibition was organised by two collaborating institutions, the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and the Benaki Museum, Athens. It was co-curated by Robin Cormack and me, while Adrian Locke was the internal Royal Academy curator. The third was staged at the Benaki Museum, between 16 November 2010 and 31 January 2011; it had the title *The Hand of Angelos: An Icon Painter in Venetian Crete*, and it was the retrospective exhibition of a late-Byzantine/Cretan artist by the name of Angelos Akotantos (active 1425–50) (Figure 36.3). The fourth exhibition took place in Cyprus at the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia between 6 October and 30 November 2012, and it was a joint project with the Benaki Museum. The occasion of this exhibition was Cyprus' presidency of the European Union, which clearly influenced the choice of its subject matter and title: *Domenikos Theotokopoulos, from Candia to Toledo: In the Footsteps of a European Journey* (Figure 36.4).

An exhibition is a performance, a play in which the objects take the part of actors. The curator is the playwright, as well as the director of the play and its stage manager. Obviously, there is a whole team working with the curator, for the stage set, the lighting, the sound and the music, if there is any. You prepare and edit a catalogue which is the programme to the play that is the exhibition. Large banners hang outside the building hosting the exhibition, exactly as they do in theatres. You want to ensure that the exhibition is widely advertised all over town and beyond. You invite the press to special



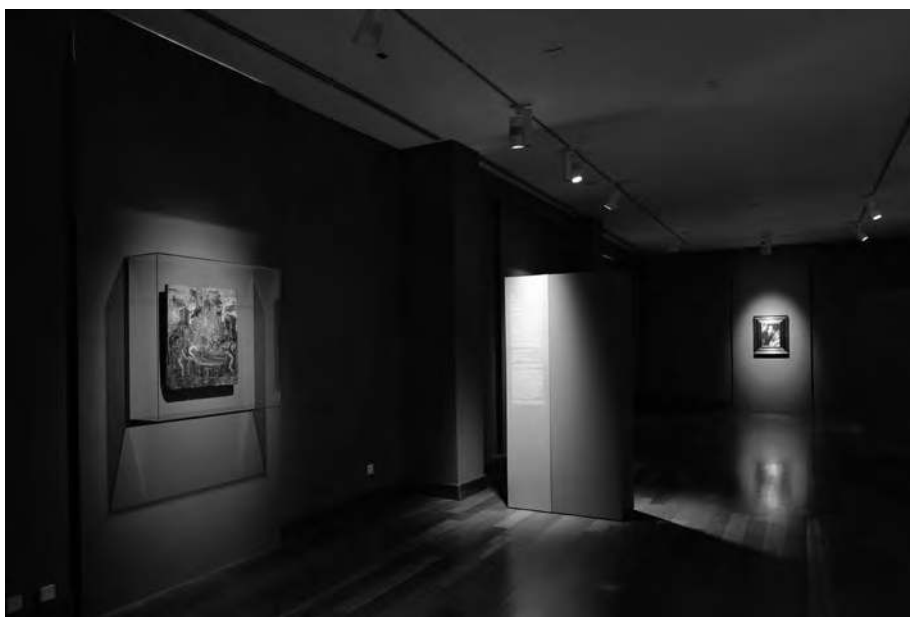
*Figure 36.1* The Mother of God exhibition, general view, Benaki Museum, Athens, 2000-2001. Photograph courtesy Benaki Museum.



*Figure 36.2* Byzantium, 330-1453, the Section “At Court”, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2008-2009. Photograph courtesy Royal Academy of Arts.



*Figure 36.3* The Hand of Angelos exhibition, general view, Benaki Museum, Athens, 2010-2011. Photograph courtesy Benaki Museum.



*Figure 36.4* The Domenikos Theotokopoulos: From Candia to Toledo exhibition, general view, Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia, 2012. Photograph courtesy Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia.

viewings, so that they can write about the exhibition before it opens: it is a good thing if the very best journalists turn up. There is a grand opening, in which not only scholars, colleagues, museum people and friends but also “celebrities” are most welcome; there is also food and drink, as good as it gets, and this is definitely an essential part of the show. Its success is mainly judged by the number of visitors. That’s why the highest goal for an exhibition is to be labelled as a blockbuster, if it has succeeded in making a record number of ticket sales. In the end, one could say that staging an exhibition may be more demanding as a task than staging a play. Or at least that’s the way I feel as an exhibition curator.

*The Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in  
Byzantine Art: Beginner’s Luck*

The Benaki Museum exhibition on the Mother of God was the museum’s contribution to the worldwide celebrations of the 2000th anniversary of the Nativity of Christ. I very much liked the idea that when everybody worldwide was celebrating Christ, our exhibition was going to celebrate his mother. My foreword to the exhibition catalogue clearly describes my aims in organising such an exhibition: “its central theme is the veneration of the Virgin in Byzantium, that is between the fourth and the fifteenth centuries, and the visual material upon which this rested”. In addition, the exhibition aimed to illuminate the very special relationship that the Virgin had with Constantinople. The exhibition was divided into six sections, each of which was designed to throw light on a different aspect of the veneration of the Theotokos, ranging from early representations of the Virgin, through her public and private cults to her position between East and West and her representations with her son. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition had a definite aim, in as much as it looked to fill a lacuna: the absence of a comprehensive study on the Theotokos, in which issues of cult, history, literature, theology and art were considered. As a result, the catalogue entries were designed to be minor studies of the pieces, rather than “summary entries”.<sup>1</sup>

When I started working on the *Mother of God* exhibition, I assumed that organising an exhibition would be like writing a PhD thesis. It did not take me long to realise that curating an exhibition was far more difficult and complicated than I had anticipated. In a PhD thesis, the struggles are with yourself, the ideas and points you want to make and, above all, with the supervisor. In an exhibition, the struggle is with yourself, the research needed, the points you want to raise, your ideas on how to organise the exhibition and how to display its concept and sections so that it will appeal not only to specialists but also to the wider public. There are battles with your wish list, which has to contain at least three times more objects than needed, with turning the wish list into a loans list, with the hosting institution, with the lenders, with the contributors to the exhibition catalogue and with the sponsors.

Furthermore, I found myself dealing with much more complicated issues than these, as diplomacy and politics are part of the exhibition’s game. The political situation or political tensions and complications in certain areas, which appear unexpectedly, can definitely make your life as an exhibition curator very difficult, affecting, for example, decisions on loans which had been secured long ago. The curator learns to become flexible in relation to decisions which prevent the presence of objects initially thought to be absolutely crucial for the points you wanted to raise. You must be prepared to find alternative objects and create



alternative sections. Until the very last moment, you keep on making changes, and you are not allowed to think for a moment that this is the end of the world, as it is not.<sup>2</sup>

For the *Mother of God* exhibition, I had to work on everything pretty much on my own, including the layout and sections of the exhibition and its catalogue; I had to travel to wherever was needed to secure loans and prepare a draft of every single letter addressed to every single institution all over the world from which loans were sought, whether the letter was in Greek, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish or Russian.

The exhibition was divided into six sections: (1) Early representations of the Mother of God, (2) The cult of the Mother of God in private, (3) The Mother of God in public, (4) The veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Hodegon monastery, (5) Between East and West and (6) Representations of the Virgin and their association with the Passion of Christ. The *Mother of God* exhibition is to this day the most successful Byzantine exhibition the Benaki Museum has ever organised. It was for me a lesson for beginners, and I do feel really lucky to say that it was blessed by beginner's luck.

At the closing of the exhibition, I organised an international conference in collaboration with the Centre for Byzantine Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens. The papers delivered at the conference covered a broad range of themes concerning Marian devotion in civil, religious and cultural contexts. These papers were put together in a volume entitled *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, published by Ashgate in 2005.<sup>3</sup> The book includes 27 papers and an introduction by Averil Cameron. At the time it was hard to imagine the impact that the Mother of God exhibition and its conference would have and the way it would connect art history with cultural studies around the person of Mary. It provided the ground for a wide academic discussion that opened the field of Byzantine Mariology.

### ***Byzantium, 330-1453: An Exhibition Like a Textbook on Byzantine Art***

The basic narrative of this exhibition concerned the range, power and longevity of artistic production in Byzantium. This means that it looked at how it began, how it was almost eliminated as a figurative medium by Iconoclasm, how it was revived after Iconoclasm and then had a remarkable crescendo in the Middle Ages, how close it came to Western art in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries before it began to diverge into characteristic Orthodox forms in the fourteenth century, gaining its self-identity before it was submerged by the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Throughout this long period, it also influenced many surrounding societies which appropriated Byzantine styles of art. The exhibition was set out as a chronological narrative, but as the visitor passed through each room, a variety of themes built up the story of change and development within a long-lasting traditional Christian society and culture.

The *Byzantium, 330-1453* exhibition was divided into nine sections: (1) The Beginnings of Christian Art, (2) From Constantine to Iconoclasm, (3) At Court (Figure 36.2), (4) At Home, (5) At Church, (6) The Icon, (7) Byzantium and the West, (8) Beyond Byzantium and (9) The monastery of St Catherine at Sinai. The scale of the *Byzantium, 330-1453* exhibition was much bigger than that of the *Mother of God*. In fact, *Byzantium* had five times more objects than the *Mother of God*. In real numbers, *Mother of God* had 81 objects and *Byzantium* almost 350, including coins on both occasions.<sup>4</sup>

The more I think about *Byzantium*, the more I find that its sections look like chapters of a textbook on Byzantine art. The same can be said for the *Mother of God*, where its

sections could make up chapters of a textbook on the Theotokos and her art in Byzantium. I strongly believe that this was the result of the fact that on both occasions the curators were academics and not museum professionals.

The 2009 Spring Symposium of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, held at King's College, London and The Courtauld Institute of Art, was framed around the *Byzantium* exhibition, taking as its theme the idea of exhibiting Byzantium. Liz James and Antony Eastmond were the organisers of the Symposium as well as the editors of the volume under the title *Wonderful Things: Byzantium Through its Art*, Ashgate 2013. I quote from the introduction to this volume by Eastmond and James,

The 2009 Spring Symposium of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies was framed around the exhibition, taking as its theme the idea of exhibiting Byzantium. This was defined in two ways. How, in concrete, physical, practical terms, is it possible to set up an exhibition of Byzantine material to appeal to a public for whom the term “byzantine” more usually refers to the machinations of an inefficient government? And, a very different issue, how can the specific objects of exhibition display inform us about the culture and society of Byzantium? The Symposium also went further in trying to conceptualise Byzantium and its art in a broader cultural setting.<sup>5</sup>

The exhibition *Byzantium, 330-1453* received an impressive number of almost 400,000 visitors and became the 16th most successful exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts from the time of its foundation in 1768.

### ***The Hand of Angelos: An Icon Painter in Venetian Crete: A Retrospective Exhibition of a Fifteenth-Century Cretan Painter***

The theme of the exhibition (Figure 36.3) was closely associated with my own research, which had started when I was a PhD candidate at the Courtauld Institute of Art. In 1981, at the Sixth International Congress of Cretan Studies, I presented a working hypothesis that seemed particularly daring. I maintained that the Cretan painter Angelos, known to us from a whole host of icons bearing the signature ΧΕΙΡ ΑΓΓΕΛΟΥ, was not an artist of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as had been hitherto believed, but that he should be identified with Angelos Akotantos, a Cretan painter of the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The latter was known only from his autographed will, which was published in the *Deltion of the Christian Archaeological Society* in 1960–61.<sup>7</sup> Using the information contained in the will, I was able to identify the painter Angelos Akotantos, the testator, with the painter Angelos, who until then was known to us only by his first name. Indirect evidence from icons painted by Angelos can be cross-referenced with the direct evidence of the will.

As is a commonplace in our field, exhibitions serve an important role in translating academic writing into a visual and experiential argument.<sup>8</sup> That's exactly what I tried to do while curating the *Hand of Angelos* exhibition. Its layout followed a very simple idea. It was divided into three sections. The first section, entitled “From Constantinople to Candia: icon painting in Crete around 1400”, presented the art of icon-painting before Angelos; the second section, entitled “The art of Angelos”, included icons either signed or attributed to Angelos alone, and the third, entitled “After Angelos” presented icons, which showed the impact of Angelos on painters of the second half of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For the narrative of the exhibition, I made a very careful selection of 63 icons.

From 15 to 16 January 2011, which was the last weekend before the closing of the exhibition, I organised an international conference, the papers of which were later published in a separate volume of the *Benaki Journal*. These papers, 14 in number, appeared under the general title *Studies on the painter Angelos, his age and Cretan painting*.<sup>9</sup>

In 2009, that is one year before the opening of the *Hand of Angelos* exhibition, a volume under the title *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete* was published in the Ashgate/Variorum series.<sup>10</sup> It contains 16 studies of mine, many of which had first appeared in Greek and were on this occasion translated into English. In a sense the Variorum collection acted as a forerunner to the exhibition and as a valuable complement to its exhibition catalogue.<sup>11</sup> This volume in connection with the *Hand of Angelos*' exhibition catalogue boosted a great interest among art historians, worldwide, for the case of Angelos Akotantos and his contribution to the formation of Cretan icon painting.

### **Dominikos Theotokopoulos: From Candia to Toledo. The Footsteps of a European Journey: A Chamber Exhibition.**

The exhibition followed the career of Domenikos Theotokopoulos/El Greco (1541–1614), from his birthplace in Venetian Candia (1541–67/68) to Venice (1567/68–70), Rome (1570–76), Madrid (1576) and Toledo (1577–1614).<sup>12</sup> It took me, therefore, beyond Byzantium. This, however, had also happened with the third section of the exhibition on the painter Angelos, which covered icon-painting between roughly 1450 and 1500.

This exhibition was like a piece of chamber music (Figure 36.4). It included five paintings alone,<sup>13</sup> each one of which represented the painter's career from the days he was an icon painter in Venetian Candia until the time he became an accomplished panel painter in Toledo, Spain. His Cretan period was represented by the Dormition of the Virgin from the homonymous church in Hermoupolis, Syros and the Adoration of the Magi from the Benaki Museum. A third piece showing the Passion of Christ from the Emiliós Velimezis Collection, Athens, and donated in 2018 to the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, Piraeus, was also included in the exhibition. Nano Chatzidaki believes that this is the panel of the Passion of Christ, and that Theotokopoulos asked the Venetian authorities for permission to sell by lot in 1566.<sup>14</sup> The arrival of El Greco in Venice was represented by the right wing of a triptych showing the Baptism of Christ.<sup>15</sup> This piece, which appeared at an auction at Christie's, London, on 8 December 2004, was acquired by the Municipality of Heraklion, Crete, and given on loan to the Historical Museum of Crete in Heraklion. The date MDLXVII (=1567), which was discovered on the lower left corner of the composition, during its cleaning by the Benaki Museum Conservation Department, coincides with the year Theotokopoulos left Candia and arrived in Venice.<sup>16</sup> The last panel in this exhibition represented the painter's Spanish period. It shows St Francis in Ecstasy and is dated to c. 1585–90. The artist's signature on the lower left side reads, *δομηνικος θεοτοκοπολ[ος]*.<sup>17</sup> It appeared at an auction at Sotheby's, London, in January 2011 and was acquired by the A.G. Leventis Foundation to be offered to the A.G. Leventis Gallery in Nicosia.

To be honest this exhibition was like an experiment to me. How many items does one need to make an exhibition? Is there a limit up or a limit down? Or how many items does a curator need in order to offer an appealing narrative to an exhibition? I would say if the curator already has a well-constructed narrative while preparing an exhibition, he/she can

include just a few pieces. The success of the El Greco's exhibition, which made it necessary for the exhibition to be extended for another two months, can be used as a proof.

Having curated four exhibitions as an academic thus far, the question arises as to whether I have any plans to curate a new exhibition. It's not one of my priorities to curate an exhibition right now. I do have some ideas about exhibitions, but they have to wait until I finish a book, which I'm writing at this moment. I have to admit though that sometimes I miss the high level of adrenaline that an exhibition gives you.

## Notes

- 1 [Vassilaki 2000](#).
- 2 [Vassilaki 2013](#): 7.
- 3 [Vassilaki 2005](#).
- 4 [Cormack and Vassilaki 2008](#).
- 5 [Eastmond and James 2013](#): 1.
- 6 Vassilaki-Mavrakaki 1981: 290–8. My first publication appeared in Greek but was also published in English. [Vassilaki 2009b](#): 3–15.
- 7 [Manoussakas 1960–61](#): 139–50.
- 8 I'm quoting Charles Barber from his review of the *Hand of Angelos*' exhibition catalogue published in the *Art Bulletin* 93.3 (2011): 371.
- 9 [Vassilaki 2013](#)–14.
- 10 [Vassilaki 2009b](#).
- 11 I'm quoting Maria Evangelatou from her review of *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete* published in the *Studies in Iconography* 32 (2011): 206.
- 12 [Vassilaki 2012](#).
- 13 I know that I exceeded by one the number of instruments participating in an orchestra of chamber music.
- 14 [Chatzidakis 1998](#): 184–227.
- 15 It is very likely that a panel with the Adoration of the Shepherds, today in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at the Queen's University in Kingston Ontario belonged to the same triptych. In fact, the Adoration of the Shepherds was the inner left wing of the triptych, while the Baptism of Christ was the inner right wing. [Vassilaki and Cormack 2005a](#): 231, fig. 4; [Vassilaki and Cormack 2005b](#): 57, figs 3–4.
- 16 [Vassilaki and Cormack 2005b](#): 63–6, fig. 17.
- 17 Leticia Ruiz Gómez, Head of the Department of Spanish Renaissance Painting at the Prado Museum, who wrote the entry for the exhibition catalogue, placed this panel of St Francis in Ecstasy within a group of three panels of the same subject and iconographic type, which were published by [Legendre and Hartmann 1937](#): 422, 423, 426. One of these was in the collection of José Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid, the second in a French private collection and the third in the collection of Paul Cassirer in Berlin and today in a Spanish private collection. [Vassilaki 2012](#): no. 5, 120–1 (L. Ruiz Gómez). She also made a comment about the painter's signature: "The work includes the artist's signature, though it is unclear and truncated. Some of the name is abbreviated, and the word 'εποίη' (=made, painted), which we would normally expect, is missing from the end".

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## PART VII

# Literature





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# BYZANTIUM'S JOURNEY THROUGH CENTURIES

## Byzantium as a Literary Inspiration

*Przemysław Marciniak*

Studies on the reception of Byzantium are gaining momentum. Investigating the presence of Byzantine-inspired themes in literature has become a crucial aspect of this developing subfield within Byzantine studies. Similar to other reception studies, studies on Byzantine motifs and inspirations in literature concern two fields: Byzantine studies and the history of literature. Accordingly, every investigation of Byzantine motifs must take into account not only the Byzantine dimension of a text but also the historical and sociological conditions under which it was created. In many cases, “Byzantine code” was activated by contemporary circumstances; in other words, Byzantium (or more likely an idiosyncratic version of it) served to express a given author’s ideas and agendas.

This chapter can only be a cursory investigation of the topic – to give a full picture of Byzantium-inspired literature is a sheer impossibility that would necessitate surveying hundreds of texts (if not more) written in dozens of languages throughout multiple centuries. Creating such an all-encompassing panorama remains a desideratum and most certainly cannot be accomplished by a single author. Consequently, I had to make a somewhat arbitrary selection of material. The texts under discussion were chosen not for their popularity but because they appear to be representative of the mechanisms involved in the reception of Byzantine motifs.

Moreover, this contribution is governed by a somewhat simplistic chronological principle as the material is presented diachronically. Nonetheless, I think that some approximate phases in the development of this reception in literature could be argued for. The first and earliest phase presents mostly random responses to the history of the Byzantine Empire or its fall in 1453. However, this changed to some extent with the publication of Cardinal and historian of the Catholic Church Baronius’ (1538–1607) *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1588–1607), which contributed significantly, even if not entirely purposefully, to the dissemination of knowledge about Byzantine history.<sup>1</sup> Baronius’ work, detailing the Church’s history up to 1198, was intended as a tool for the Counter-Reformation in debates with Protestants. It emerged as a key resource for playwrights seeking material from Byzantine sources. The next crucial step was the publication of Edward Gibbon’s (1737–94) *The Decline and Fall of Roman Empire* (first edition 1776). This work remained an influential source for many literary texts drawing on Byzantine history and not only in the anglophone

sphere. In the modern period (roughly from the late nineteenth century onwards), along with the gradual development of Byzantine studies and the dissemination of translations of Byzantine texts into modern languages, the narrative becomes more varied and dependent on different sources. This tripartite division is neither rigid nor absolute. Furthermore, even though Baronius' and Gibbon's texts might have held considerable sway, they were never the only ones available, as some authors used translations of Byzantine sources or other literary texts that were already based on Byzantine works.

Many texts related to Byzantium have fallen into obscurity, and today, they are read mainly, if not only, by specialists. Some of them were marginal from the beginning, having been written by non-professional or not very successful writers. Few readers today are likely familiar with three Byzantine plays written by Thomas Evelyn Scott-Ellis, Baron Howard de Walden (1880–1946) at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, some texts created in response to political situations faded away when the events concluded. This was the case with a sudden flood of theatrical pieces and novels written during the Greek War of Independence (1821–32).<sup>3</sup>

Among the works perhaps less frequently read by the general readership, there are some that attract more attention from scholars. *Leo Armenius: oder Fürsten-Mord* (Leo Armenius, composed 1646, first edition 1650), penned by Andreas Gryphius (1616–64), a prominent Protestant writer of the German Baroque, remains important for the history of German literature but is rarely analysed by students of the reception of Byzantium. Yet, the best example remains *Theodora* (first staged 1884) by Victorien Sardou (1831–1908), a once hugely successful play, today studied by Byzantinists as a milestone in the rediscovery of Byzantine culture in the popular imagination.<sup>4</sup> Texts drawing on Byzantine motifs exist in many cultures/languages. The Hungarian play by Imre Madách (1823–64) *The Tragedy of Man* (first published in 1861) is considered one of the most important literary works in Hungary. In this work, Lucifer travels with Adam, showing him how futile and hopeless are the latter's dreams of man's glory. One of the scenes takes place in eleventh-century Constantinople, where Adam assumes the role of Tankred. The setting is not very Byzantine (but this is often the case with Byzantine-inspired texts). Nevertheless, the author incorporates certain stereotypes prevalent in the collective consciousness. When Adam/Tankred finds himself in Constantinople, he takes part in the following conversation (vv. 1484–87):

|                        |                                                      |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Fourth Citizen:</i> | What do you believe: Homousion<br>Or Homoiusion?     |
| <i>Adam:</i>           | That's beyond me.                                    |
| <i>Lucifer:</i>        | Don't admit it, that's major above all. <sup>5</sup> |

Constantinople/Byzantium is portrayed as a place of mostly senseless and useless religious debates, which mirrors contemporary views of the empire quite accurately.

Nonetheless, studies on the reception of Byzantium in literature are by no means a *terra incognita*. This slightly distorted image, the impression that it remains understudied, is caused by the fact that different studies are scattered through various collections and written in languages (such as Czech, Polish and Hungarian) not easily accessible to anglophone readers. There exists – to the best of my knowledge – only one collected volume dedicated entirely to the issue of the reception of Byzantium in literature, edited by Evangelos Konstantinou which covers Byzantine motifs in literature between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>6</sup> However, local instances of Byzantine inspiration in literature have

been researched more thoroughly in the case of Spanish, French, Swedish, German and Polish literature.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, it seems that scholarly interest in literature drawing on Byzantine culture is less prevalent in countries from the Orthodox/Byzantine semiosphere (with the notable exception of Modern Greek literature).<sup>8</sup> Whether or not this is caused by a less significant presence of Byzantine-inspired texts in these countries/cultures remains to be researched.

A discussion of the available material would not be complete without mentioning one, perhaps less obvious, type of source. Nowadays, translation is meant to render as faithfully as possible the original work in a different language. But in the early modern period, translation could also involve cultural recoding, that is adapting a text to new cultural/literary/social circumstances. Such a process can also be considered within the parameters of literary reception. For instance, Ingela Nilsson has analysed such translations/adaptations of Byzantine novels in early modern France.<sup>9</sup> And indeed, perhaps in the first phase of the reception process, Byzantine novels (as a kind of extension of ancient ones) were popular and well known. This popularity appears to be mirrored in the Spanish term “la novela bizantina”, which describes not works created in the Byzantine period but a specific genre of Spanish romances penned during the Siglo de Oro (the Spanish Golden Age, roughly between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), represented by works such as *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (*The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda*) by Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) and *Historia de Hipólito y Aminta* (*The history of Hippolyto and Aminta*) by Francisco de Quintana (1599–1658).<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, some texts, which today have fallen into obscurity and are hardly known even among Byzantinists, gained sudden popularity. For example, during the sixteenth century, a twelfth-century poem by Theodore Prodromos (c.1115– c. 1166), *Ἐπὶ ἀποδήμῳ τῇ Φιλίᾳ* (*On Friendship's departure*, mostly known under its Latin title *Amicitia exulans*), was translated into Latin by Jean Lezeau (published in Paris in 1559), into French in the same year by Jean Figon (published in Lyon); and then into Polish by Stanisław Witkowski (published in Kraków in 1605). Prodromos' work caught the interest of French translators because it was a work devoted to friendship, a theme of particular importance for the European elite of that time.<sup>11</sup> Figon states in his introduction:

Ceci di-ie, Monseigneur, pource qu'on peut facilement colliger par l'argument de ce Dialogue, qu'il est difficile de trouver aucune amitié en ce monde.

(I say this, My Lord, because one can easily gather from the argument of this Dialogue that it is difficult to find any friendship in this world.)

(*Amitié bannie du monde* (*Friendship banished from the world*), p. 4, A2v)

The Byzantine dialogue was most likely seen as one of many ancient texts on friendship, which were translated and circulated at that time, such as Plato's *Lysis*, Lucian's *Toxaris* and Cicero's *De amicitia*. The Polish translation, however, does not translate *philia* as “friendship” but rather “concord”, and the translator discusses exactly this aspect of Prodromos' work in his introduction. This is especially interesting since the text was dedicated to the powerful Polish magnate, Stanisław Stadnicki (1551–1610), who earned himself the nickname “Devil” for many deeds which had little to do with concord.

The division presented below is only provisional (as is always the case with literary periodisation) and certainly can be challenged and disputed. A thorough discussion of all examples is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I offer a selection, which is necessarily

somewhat arbitrary. I have chosen texts which are perhaps less known (at least among Byzantinists), thus excluding from the presentation much better researched texts such as the above-mentioned *Theodora* by Sardou.

### **The Beginnings: From the Fall of Constantinople Until the End of the Eighteenth Century**

If the beginning of the reception of Byzantium is marked by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, then the first text inspired by Byzantine motifs is most likely *Tirant lo Blanch* (*Tirant the White*), a chivalric romance written in the Catalan language by the Valencian knight Joanot Martorell (d. 1468) between 1460 and 1465. This is a peculiar text, which may to some extent be seen as a response to the trauma caused by the fall of Constantinople. As I have argued elsewhere, *Tirant* is, *cum grano salis*, a precursor of the alternative history genre since it ends with the restitution of the empire by the protagonist.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it features some fantastical elements, such as Morgana Le Fey and King Arthur's visit to Constantinople (where Morgana finds Arthur, cures him by removing Excalibur from his hands and they happily depart for Avalon). What is interesting is the fact that this work is devoid of the prejudices and stereotypes surrounding Byzantium that were abundantly prevalent in later narratives. Nonetheless, one feature of Martorell's work became characteristic of later narratives drawing on the story of the eastern empire – Byzantium was just a veil used to discuss contemporary political or social events.<sup>13</sup>

While in the example of Martorell, there is no evidence that he ever went to Constantinople and, perhaps most importantly, his story was by no means influenced by any work of Byzantine origin, this was not always the case.

A learned Venetian lady, Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653) penned a poem entitled *L'Enrico ovvero Bisanzio acquistato* (*Enrico, or Byzantium conquered*), which was printed in Venice in 1635. This epic poem portrays the conquest of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1204). As the authors of the English translation note, the political circumstances – that is a gradual dominance of the Ottoman Empire over the Venetian state – activated the historical memory of the glorious (even if only from the Venetian perspective) victory. However, there appears to be one important difference between Marinella's poem and Martorell's romance. As Niccolò Zorzi has argued, the author of *Enrico* used in her text (and more precisely in the *canto primo*) the Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates' (c. 1155–1217) *History*.<sup>14</sup>

Marinella's text is by no means an isolated exception; the growing availability of Byzantine texts translated into a more widespread use of Byzantine sources. In 1642, Thomas Fuller (1608–61) achieved considerable success with his compilation of character sketches titled *The Holy State and the Profane State*. This collection included a brief biography of Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183–85), which was later expanded into *The Life of Andronicus, or the Unfortunate Politician* in 1646. Fuller drew inspiration from the accounts of Niketas Choniates, faithfully adhering to his narrative. Fuller's interest in the Byzantine emperor stemmed from his perception of Andronikos I as the medieval counterpart to the contemporary English dictator Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), both of whom ascended to power through regicidal acts.

Interestingly, in 1643, Fuller penned a play titled *Andronicus: A Tragedy*, which remained unpublished until the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660.<sup>15</sup> This was just one of a considerable number of plays drawing on Byzantium that were created in this first phase of the reception of Byzantium. Jesuit writers such as Joseph Simons (c. 1593–1671) crafted

plays which used Byzantine history to comment on contemporary events. Their plays were mostly, if not exclusively, based on Cardinal Baronius' narrative. However, they were not the only ones, as this period saw a plethora of plays based on Byzantine themes appear throughout Europe.<sup>16</sup>

The earliest phase in the history of the reception of Byzantium in literature is marked by the fact that Byzantium was rarely – if at all – seen as a cultural/political entity in its own right. Byzantine texts – this is clear from the introductions to translations of Prodhomos' text mentioned earlier – were treated as part of ancient literature. Moreover, certain general tendencies emerged at this time: Byzantium tended to be treated as useful interpretational code. It was conveniently relegated to historical obscurity, thus providing a framework for the interpretation and discussion of modern events that the authors did not wish to address directly. I would even argue that this tendency intensified in the following centuries, particularly with the publication of Edward Gibbon's renowned work on the "decline" of Byzantium.

### The Rise and Fall of Gibbon ('s Narrative)

If Montesquieu, Voltaire and Edward Gibbon form the unholy trinity largely responsible for the negative imagery of Byzantium in the centuries that followed, it was *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788) by Edward Gibbon that particularly influenced writers drawing on Byzantine history.<sup>17</sup> The *Decline* was a powerful and influential narrative, partly because it was (and still remains) a very readable text.<sup>18</sup>

Gibbon was very well prepared to write the history of Rome (and Byzantium). In contrast to Voltaire, he read the works of Greek historians in the original. The clear weakness of his text on the history of Byzantium was that Gibbon never saw the places he described (this is one of the defining traits of orientalism – textual knowledge is more appreciated than empirical knowledge). Later travellers to Constantinople emphasised this fact, mentioning that familiarity with the topography of the described locations would undoubtedly have facilitated understanding of the analysed events.<sup>19</sup>

The part of *Decline* dedicated to the history of Byzantium (from the time of Emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41), i.e., from [Chapter 48](#) to the end) is decidedly shorter than the earlier sections covering Roman history. The author himself justifies this condensed treatment of the Byzantine period by stating that readers would not tolerate such a detailed account of 800 years of decline and decadence. As David Womersley has rightly observed, Gibbon was fascinated by Byzantium, but fascination does not exclude disgust.<sup>20</sup> As has been noted:

The Enlightenment did not necessarily signal an enlightened approach to Byzantium. The judgement of Edward Gibbon (1776–1789) is all too familiar, a view determined largely by the eighteenth-century English interpretation of Greek philosophy and the stoic values of the Roman republic (which fitted comfortably with the self-image of the English upper class), together with the distaste felt by many enlightenment thinkers for the politics of the medieval Church, eastern or western [...].<sup>21</sup>

Gibbon's narrative, underpinned by the earlier negative views of the Enlightenment philosophers, set the tone for the many historiographical and literary works, which used his text. His influence was prevalent mostly in the anglophone sphere, but his works (in the original or in translation) were read across Europe and America by professional historians and laymen alike.<sup>22</sup>

It is well beyond the limits of this chapter to list all the works drawing on Gibbon's text (not to mention that this would be a pointless exercise), but some of them are worth examining. Perhaps one of the first important works that drew on Gibbon's narrative was Joanna Baillie's (1762–1851) drama *Constantine Paleologus* (1804). In her own words: "The subject of it is taken from Gibbon's account of the siege of Constantinople by the Turks".<sup>23</sup>

Although this play fell into oblivion, in nineteenth-century England it must have enjoyed considerable popularity because the author of another play dedicated to the fall of Constantinople, Lord Morpeth, claims in the introduction to his work: "It is hardly requisite to observe, that Miss Baillie has published a Tragedy upon the same subject. I should naturally shrink from entering into such formidable competition [...]".<sup>24</sup> A quote from *Constantine Paleologus* was also used in another influential nineteenth-century work drawing on Byzantine history, *Count Robert of Paris* (1831) by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832).

It is small wonder that Baillie's text was meant to function as a political/sociological commentary. Baillie uses the story of the fall of Constantinople (somewhat altered by her) to discuss contemporary social and political issues – how to define the relationship between the state and the people during the Napoleonic wars and how to deal with moments of societal turmoil and upheaval such as the French Revolution.<sup>25</sup>

However, although Baillie relied on Gibbon's narrative, she also offered a significant reinterpretation of his arguments, demonstrating that the introduction of Christianity did not begin the barbaric phase but quite the contrary, Christian religion represented the civilised element.<sup>26</sup>

The political events of the time activated memory of the Byzantine Empire and invited reinterpretation of its history in the contemporary context during the Greek War of Independence (1821–32). As David Roessel offered in his book *In Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination*:

The fall of Constantinople in 1453, which for Greeks constitutes the defining moment of their history, was the single event of Byzantine history that had any currency in philhellenic writing. Felicia Hemans described the fall of the city and the death of Constantine XI in *Modern Greece* (1817) and at greater length in *The Last Constantine* (1823). But in both works, she made numerous allusions to the Persian Wars. (...) Hemans placed the capture of the city in the context of the Herodotean struggle between Europe and Asia. Like many early philhellenic writers, she appropriated the fall of Constantinople and subsumed it into the desire to revive Athens. So did Shelley in *Hellas*, where his vision of the recapture of Constantinople by the Greeks was set within the framework of *The Persians*. (...).<sup>27</sup>

While Roessel is right in identifying the fall of Constantinople as the only Byzantine event used by the Philhellenes, the list of – today almost completely forgotten – works which were inspired by this event was much longer. For instance, the British statesman and writer Lord Morpeth (George W. F. Howard, 1802–64), mentioned above, wrote the tragedy *The Last of the Greeks, or the Fall of Constantinople* (1828), David Douglas a poem called *The Fall of Constantinople* (1823), and Nicholas Michell (1807–80), *The Siege of Constantinople in Three Cantos: With Other Poems* (1831).<sup>28</sup> They must have been relatively popular – there were at least two editions of Morpeth's tragedy. Both Morpeth and Douglas more or less directly refer to the Greek War of Independence in the introductions to their texts. David



Douglas writes that “the eyes of Europe are turned with an unwonted anxiety to the cause of Greece” (p. 6\*), while Lord Morpeth wrote about contemporary events in eastern Europe (p. 3\*).<sup>29</sup>

All these writers described the medieval Greek-Turkish struggle in the context and tradition of the Greco-Persian wars (and therefore European-Asiatic conflict). Gibbon's work features in these texts, be it directly or indirectly; for instance, Douglas refers to him and quotes his work in the *Preface*.

In the *Notes* accompanying his work, Michell makes an interesting remark: “The taking of Constantinople [...] is too well known to need a comment” (p. 67). This is probably not only a reference to general historical knowledge but also to the general popularity of the topic, which transcended the boundaries of the anglophone sphere and lasted even after Greece regained its independence. Not long before 1839, the Greek writer and intellectual Ioannes Zambelios (1787–1856), a former member of the *Φιλική Εταιρεία* (*Society of Friends*) actively engaged in the fight against the Turks, wrote a play on Constantine Palaiologos (1405–53), which tells the story of the siege of Constantinople (*Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος*, 1819).<sup>30</sup> Like the British authors, Zambelios emphasised the Asiatic origins of the Turks and the Greek heritage of the Byzantines. The comparison between the last Byzantine emperor and Leonidas, so common in British texts, can also be found in the poem *Konstantin der Palaeologe* (1878) by Hermann Lingg (1820–1905). Constantine is described as “Sparta's letzter Heldensohn” (“Sparta's last heroic son”), which might be an allusion both to the fact that Constantine was proclaimed emperor in Mistra (near ancient Sparta) and to the most famous son of Sparta, that is, Leonidas.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, no other political event contributed to a comparable surge in Byzantine-inspired literature, although some invited a similar comparison; for instance, the Crimean War (1853–56) apparently motivated the Anglican priest and scholar John Mason Neale (1818–66) to publish the novel *Theodora Phranza*, about a daughter of the Byzantine dignitary George Sphrantzes or Phranzes (c. 1401–77). This book, drawing on Byzantine history, was intended as a commentary on the life of Orthodox Christians under Turkish rule.<sup>32</sup>

Byzantium became once more a prominent theme, albeit for different reasons, at the end of the nineteenth century in France and (to a lesser extent) in Italy. In the *Gazzetta Letteraria* (a literary-artistic newspaper published in Torino between 1876 and 1902), the following remark was made: “Nella letteratura francese da qualche tempo osservasi una curiosa ed interessante fioritura di opere bizantine”. (“In French literature, one can observe for some time a curious and interesting blossoming of Byzantine works.”)<sup>33</sup> Much has been written on what is called the decadent movement (an artistic and literary phenomenon that occurred at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century) and the Byzantine motifs within this literary trend.<sup>34</sup> Peter Jeffreys offered in his study on Cavafy's poetry:

Of the many concepts that resonated with decadent aesthetes, Byzantium most powerfully captured the effete sophistication that fin-de-siècle writers and artists strove to convey in their creative works and critical writings. Indeed, the epithets “Byzantine” and “decadent” were often used synonymously; Byzantium, as either a historical reality or an aesthetic fantasy, appears frequently in the terminology and subject matter of decadent writers and theorists [...].<sup>35</sup>

In line with many literary movements, the writers of the so-called decadent movement were interested not in reconstructing the real Byzantium (whatever this might mean) but in using the Byzantine past to express their own fears and desires (again, nothing out of the ordinary).<sup>36</sup> Consequently, they purposefully emphasised, and in some cases even exaggerated, certain aspects of Byzantine culture. For these French authors, the empire was a fascinating blend of intellect and barbarism, representing a civilisation simultaneously brutal and refined.<sup>37</sup> In the introduction to the modern edition of works of the French writer Léon Bloy (1846–1917), including his *Constantinople et Byzance*, a text inspired by the eminent historian Gustave Schlumberger's *L'Épopée byzantine*, the editors wrote that what drew the writer to Byzantium was its greatness and strange wealth, juxtaposed with suffering, triumphs, martyrs, nobility, cruelty, and, above all, decadence.<sup>38</sup>

Certainly, the Byzantinism of the decadent era performed a deconstruction of Byzantine culture by using it as a mirror in which it saw its own deviations, issues and desires. There was, however, something else that made this *byzantinomania* different from any earlier use of Byzantine motifs in literature: it coincided with the revival of Byzantine studies. The collaborative endeavours of historians and Byzantinists such as George Finlay (1799–1875), John Bagnell Bury (1861–1927) and Karl Krumbacher (1856–1909) contributed to a gradual recognition of the eastern empire. While their contributions were significant, the real transformation in the perception of Byzantium occurred not at universities but at a more popular level through novels and plays capable of shaping the public imagination. But the founding fathers of Byzantine studies perceived literary experiments as a potential danger to the discipline.

Krumbacher opens his review of Adam's *Basil et Sophia* (1900) with a recollection of his visit to the variety-theatre *Olympia*, in Paris where he saw a “pantomime” *L'Impératrice*.<sup>39</sup> He remarks that by the end of the performance, the dancer danced in an outfit so transparent that it would make his colleague, Röntgen, envious. He concludes his story with an interesting comment: “So populär ist Byzanz mit einem Male geworden. Ob wir uns über diese Popularität freuen sollen?” (Byzantium became all of a sudden so popular. Should we be glad about this popularity?).<sup>40</sup>

He offers no direct answer to this question, but there is at least a suggestion of what Krumbacher thought. His claims that the depiction of the night Paulician liturgy was not historically truthful, psychologically possible nor artful but simply “pathologic” show that he was not invested in the book. But more importantly, what must have irritated him (and other Byzantinists as well)<sup>41</sup> was not historical mistakes or the *licentia poetica* of the authors (which he even says outright in his review); but damaging stereotypes:

It is Byzantium seen through the temperament of a blasé fin-de-siècle man, who writes for an inwardly related audience and therefore finds no means of sensation strong enough. It is Byzantium composed of debauchery and atrocities, circus games, and theological quarrels, as was popularized in the past by the unhistorical perspectives of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Gibbon, etc., but is now generally considered an outdated view.<sup>42</sup>

What Byzantinists such as Charles Diehl (1859–1944), Krumbacher and others disliked about the *decadent* literature was that it perpetuated harmful stereotypes about Byzantium. They were partly right but also partly missing the point that most of the readers of books penned by Adam, Lombard and many others did not care about the eastern Roman Empire. What is more, as Diehl noted, Victorien Sardou (1831–1908) and Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923; the author of the once-famous drama *Theodora* and the actress who played

the title role) and Jules Massenet (1842–1912, the composer of the opera *Esclarmonde*, 1889) did more for Byzantium than many academic books.<sup>43</sup>

Gibbon's narrative of Byzantium was highly influential in anglophone literature; similarly, Johannes Irmscher has argued, on the basis of the numerous German translations of *The Decline and Fall*, that the work also left a profound mark on the German image of Byzantium.<sup>44</sup> In other countries, however, Gibbon's influence appears to have been more nuanced — for instance, a survey of nineteenth-century Polish newspapers shows that, alongside Gibbon's work, a number of other texts were also used in popular discussions of Byzantium.<sup>45</sup> And yet, while the stereotypes propagated by Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Gibbon persisted, the overwhelming dominance of Gibbon's narrative gradually weakened throughout the nineteenth century. French, and to a lesser extent Italian, literary recycling and adaptations of Byzantine themes are excellent examples of this tendency.

The last decades of the nineteenth century were a turning point not only in the study of Byzantium but also in the evaluation of its potential for literature, and culture more generally. The decadent movement opened new ways of interacting with Byzantine heritage in literature and in fact the last decades of the nineteenth century can be seen as a bridge between this and the next phase I describe.

### The World of Many Narratives

If surveying the reception of Byzantium in earlier centuries is a challenge, to do the same for the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries would be a Herculean task. Some earlier, important texts ceased to be read or became gradually less popular (this is the case with Gibbon's text and even more obviously with Cardinal Baronius' history). Byzantine studies have become more popular and accessible, there is a growing number of translations, studies (including texts popularising Byzantium), and Byzantium has a substantial presence on the Internet. What I call the last phase spans over 120 years and encompasses various literary movements and cultural fashions. However, the interest in Byzantium has clearly intensified in recent decades, during which the scholarly approach to Byzantium has also changed considerably as Byzantine studies have become an internationally recognised discipline present at universities worldwide.

There are several texts that have become universally known. Perhaps some of the most popular poems drawing on Byzantium were William Butler Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium* (written in 1926, published in 1928 in the collection *The Tower*) and *Byzantium* (from 1930). James Notopoulos has claimed that Yeats was the first English poet to "set out for inspiration to Byzantium".<sup>46</sup> This is not entirely accurate because, in addition to the previously mentioned poems about the fall of Constantinople, Byzantine echoes can be found, for example, in the works of Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), such as in the poem *St. Simeon Stylites* (published in 1842), which might have been inspired by Gibbon's work.<sup>47</sup> Yeats' first encounter with the art of the empire occurred in 1907 during his visit to Ravenna. The poet's trip to Sicily and Italy in 1925, when he brought back many photos of Byzantine mosaics, seems to have played a crucial role in the creation of these poems.

However, Yeats was not interested in historical Byzantium – the empire is in his poems merely a poetic figure.<sup>48</sup> Polish poet and Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) claimed that Yeats' Byzantium is a "symbolic place, having little to do with the history of the Eastern Empire".<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, Yeats seems to have been fascinated by the idea of the

empire as he himself stated in *A Vision* (1925, a collection of studies on various topics such as philosophy, history and poetry):

I think that if I could be given a month of antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato.<sup>50</sup>

Yeats' Byzantine poems became so influential that they themselves became an inspiration leading back to Byzantium. The film *Byzantium* (2012), based on the play by the director and writer Moira Buffini, was inspired by Yeats' poetry rather than any Byzantine source.<sup>51</sup>

However, the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries did not produce any work comparable to Sardou's *Theodora*, which was widely performed, translated and turned into films.<sup>52</sup> There were texts that enjoyed some limited international popularity such as the *Dark Angel* (published in Finnish as *Johannes Angelos*, 1952) by Mika Waltari. This novel written by a Finnish author dramatises the last days of Constantinople and was translated into several languages, including Polish and German. Its popularity in Poland is evidenced by the fact that it was the inspiration for the fantasy novel *Połowa nocy* (*The Half of the Night*, 2005) by Izabela Szolc. This novel tells the story of the daughter of Loukas Notaras, the last grand duke and chief minister of the Byzantine Empire (1402–1453), who was turned into a vampire. The fragment of the book which is set in Constantinople forms an intertextual game with Waltari's novel.

The popularity of most texts drawing on Byzantium was limited to a national readership, and some of them used Byzantine code to discuss contemporary events. This is the case of Maro Douka's *Ένας σκούφος από πορφύρα* (1995, translated into English by David Connolly as *Come Forth, King*, set in the twelfth century during the Komnenian period). This novel was a bestseller in Greece, but until the English translation in 2003, it remained virtually unknown outside of the Greek-speaking world. As Mariana Spanaki has argued, "Douka sees Byzantium as a model for resolving Balkan ethnic conflicts", and even that it functioned as a form of "popular historiography at a time of crisis".<sup>53</sup> However, it is important not only because it functions as a commentary but also because it signals a renewed Greek interest in the history of Byzantium.

However, one of the most interesting developments in the literary reception of Byzantium is its presence in new genres and media (cinema, TV and videogames). While the latter are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that Byzantine motifs entered the world of speculative fiction (sci-fi, fantasy and alternative history) as well as graphic novels. The Greek *Κλασικά Εικονογραφημένα* (*Classics Illustrated* series) included themes and characters from the history of the eastern empire.<sup>54</sup> Byzantium appeared in the graphic novels series *Mosaik*, the longest-running European monthly comic book, first published in the German Democratic Republic in 1955.<sup>55</sup> Most recently, two young authors and illustrators, Spyros Theocharis and Chrysa Sakel, behind the *Byzantines Tales*, created in 2019, published graphic novels on Emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025) and Empress Theophano (c. 941–976).<sup>56</sup>

Vampires, zombies and werewolves have become part of the Byzantine world.<sup>57</sup> There are detective stories set in the Byzantine world: John the Eunuch series tells the story of a servant of Justinian across 12 volumes written by Mary Reed and Eric Mayer and published between 1999 and 2018. We have successful alternative histories of the empire: most well-known are books by Harry Turtledove (*Agent of Byzantium*, 1987), but there are also novels written, for instance, in Polish (*Black Icon*, 2006 by Mieszko Zagańczyk, which is built on the premise that the Byzantines won the battle of Mantzikert). There are also space operas inspired by

the history of the eastern empire (e.g. novels by Arkady Martine). Interestingly, the third volume of the immensely popular science-fiction trilogy *Remembrance of Earth's Past* by the Chinese author Liu Cixin (the first volume, *The Three-Body Problem*, has been recently adapted for a TV series by Netflix) opens with the scene set in Constantinople in 1453, thus showing that the non-European author found this event both important and interesting enough.

It would be difficult to do full justice to a phenomenon which is still happening. Nonetheless, some general conclusions can be drawn. Certain stereotypes persist even today: Byzantium is still perceived as decadent and luxurious, full of unmanly eunuchs and court intrigues. Justinian's and Theodora's times along with the fall of Constantinople are still popular themes. French decadents would likely have appreciated what is perhaps one of the most eccentric renderings of the life of the imperial couple — Charles Busch's *Theodora, She-Bitch of Byzantium* (first performed in 1984), in which Theodora is played by the playwright himself, the drag performer Charles Busch. This play might also serve as a good example of “reception of the second degree”, a pattern already visible in the Buffini film discussed above – Busch, a major figure in queer theatre, is inspired more by Sardou's play and its melodramatic-cinematic afterlife than by Byzantium itself.<sup>58</sup>

However, other periods in history are attracting the attention of writers: a detective story, *The Eunuch's Secret: A Byzantine Murder Story* by M. L. Jerinic (2020), is set in eleventh-century Byzantium (the volume cover includes an illustration from the *Madrid Skylitzes*, the twelfth-century illuminated manuscript version of the *Synopsis of Histories* by John Skylitzes which covers the events between 811 and 1057). Not only do authors of works set in Byzantium consult professional Byzantinists, but trained Byzantinists also write such works.<sup>59</sup>

Knowledge of Byzantium might still be mediated through intermediary texts, but studies on Byzantium, which contribute to a better understanding of the empire, influence the imagery of Byzantium in literature. Modern novels, taking advantage of modern studies in art history and archaeology, are becoming more detailed when recreating the world of Byzantium (easier travel to various Byzantine monuments also contributes to this change).

It seems (but such a conclusion should be formulated only with caution) that Byzantium has ceased to be used mainly to comment on contemporary political or cultural issues. This can still occur, but it is no longer the primary function of such texts.

### (Without a) Conclusion

As is apparent from this survey, the reception of Byzantium in literature (which surely applies to other media as well) is a fluid phenomenon, dependent on political and cultural circumstances. The modern use of Byzantium differs substantially from the earlier period not only because of the new genres but because there is no longer one predominant narrative dictated by a single influential text. My division of the material is not only provisional but also highly imperfect – as mentioned earlier, one can argue that the decadent movement from the end of the nineteenth century foreshadows the later way of using Byzantium, since the French authors abandoned Gibbon's perspective, used scholarly literature and conducted discussions (or even argued) with Byzantinists.

A defining feature of the final (for now) phase is the changed relationship between Byzantine studies and Byzantine-inspired literature. The founding generation of Byzantinists — Krumbacher, Diehl, and others — observed the popular reception of the empire with suspicion, fearing that the stereotypes circulated by decadent and popular fiction would discredit the discipline they were trying to establish. However, the opposite has happened.

The professionalisation of Byzantine studies, the proliferation of translations and accessible scholarship have produced a permeable boundary between scholarly and creative engagement with Byzantium. Authors of historical and speculative fiction now routinely consult Byzantinists, and Byzantinists themselves – among them Panagiotis Agapitos and scholars trained in Byzantine studies such as Harry Turtledove – have crossed into literary production, extending their scholarly interests into fiction. This does not mean that the older stereotypes have disappeared: generic conventions of alternative history, mystery fiction, and fantasy continue to draw on the familiar repertoire of decadence, intrigue, and exotic difference. Byzantine studies, however, is no longer merely an observer of the “popular” reception of Byzantium. It has increasingly become one of its participants, contributing directly to the creation, circulation, and interpretation of new images of Byzantium.

This survey is also incomplete: to paint the full – or at least fuller – picture, the inclusion of literature written in Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Russian should be taken into account. Other chapters in this part of the Handbook will discuss lesser-known instances of the use of Byzantine heritage. A collaborative research project grouping together students of Byzantium and historians of literature is needed if we would like to understand exactly how Byzantium was used and abused in literature.

### Notes

- 1 However, it is worth noting that certain aspects of Baronius’ work were challenged shortly after its publication. In 1616, Richard Crakanthorpe published a short text entitled *Justinian the Emperor Defended Against Cardinal Baronius*. Baronius’ work was flawed – his Greek was not very good, and he often relied on incorrect translations, see Pullapilly 1975: 156.
- 2 Ellis 2006.
- 3 For a more thorough discussion, see below.
- 4 See for instance the excellent discussion in Boeck 2015: 102–32.
- 5 Translation by Ottó Tomschey <https://mek.oszk.hu/00800/00876/00876.pdf> (last accessed 18 January 2024).
- 6 Konstantinou 1998.
- 7 See for instance: for the Spanish literature, Broto 2009; for French, Delouis 2003: 101–51, for Polish, Ławski 2003: 205–44, for Swedish, Bodin 1992: 3–31 and Bodin 2002. See also ‘Further Reading’ provided in the bibliography.
- 8 For an introductory overview, see Ricks and Magdalino 1998.
- 9 Nilsson 2015: 221–45; Nilsson 2016: 171–202.
- 10 González-Barrera 2005: 80:

The Byzantine novel has as its protagonist the pilgrim of love, a new knight errant, who, as an archetype of the human condition, becomes the novelistic hero of the Counter-Reformation. The search is not only for love but also spiritual. The pilgrim is the symbol of the Christian arising from the biblical idea, present in numerous texts of the Old Testament, that life is nothing more than a bitter pilgrimage spanning from the cradle to the grave, a painful exile along the roads of the world until reaching the eternal life.

(trans. P. Marciniak)

- 11 Schachter 2015: 100–18.
- 12 Marciniak 2023: 249–55.
- 13 Broto 2009: 36–40.
- 14 Zorzi 2006.
- 15 See Marciniak 2021.
- 16 Marciniak 2021.
- 17 See for instance Lemerle 1948; Volpilhac-Augier 2003; Palágyi 2006 (on Voltaire).
- 18 Mango 1984: 29.



19 See, for instance, [Walsh 1828](#): 31:

Balta was the name of the admiral, and this little port retaining his name, is considered proof of the fact. From hence to the harbor the distance is ten or eleven miles, which induced Gibbon to say, for the sake of probability, that “he wished he could contract the distance of ten miles, and prolong the term of one night”. Now, had Gibbon visited the spot, he might have spared his wish and established the probability.

20 [Womersley 1999](#): 155.

21 [Jeffreys et al. 2008](#): 7.

22 On German translations, see [Irmischer 1965](#): 539–43; The greatest of Polish Romantic poets, Adam Mickiewicz, was also familiar with Gibbon's work, [Ławski 2003](#): 207, fn. 7.

23 [Baillie 1977](#): xiv.

24 Morpeth 1828: iv.

25 Friedmann-Romell 1999: 151.

26 [Patten 1992](#): 154.

27 [Roessel 2002](#): 37–8.

28 Lord Morpeth's text, apart from being part of the Philhellenic movement, might also argue for strong and just political leadership by presenting the loss of Constantinople “to the Turks as divine punishment for its corruption and lack of virtue”, [Gent 2010](#): 53.

29 He claims, however, that these events “did not suggest the undertaking” (p. 3\*).

30 Sideras and Sidera-Lytra 2004–2005.

31 [Jeffreys 2016](#): 122.

32 James 2000.

33 *Gazzetta Letteraria*, 9. 18, May 2nd, 1885.

34 On the definition of “decadence” within this literary movement, see [Ryals 1958](#). The most general survey was offered in Praz 1956: 287–411.

35 [Jeffreys 2016](#): 122.

36 It was proposed that readers of Paul Adam's Byzantine novels might have found allusions to the contemporary world in them – the hordes of barbarians attacking Byzantium could be seen as a foreshadowing of the German forces besieging Paris in 1870, see [Malinowski 1990](#): 34–36.

37 For a more detailed [Delouis 2003](#): 116–34.

38 [Bloy 1966](#): 13.

39 Actually, this was a ballet by Jean Richepin and Paul Vidal; the role of the Byzantine empress was performed by a Spanish dancer Agustina del Carmen Otero Iglesias.

40 [Krumbacher 1901](#): 663.

41 See Zichy 1902: 202–3.

42 [Krumbacher 1901](#): 665.

43 [Diehl 1900](#): 11–12.

44 [Irmischer 1965](#): 537–559.

45 [Marciniak 2026](#): 445.

46 [Notopoulos 1959](#).

47 [Ricks 2000](#): 225–6.

48 [Ricks 2000](#): 231.

49 [Miłosz 2004](#): 12.

50 [Yeats 1937](#): 279. There are many references to Byzantium in *A Vision*.

51 As confirmed by Moira Buffini in private correspondence with me.

52 [Carlà-Uhink 2015](#).

53 [Spanaki 1998](#): 124–25.

54 See for instance [Nikolaou 2017](#).

55 [Grünbart 2017](#): 147–70.

56 <https://www.byzantinetales.com> (accessed 27 February 2024).

57 [Marciniak 2023](#).

58 See the review of the play: [https://www.sfweekly.com/archives/lucia-and-the-she-bitch-have-a-lot-in-common/article\\_95cc5bdd-4925-5870-a589-c99e033c0038.html](https://www.sfweekly.com/archives/lucia-and-the-she-bitch-have-a-lot-in-common/article_95cc5bdd-4925-5870-a589-c99e033c0038.html) (accessed 27 May 2026).

59 See for instance Panagiotis Agapitos' essay on his experiences as the author of detective stories set in Byzantium, [Agapitos 2023](#).



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# BYZANTINE VERNACULAR LITERATURE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CZECH BYZANTINE STUDIES

The Case of Karel Müller

*Markéta Kulhánková*

## The Vicious Circle of Translation

Translating pre-modern literatures poses a formidable challenge. Primarily, this task falls upon scholars and researchers, who produce translations as a byproduct of their scholarly and pedagogical pursuits. Constraints stem from limited funding, as there are neither assured bestsellers among Byzantine texts nor a proactive promotion of Byzantine literature by national governments on a global scale. There are also temporal limitations, as translation is not recognised as a scholarly pursuit in many countries and scholars are compelled to allocate their time to the production of papers and books that are officially acknowledged, relegating translating to a secondary status. Moreover, profound familiarity with a pre-modern text and its historical context does not automatically ensure the capacity to convey its allure and distinctive qualities through a well-crafted translation. All these obstacles contribute to a notable scarcity of translations of Byzantine literature into modern languages, despite the wealth of captivating Byzantine texts that merit translation.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, the demand for effective translations has become more urgent today, given the rising trend of interdisciplinary and global studies, alongside the decreasing number of readers who understand the original texts. Noteworthy initiatives such as the English series of *Translated texts for Byzantinists* by Liverpool University Press, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* by Harvard University Press, the German *Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur* by Hiersmann Verlag and the Greek *Κείμενα Βυζαντινής Ιστοριογραφίας* (*Texts of Byzantine Historiography*), by the publishing house Kanaki, exemplify the devotion of numerous scholars to this task. Despite the aforementioned challenges, these scholars, occasionally collaborating with professional translators, persist in this often-unacknowledged pursuit, being aware that a (good) translation enhances the accessibility and consideration of pre-modern texts, reaching not only colleagues in related fields but also a broader audience.

Naturally, the less spoken a modern language is, the more obstacles arise due to the restricted potential audience and publishers' hesitancy to invest in an enterprise destined to

incur financial losses upfront. This chapter aims to pay tribute to a pioneer in this regard, who dedicated a substantial portion of his career to translating Byzantine literature into Czech, being at the same time a passionate advocate for scholarly engagement with Byzantine literature within the Czech academic milieu. Karel Müller (1875–1955), positioned at the inception of Czech translations of Byzantine literature, simultaneously held the distinction of being the most prolific among those who succeeded him. He fell short of achieving widespread recognition among the general reading public for his translations, a reception he likely aspired to attain. Presently, his translations are difficult to access, residing discreetly within the repositories of public libraries. Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely due to this obscurity, Müller's endeavours in translation and popularisation are worth consideration. They stand as a source of inspiration and motivation for contemporary students of Byzantine literature, both in the Czech Republic and beyond.

### Advocating and Studying

Following WWI and the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, a convergence of propitious conditions for the advancement of Byzantine studies in the newly formed state unfolded. One contributing factor was the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia (1917–23), which compelled numerous intellectuals to seek refuge outside their homeland. Notably, the prominent art historian Nikodim Kondakov (b. 1844) arrived in Prague in 1922 and remained there until his passing in 1925. Over this span of three years, he cultivated a community of students and colleagues, who after his demise carried forward the art historical exploration of Byzantium in a scholarly circle around the journal *Seminarium Kondakovianum*. Another influential factor emerged from the ideas of Pan-Slavism, deeply ingrained in the Czech and Slovak elites of the time, including the first president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937). President Masaryk ardently advocated for the incorporation of a research group of Byzantinists within the newly established Institute of Slavonic Studies (formally established in 1922, operative from 1928). He also championed the inception of a scholarly journal dedicated to Byzantino-Slavic relationships, leading to the establishment of the journal *Byzantinoslavica*, which has been consistently published since its inception in 1929 until today.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the protagonist of the present chapter both preceded and stood somehow aside from this vibrant academic traffic.

Tracing information about the life and career of Karel Müller proves more challenging than assembling his scholarly works and translations. According to the comprehensive *Ottův slovník naučný* (Czech *Otto's Encyclopaedia*), Müller hailed from Jičín, a small town in western Bohemia, studied Classical Philology at the Faculty of Arts at the Czech University in Prague (present-day Charles University) and subsequently assumed a teaching position at a “gymnasium” (preparatory high school) in the south-Bohemian town of Jindřichův Hradec.<sup>3</sup> The entry, published in 1909, mentions predominantly his contributions to Classics and translations from Classical Greek, naturally, because Karel Müller's active involvement with Byzantine literature commenced only around 1907 and culminated in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century.

Müller's first work that concerned Byzantium was a historical treatise entitled *Význam říše byzantské v dějinách lidstva* (*Importance of the Byzantine Empire in the History of Mankind*). This work was serialised in the yearbook of his school across two parts, during 1906–07 and 1907–08. The study later underwent further refinement and was released

as a distinct two-volume book in 1927.<sup>4</sup> The historical narrative adopts a resolute and defensive tone, distancing itself from the contemporary pejorative view of Byzantium as a decadent, unwieldy state with an excessive bureaucracy and the Byzantines as softened lovers of luxury. Müller's aim was to counter the prevailing negative perception and present a more balanced perspective on Byzantine history and culture. Despite his efforts to unearth beauty or intrinsic value in Byzantine texts and gain a deeper understanding of their authors, remnants of prejudices against Byzantine history, society and culture persist throughout Müller's writings.

His subsequent work was an extensive descriptive article introducing Michael Psellos' (1018–78) epistolography. The introduction features several lines that could be considered Müller's manifesto, recurring in various forms throughout his subsequent writings, both in shorter and more extended expressions:

In Czech scholarly literature, as far as I know, Byzantine themes were only occasionally addressed. This is entirely natural, as attention had to be primarily directed towards the phenomena of the Classical and Hellenistic periods ... Byzantine life developed on the life of Classical and Hellenistic Greece, and therefore can be properly understood and appreciated only through the previous development of the Hellenic nation. Nevertheless, there could now be a turning of attention to Byzantine studies in our country. Hence, even among Czech philologists, there is a need to arouse interest in this new scholarly field, in the history of the great and powerful Byzantine Empire, which survived the fall of the Western Roman Empire for almost a millennium. This includes its extensive literature, which, although not always reaching classical heights, exhibits many significant literary phenomena, and has invaluable significance for medieval comparative literature. Finally, the Byzantine cultural life in general includes so many different elements that worked together to create an atmosphere that gave rise to the well-known term "Byzantinism". Unfortunately, this Byzantinism has so far been understood only from its negative aspects, and it is necessary to show that it also had its positive aspects.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, Müller's preferred genre of Byzantine literature evolved to be the Palaiologan romance. He valued the vernacular language, which, in his view, did not impede the "flight of creative imagination" as the learned language did.<sup>6</sup> Besides this, he appreciated its openness to Western influence, considering the encounter of Greek popular culture with the refined intellectual culture of the romance as "beneficial both aesthetically and morally".<sup>7</sup> The disparity in his assessment of the twelfth-century novel is conspicuous. In Müller's perspective, the Komnenian novels, derogatorily termed "dramas" by the Byzantines, are "artificially unnatural" and exhibit a "feeble reflection of the aesthetic culture of antiquity", wherein "unartistic and crude imitation takes precedence, obscuring any genuine artistic endeavour". According to Müller, their authors were "individuals lacking both artistic and moral ideals, propelled solely by base pleasures and sensuality".<sup>8</sup> Conversely, vernacular romances present for Müller a commendable cornerstone of Modern Greek literature that "stands on the ground of a living spoken language, creating works understandable to the people and thus striving for their elevation".<sup>9</sup>

Müller dedicated two comprehensive studies to the romances *Livistros and Rodamme* (mid-thirteenth century)<sup>10</sup> and the *Tale of Achilles* (mid-fourteenth century),<sup>11</sup> thoroughly examining their manuscript tradition, content and literary qualities. These works attest to

his profound familiarity with international research, as he frequently engaged in polemical discussions or provided corrective remarks. He knew and discussed not only Karl Krumbacher's (1856–1909) *History of Byzantine Literature*<sup>12</sup> and Charles Gidel's (1827–1900) *Studies on Modern Greek Literature*<sup>13</sup> but also works by Charles Diehl (1859–1944), Dirk Christiaan Hessling (1859–1941), John Bagnell Bury (1861–1927) and other scholars. His access extended to recent publications, editions and academic journals such as the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*. Despite his evident appreciation of late Byzantine vernacular literature, he consistently engaged in comparisons, perceiving these texts as inferior to ancient Greek literature:

Even in the aesthetic assessment of the version N, we must not use the standards of the Classical Greek era, but we must always bear in mind that it is a work of the Byzantine period when the spirit of antiquity had already declined from its incomparable height.

With these words he closed his study of the *Tale of Achilles*.<sup>14</sup>

Müller's profound familiarity with contemporary scholarly literature, including works in Modern Greek, is also apparent in his *Přehled literatury byzantské* (*Overview of Byzantine Literature*) published in 1929. In alignment with the prevailing scholarly perspective, he categorised Byzantine writings into the learned and vernacular parts. In keeping with the preceding discussion, the vernacular component garners notably more recognition in his assessment.<sup>15</sup> While the *Overview* primarily targeted a professional community of classicists, Müller also addressed a broader audience. Two years before the release of the *Overview*, he authored a concise book as part of a series of school handbooks titled *Úvod do byzantských dějin, kultury a literatury s ukázkou z literatury byzantské* (*Introduction to Byzantine history, culture, and literature with a sample of Byzantine literature*).<sup>16</sup> Together with the two-part reworking of his initial publication on Byzantine history,<sup>17</sup> he thus offered the Czech audience a robust and contemporary introduction to the Byzantine world. It was not until the publication of *Byzantská vzdělanost* (*Byzantine education*) by the prominent Czech Byzantinist (and translator) Růžena Dostálová (1924–2014) in 1990 that another book-length overview of Byzantine literature became available in the Czech language.

### Translating

But Müller's activities extended beyond this. Let us now delve into perhaps the most notable aspect of Müller's endeavours – his translations. Between 1923 and 1934, he translated and published three Palaiologan romances: *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* (first half of fourteenth century) appeared as a tiny book with an introduction and concise explanatory notes in 1921<sup>18</sup>; *Belthandros and Chrysantza* (late thirteenth century) was published in sequels in the “entertaining and informative monthly magazine” *Země* (*Earth*) in 1923<sup>19</sup>; and lastly, in 1934, a bibliophile, illustrated edition of *Florios and Platziaflores* (second half of fourteenth century) was released, limited to 52 signed copies (see [Figures 38.1](#) and [38.2](#)).<sup>20</sup>

The introductions to all three translations align with Müller's sentiments expressed in his treatises. Apologetic declarations about Byzantine literature as a whole were coupled with commendations of the romances' closeness to the people and their “charming fairy tale features” that augmented the aesthetic appeal of the narratives.<sup>21</sup> A look at the *Overview* indicates that the selection of these three texts was anything but arbitrary. In Müller's



Figure 38.1 Jan Konůpek (1883–1950), Illustration for Karel Müller's translation of *Florios* and *Platziaflora*, 1934, p. 55. © Jan Konůpek. Taken from Müller, K. and Konůpek J. (1934) *Florios a Platziaflora: byzantský román milostný*. Prague.





Figure 38.2 Jan Konůpek (1883–1950), Illustration for Karel Müller's translation of *Florios and Platziaflore*, 1934, p. 25. © Jan Konůpek. Taken from Müller, K. and Konůpek J. (1934) *Florios a Placjaflore: byzantský román milostný*. Prague. Public Domain.

perspective, they embodied three distinct stages of the Palaiologan romance: *Kallimachos* retains a predominantly Byzantine character and is closely aligned with folk tales; *Belthandros* incorporates various sources of inspiration, including Western influence, even though there is no direct Western model for the narrative; and *Florios*, ultimately, represents a freely adapted Western model.<sup>22</sup>

In his translations, Müller undertook a task that most modern translators did not; he not only rendered the content but also preserved the verse form in Czech. It is worth noting that the Czech language shares prosodic qualities with Modern Greek, and the iambic structure of the verse, particularly in longer lines such as those found in political verse, does not present any fundamental obstacles for translation. Müller's lines read easily, evoking a sense of euphony. However, the language register appears notably outdated, not only due to the century that has passed since the translations were crafted but also the well-known phenomenon that translations tend to age faster than originals. Müller did not resist the temptation that often plagues translating classicists – to artificially archaize the language.

Over the years, Müller expanded his collection with two additional translations, with choices that aligned with his profound appreciation of folk creativity and vernacular language, discussed above. In 1938, he released a translation of *Byzantské epos Basilios Digenis Akritas* (*The Byzantine epos Basilios Digenis Akritas*) based on the Trebizond manuscript (now lost, probably the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century). The missing beginning and end in this version were supplemented from the Oxford manuscript (Lincoln College 24, 1670), although without maintaining the rhyme of the latter. It is not surprising that Müller made this choice due to the perceived “folk tone” of this version.<sup>23</sup> In the introduction, he acknowledges that when he commenced the work on this translation “a couple of years after the [first] World War”, he could not have been aware that shortly afterwards, the Grottaferrata manuscript (Z.α.XLIV 444, late thirteenth or early fourteenth century) would be identified as the one closest to the lost original.<sup>24</sup> Both this statement and the comprehensive introduction, explanatory remarks and bibliography further affirm Müller's extensive awareness of developments in the study of Byzantine literature abroad, including his ability to consult treatises in Modern Greek. The enduring nature of Müller's engagement with *Digenis* is apparent not only from this translation project but also from the fact that he had already published a study dedicated to this poem in 1911–12. Additionally, the sample of Byzantine literature included in his *Introduction into Byzantine history, culture, and literature* was drawn precisely from this poem.<sup>25</sup>

Müller's final translation emerged in the midst of WWII. In 1940, the 65-year-old philologist published the early Modern Greek *Alphabet of Love*, or *Erotopaignia* (fifteenth to seventeenth century), translated from Wilhelm Wagner's (1843–80) edition<sup>26</sup> under the Czech title *Rhodské písně milostné* (*Rhodian Songs of Love*). The difficult conditions of wartime Europe are reflected in the apparent limitation of Müller's access to scholarly works on these poems. He seems to have overlooked Hesselings's and Pernot's newer edition,<sup>27</sup> maintaining that Wagner's unsatisfactory edition is the only existing one.<sup>28</sup> Already in his *Overview* Müller briefly touched upon post-Byzantine literature, particularly the writings of Venetian Crete, and in his last known work, he once more confirms his comprehensive view of what should be considered “Byzantine”, asserting that the *Erotopaignia* “rightly rank among the best and most marvellous fruits of all Byzantine folk literature”.<sup>29</sup> In alignment with the aesthetic demands of his era, Müller holds in high regard “the directness and candour of expression, metaphorical richness, and colourful diction [as] significant strengths of this pure lyrical poetry”.<sup>30</sup>

### No One a Prophet in Their Own Country

I have been unable to trace further activities of Karel Müller after 1940. It is highly likely that in the tumultuous atmosphere at the end of WWII and thereafter, the aged man enjoyed a well-deserved period of rest. What is more upsetting is that I have not succeeded in identifying any contemporary responses to his work. There are no reviews of any of his works in the unique classicist journal of the then Czechoslovakia, the *Listy filologické* (*Folia Philologica*), where Müller himself published some of his works. The sole reference to Müller's work that I was able to identify appears in a brief article by the authoritative Czech Slavist Bohuslav Havránek (1893–1978) in the journal *Slovo a slovesnost* (1940). The article reflects on the influence of Greek literature on Slavic literatures and discusses how this influence is addressed in relevant scholarly works in Czech. Havránek criticises Müller's volume on *Digenis*, faulting it for not devoting particular attention to the Russian version of *Digenis* in the introduction. He further succinctly remarks that "the translation itself reads well but does not excel in any way".<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Müller's active contributions have only garnered a certain level of appreciation in modern retrospectives on the development of Byzantine studies in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, his translations endure. They remain accessible to students and interested individuals in various libraries. Although somewhat dated, they still carry value, particularly since, with the exception of *Digenis Akritas*, they stand as the sole translations of these texts into Czech.<sup>33</sup> Many of the observations found in his introductions and studies have been validated by subsequent research. When delving into Müller's work, one cannot help but admire his erudition and dedication to texts he perceived as dusty and unjustly neglected jewels of the past. Despite his endeavours remaining solitary and the delayed recognition of his work, he deserves commemoration as a pioneer in fostering a balanced perception of Byzantine literature, particularly its vernacular part, during the period between the two World Wars.

### Notes

- 1 For a (far from complete) database of Byzantine texts into modern languages see D. Jenkins, "Modern Language Translations of Byzantine sources": [https://library.princeton.edu/byzantine/title-list?field\\_translation\\_author\\_tid=All&field\\_translation\\_genre\\_tid=All&field\\_translation\\_century\\_tid=All&field\\_translation\\_language\\_tid=33&field\\_translation\\_original\\_lang\\_tid=All&field\\_translation\\_translator\\_tid=All&field\\_translation\\_url\\_title=All](https://library.princeton.edu/byzantine/title-list?field_translation_author_tid=All&field_translation_genre_tid=All&field_translation_century_tid=All&field_translation_language_tid=33&field_translation_original_lang_tid=All&field_translation_translator_tid=All&field_translation_url_title=All) [accessed 8/1/2024].
- 2 Foletti and Palladino 2020: 94–109.
- 3 *Ottův slovník naučný*, vol. 28, Praha 1909: 979; see also [https://cs.wikisource.org/wiki/Ott%C5%AFv\\_slovn%C3%ADk\\_nau%C4%8Dn%C3%BD/M%C3%BCller\\_Karel\\_\(filolog\)](https://cs.wikisource.org/wiki/Ott%C5%AFv_slovn%C3%ADk_nau%C4%8Dn%C3%BD/M%C3%BCller_Karel_(filolog)) [accessed 11/01/2024].
- 4 Müller 1927a, Müller 1927b, cf. Havlíková 2002: 102, n. 4.
- 5 Müller 1909: 18–9.
- 6 Müller 1927c: 35–6, 1929: 37.
- 7 Müller 1929: 74–5.
- 8 Müller 1929: 26–7.
- 9 Müller 1927c: 39.
- 10 Müller 1923a.
- 11 Müller 1926.
- 12 Krumbacher 1897.
- 13 Gidel 1866.
- 14 Müller 1926: 234
- 15 Müller 1929.

- 16 Müller 1927c.
- 17 See above and endnote 4.
- 18 Müller 1921.
- 19 Müller 1923b.
- 20 Müller and Konůpek 1934.
- 21 Müller 1921: 4–5.
- 22 Müller 1929: 73–4.
- 23 Müller 1938: 23.
- 24 Müller 1938: 23.
- 25 In the in the yearbook of his school 1911–12; and Müller 1927c: 41–8 (the sample is the beginning of Book 5 of the Trebizond version – the narrative about Digenis’ childhood and his first hunt, and this version of the translation is almost identical with the text in Müller 1938).
- 26 Wagner 1879.
- 27 Hesselung and Pernot 1913.
- 28 Müller 1940: 6.
- 29 Müller 1940: 21.
- 30 Müller 1940: 21.
- 31 Havránek 1940: 63.
- 32 Havlíková 2002: 102–3; Vavřínek 1992: 473.
- 33 For the new translation (of the Grottaferrata version) see Cikán and Kulhánková 2018.

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# THE RECEPTION OF BYZANTIUM IN THE TEXTBOOKS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN GREECE IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

*Panagiotis Theodoropoulos*

In recent times, prominent Byzantinists have intensified the discussion concerning the implications of the use of the epithet “Byzantine” by modern scholars in relation to the eastern Roman Empire. They argue that the term Byzantine promotes the notion that the empire was not truly Roman, despite the fact that throughout its existence its inhabitants perceived it as such.<sup>1</sup> From the dawn of modern scholarship in the sixteenth century until the late nineteenth century, the term Byzantine was used interchangeably with the term “Greek”, perpetuating the Western medieval perception of Byzantium as the “empire of the Greeks”.<sup>2</sup> Scholars from the nascent modern Greek state of the nineteenth century capitalised on this phenomenon, Hellenising the eastern Roman Empire and thus arguing for the uninterrupted continuity of the Hellenic nation through the centuries.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, towards the end of the nineteenth century the term Byzantine began to win ground in Western scholarship against the term Greek. This trend culminated in the 1960s, when it was coupled with an effort to disassociate Byzantium from its ancient Greek and Roman origins, stressing its autonomous character which, according to this view, stemmed from its Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

In this brief study, I explore how twentieth- and twenty-first-century history textbooks for secondary education in Greece understood and portrayed the Romanness of the Christian Empire based in Constantinople.<sup>5</sup> My analysis will focus on the perceived interplay between Romanness and Hellenism in Byzantium, the terminology used and periodisation followed by these textbooks. Ultimately, I confirm that the term Byzantine is indeed used by textbook authors in a way that undermines the Romanness of the empire, since the term is linked with the empire’s perceived Hellenisation. Moreover, I suggest that contrary to the schema outlined in the introductory paragraph, textbook authors continue to associate Byzantium with Hellenism to the present day, decades after scholarly consensus moved away from this understanding.

### Romanness in Byzantium

In the nineteenth century, Byzantine history was not always understood as part of Greek history. It was only under the influence of two pioneering scholars in historic studies, Spyridon Zampelios (1815–81) and Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–91), that Byzantium came to be perceived as the medieval phase of the history of the “Hellenic” nation. In the twentieth century, the narrative of national continuity became prevalent and Byzantine history was taught in secondary schools through this lens. This approach centred on national continuity waned somewhat during the second half of the twentieth century. Indicatively, the current *Lykeion* (senior high school) textbook—*History of the Medieval and Early Modern World 565-1815* (written in 2001) – diverges from this tradition in focusing on social change in Byzantium rather than national continuity.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, a common feature of textbooks from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is that they downplay the Romanness of the empire. The majority (if not all of them) consider Byzantium and its culture essentially Hellenic. This phenomenon is easier to observe in the first half of the twentieth century when textbook authors, many of whom were renowned academics (although this later changed),<sup>7</sup> were vocal about it. A telling example is the title of the 1925 textbook of Antonios Chorafas – *History of the Hellenic Empire*. However, the trend continued well into the twenty-first century and in contemporary textbooks.

Adamantios Adamantiou concedes in his textbook, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, written in 1920, that one of its main purposes is to show the “national unity” that was achieved in “Medieval Hellas”.<sup>8</sup> According to Adamantiou, “the Hellenic nation during the Middle Ages united into one empire, which produced the most valuable goods of our race”. Therefore, the Christian Empire that emerged in the Roman East was in reality the “medieval Hellenic empire”.<sup>9</sup> Following the same line of thought, the 1940 textbook of Haralampos Theodoridis and Anastasios Lazarou, *History of the Middle Ages*, understands the empire of Constantinople as the “great Hellenic empire” that spread Greek culture to the entire world.<sup>10</sup> Even books from the second half of the twentieth century follow this trend, such as the textbook of Eleni Vourazeli-Marinakou, *History of the Middle Ages: From Constantine to the Fall of Constantinople to the Turks* – in use from the 1950s until the 1970s – which understands Byzantine history as the “history of Hellenism from 330 to 1453”.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the textbook of Kostas Kalokairinos, *Roman and Medieval History*, which was recalled as soon as it was published in 1965 for not being patriotic enough (its revised 1976 edition continued in use until the early 2000s),<sup>12</sup> advances the notion that the Byzantine Empire was in fact Greek, since the “Christian empire” gradually “surrendered itself completely to Hellenism”, which caused “the last Roman memories to be forgotten”.<sup>13</sup>

The 1970s *Gymnasion* (junior high school) textbook of Zacharias Orphanoudakis, Maria Theochari and Lampros Tsaktsiras, *Roman and Byzantine History*, which remained in use until the 2000s, continues this strand of thought. According to the authors, “the Roman tradition kept continuously losing ground, and in the end it was limited to lifeless ceremonies and titles. Hellenism and Christianity were elements with vitality, for they corresponded to a living reality”.<sup>14</sup> As for contemporary textbooks, the *Gymnasion* textbook by Ioannis Dimitroukas and Thoukydidis Ioannou, *Medieval and Early Modern History* (written in 2006), maintains the same notion of a gradual move from a Roman empire to a Hellenic empire. Their definition of the empire suggests that the Byzantine state was not Roman anymore: “Byzantium is the Christian state of the Greco-Roman East which emerged within the bosom of the Roman state”.<sup>15</sup> Their understanding of this transformation becomes



clearer in the passage that evaluates the reign of Heraclius (r. 610–41), which according to them signals “the final end of the Roman empire and the beginning of the medieval Hellenic Byzantine empire”.<sup>16</sup>

These authors, along with Kostas Baroutas, were also responsible for the contemporary Lykeion textbook *History of the Medieval and Early Modern World 565-1815*, wherein they express the same ideas, albeit in a more implicit way. They state that the early Byzantine Empire (fourth–sixth centuries) was simultaneously Roman,<sup>17</sup> which implies firstly that “Byzantine” and “Roman” are not synonymous and, secondly, that from the seventh century onwards the empire ceased to be Roman. This is supported by the way the authors describe the post-seventh-century empire, namely as an ethnologically homogenous state mainly inhabited by “Hellenes or hellenophones”.<sup>18</sup>

### Hellenising Byzantium

Given the perception of Byzantium as a “Hellenic empire”, it is unsurprising that for the majority of textbooks it was essential to demonstrate the transition from a Roman empire to a Hellenic one. This emphasis on the Hellenisation of the empire was more prominent in textbooks from the first half of the twentieth century. However, it has remained central in the narrative of Byzantine history to the present day.

A number of twentieth-century textbooks begin their narrative of Byzantine history by recalling the Hellenistic past in order to portray the picture of a Hellenised Roman East which was awaiting a political centre in order to be transformed into a “Hellenic” state.<sup>19</sup> The Hellenic character of the East was enhanced by the spread of Christianity, a religion that adopted Greek as its main language. As for Constantine the Great (r. 306–37), according to most textbooks, he offered a great service to Hellenism by adopting Christianity and by transferring the capital of the empire to the Hellenic East.<sup>20</sup> For many textbook authors, this was the beginning of the Hellenic/Byzantine Empire despite the fact that it would take a few more centuries for the state to become completely Hellenised.<sup>21</sup>

According to most textbooks, the next milestone in the process of Hellenisation was the year 395, when the empire was divided between the two sons of Theodosius I (r. 379–95). The creation in this way of the eastern Roman Empire allowed the Hellenic element to become prominent, since the Greek-speaking East was institutionally separated from the Latin-speaking West. For this reason, this date is viewed by the majority of textbook authors (especially those writing prior to the 1950s) as the secure beginning of the Hellenic/Byzantine Empire.<sup>22</sup> For many authors, the first piece of evidence for the Hellenisation of the empire was the establishment of the *Pandidakterion* (a higher education institution) in Constantinople in 425, where the Greek chairs outnumbered the Latin ones.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, authors of the first half of the twentieth century emphasise the role of Eudocia, the wife of Arcadius (r. 395–408), who supposedly introduced Greek customs to the court, since she was a “Hellene”.<sup>24</sup>

However, the most important milestone in the Hellenisation of the empire for all authors was the reign of Heraclius (610–41) and the seventh century in general. All textbooks stress the fact that during this period, the Greek language became the administrative language of the empire, the emperor adopted the Greek title “basileus”, abandoning the Latin title “imperator”, and that territorial losses to the Arabs (first inflicted during his reign) rendered Byzantium a more ethnically homogenous “Hellenic” state.<sup>25</sup> Authors of



the second half of the twentieth century consider the seventh century the beginning of the Byzantine period per se, since they deem that the process of the empire's Hellenisation had been completed.<sup>26</sup> However, for a number of authors the final milestone in this process was the Photian schism in the ninth century. According to these authors, Patriarch Photius (858–67/877–86) achieved the spiritual emancipation of Hellenism from Rome, completing in this way the political emancipation that had started with the division of the empire in 395.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Problem of Justinian (r. 527–65)**

The effort of most textbook authors to present a linear process of Hellenisation from the fourth to the seventh century faced a major obstacle in Justinian. He was an emperor whose ideological agenda posed a direct threat to the concept that the eastern Roman state was continuously moving away from its Roman roots, acquiring a fully Hellenic character. At the beginning of the century, authors chose to ignore such contradictions. Adamantiou in 1920, although he noted that Justinian attempted “the rebirth of the idea of Roman global domination”, proudly affirmed that after the Justinianic reconquest “the Mediterranean was a Hellenic sea”.<sup>28</sup> Justinian's ideology appeared for the first time as a problem in the 1925 textbook of Choraphas, who notes that “the 6th century hindered the natural and necessary development of the evolution of the eastern Roman state into a Hellenic one. Emperor Justinian dreamed about the glory of the Roman Caesars and attempted the restoration of the Roman state”.<sup>29</sup> The same ideas were expressed in the 1932 textbook composed by Choraphas and Sakellarios.<sup>30</sup> The textbooks of the following three decades chose to silence the debate, with the textbook of Vourazeli-Marinakou even presenting implicitly a Hellenised Justinian.<sup>31</sup>

The discussion regarding Justinian's ideology vis-à-vis the Hellenisation of the empire re-emerged in the 1960s textbook of Kalokairinos. The author promoted a narrative that reconciled Justinian with Hellenism. According to him, Justinian consciously tried to resurrect the ancient Roman past through his wars. However, with his domestic policies, without realising it, he contributed “more than any other emperor until then to the Hellenic-Christian Byzantium”.<sup>32</sup> Kalokairinos argues that Justinian's drive for a centralised and orthodox empire (which was realised through his religious policies), along with his legislation and his administrative reforms, led the empire away from its ancient Roman roots.<sup>33</sup> In this way, Justinian, whose legislation exalted the *Latinitas* of the empire, is presented as a keyfigure in the transformation of the Roman Empire into a Hellenic Christian state. This idea survives in the contemporary Lykeion textbook of ancient history (*History of the Ancient World: From the prehistoric civilizations of the East until the time of Justinian*) by Antonios Mastrapas (which ends with the reign of Justinian). The author repeats the argument of Kalokairinos, stating that Justinian, influenced by his education and the ancient greatness of the Roman world, strove for the restoration of the Roman Ecumene, which is reflected in his foreign policy. Nonetheless, judging from his domestic policy Justinian was innovative and took measures that “led the empire forward and moved it away from the Roman tradition”.<sup>34</sup> In this way, and further echoing the thought of Kalokairinos, Justinian played (contrary to his own intentions) a crucial role in the Byzantinisation of the empire, which in all textbooks signifies the process of becoming less Roman and more Hellenic.

It is pertinent to add a final remark concerning the reception of Justinian in school textbooks. A significant number of textbook authors argue that Justinian bequeathed to his successors an empire that was overstretched and financially ruined.<sup>35</sup> These conditions, according to this narrative, brought the extensive territorial losses of the seventh century, which rendered the empire completely Hellenic. It is another way to link Justinian to the Hellenisation of the empire. The prevailing view, therefore, is that Justinian's vision to restore the "ancient Roman state" was destined to fail. The future of the empire was Hellenic, and it was inevitable.

### **Terminology and Periodisation**

The discussion above raises two important and interconnected issues: the chronological definition of the Byzantine Empire (which entails a definition of the Byzantine Empire) and the terminology used to describe the state as well as its culture and inhabitants. A significant number of textbooks (but not all of them) mention in their introduction that the terms "Byzantine" and "Byzantine empire" are invented terms, the product of modern scholarship. The inhabitants of the empire identified as "Romaioi", and they understood their state as "Roman".<sup>36</sup> Authors of textbooks from the first half of the twentieth century, however, comment on this information to the effect that in reality these "Romaioi" were Hellenes and so was their state.<sup>37</sup> These authors tend to use the ethnonyms "Hellene/Hellenic" and "Byzantine" interchangeably in relation to the empire and its inhabitants, while from the 1950s onwards the term "Byzantine" gradually prevails. In either case, the ethnonym "Roman" is mostly absent from the narrative of Byzantine history throughout the century (especially regarding the post-fifth-century empire).

For example, the state and its armies under Justinian are labelled "Hellenic" by most textbook authors of the first half of the twentieth century,<sup>38</sup> whereas from the mid-twentieth century, one notices that they are referred to as "Byzantine".<sup>39</sup> They are hardly ever called "(Eastern) Roman". This choice of terminology creates the following paradox: despite the narrative of a gradual Hellenisation/Byzantinisation of the Roman Empire, one notes that the use of the ethnonym Roman disappears prematurely from the textbooks (with discrepancies between authors nonetheless) even at the beginning of this process.

This brings us to the discussion concerning the chronological definition of the Byzantine Empire, which can be described more accurately as the debate regarding when one can arbitrarily start calling the Roman Empire "Byzantine". Dionysios Stathakopoulos in his *Short history of the Byzantine Empire* (2014) has emphasised the difficulty of this debate by stating that one can be certain about the end of Byzantium (1453) but not about its beginning.<sup>40</sup> As discussed above, both the years 330 and 395 have been proposed as the beginning of Byzantine history. On the other hand, the seventh century, which allegedly brought the complete Hellenisation of the empire, has been seen by textbook authors writing after 1950 as the beginning of Byzantine history per se. The period from the fourth to the sixth century, labelled the "πρωτοβυζαντινή" (early Byzantine) period, is according to these textbooks a period when the empire was still in transition from a Roman to a Byzantine state. It should be noted that twenty-first century textbook authors placed an even greater emphasis on the developments of the seventh century, which they envisaged as the end of Roman history.<sup>41</sup> It is perhaps not a coincidence that the current Lykeion textbook of Kostas Baroutas, Ioannis Dimitroukas and Thoukydidis Ioannou, *History of the Medieval and Early Modern*

*World 565-1815, commences its narrative of the history of the Middle Ages with the late-sixth-century empire.*<sup>42</sup>

One observes that over time there has been an increasing tendency to accentuate the Hellenisation of the empire in the seventh century. This trend links the term “Byzantium” to the process of the Hellenisation of the eastern Roman Empire, downplaying its institutional continuity from Rome. Authors in the second half of the twentieth century who refrained from using the terms “Hellene/Hellenic” in relation to the empire, preferring the term “Byzantine” instead, still put forward an equally strong association of Byzantium with Hellenism. Therefore, despite the transition from “Hellenic” to “Byzantine”, the Roman-ness of the empire continued to be denied. This reinforces my previous assessment that in these textbooks the term “Byzantine” is not synonymous with “eastern Roman”, but rather functions as a descriptor of de-romanisation.

This brief account of the reception of Byzantium and its Roman-ness in secondary education in Greece in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has reaffirmed the conviction of those scholars who argue that the term “Byzantine” has contributed to the systematic undermining of the Roman-ness of the empire of Constantinople. We have seen that the textbooks, despite their evolution, remained firm regarding the nature of the eastern Roman Empire: it was a political entity that evolved away from its Roman roots into a Christian Hellenic empire. The term “Byzantine”, with which the authors of the second half of the twentieth century replaced the terms “Hellene/Hellenic” (favoured by the authors of the first half of the century), does not reflect a change of attitude towards the Roman-ness of the empire, quite the opposite. These authors promoted a strong association of the adjective “Byzantine” with the perceived Hellenisation of the empire in the seventh century, when they deemed that the last remnants of the empire’s Roman past vanished. In this way, the empire is considered fully Byzantine, only after it had supposedly ceased to be Roman and succumbed to Hellenism.

## Notes

- 1 Kaldellis 2021: 349–67; Stouraitis 2022: 19–47.
- 2 Kaldellis 2021: 351–7.
- 3 Kaldellis 2021: 357; Stouraitis 2022: 28–30.
- 4 Kaldellis understands that this process had been completed at the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas Stouraitis places the final stages of this process in the 1960s, highlighting the influence of the works of Jenkins and Mango: Kaldellis 2021: 366; Stouraitis 2022: 31–3.
- 5 Due to the limitations of this study, I have only considered textbooks by Greek authors which I deem to have been influential, either because the textbooks enjoyed multiple re-editions or because their authors produced more than one textbook. For an exhaustive list of secondary-education textbooks: Sophianopoulou 2022: 577–606.
- 6 For a detailed account of the evolution of the teaching of Byzantine history in secondary education: Sophianopoulou 2022: 38–49 and 63.
- 7 On the authors of Byzantine history textbooks: Sophianopoulou 2022: 571–6.
- 8 Adamantiou 1920: 3.
- 9 Adamantiou 1920: 6.
- 10 Theodoridis and Lazarou 1946: 12.
- 11 Vourazeli-Marinakou 1951: 9.
- 12 Sophianopoulou 2022: 47–8.
- 13 Kalokairinos 1982: 144.
- 14 Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 110.
- 15 Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 6.

- 16 Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 6.
- 17 Baroutas, Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 7.
- 18 Baroutas, Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 14.
- 19 Adamantiou 1920: 7–8; Choraphas 1925: 3–6; Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 67; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 16, 108.
- 20 Amantos 1914: 3–5; Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 61; Theodoridis and Lazarou 1946: 12; Vourazeli-Marinakou 1951: 17; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 92; Kalokairinos 1982: 145–6.
- 21 Adamantiou 1920: 27; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 85, 92; Mastrapas 2023: 240; Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 7–9.
- 22 Brachnos 1909: 99; Adamantiou 1920: 21; Choraphas 1925: 3–4; Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 67–8; Theodoridis and Lazarou 1946: 15; Vourazeli-Marinakou 1951: 22.
- 23 Brachnos 1909: 100; Mastrapas 2023: 249; Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 11.
- 24 Brachnos 1909: 100; Amantos 1914: 7.
- 25 Amantos 1914: 24–9; Adamantiou 1920: 96; Choraphas 1925: 27; Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 108; Theodoridis and Lazarou 1946: 63–4; Vourazeli-Marinakou 1951: 51; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 188; Kalokairinos 1982: 221; Baroutas, Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 14; Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 19–21, 32.
- 26 Vourazeli-Marinakou, 1951: 9; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 5; Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 20.
- 27 Adamantiou 1920: 128–9; Choraphas 1925: 123; Vourazeli-Marinakou 1951: 146; Kalokairinos 1982: 252.
- 28 Adamantiou 1920: 54 and 67, respectively.
- 29 Choraphas 1925: 17.
- 30 Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 77.
- 31 Vourazeli-Marinakou 1951: 36, “Justinian came from Macedonia to Constantinople and received Hellenic and Christian education”.
- 32 Kalokairinos 1982: 169.
- 33 Kalokairinos, 1982: 169–74.
- 34 Mastrapas 2023: 256.
- 35 Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 82–3; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 139; Kalokairinos 1982: 166 and 174–5; Mastrapas 2023: 258; Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 16–8.
- 36 Amantos 1914: 3–5; Adamantiou 1920: 31; Choraphas 1925: 3–4; Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 67–8; Theodoridis and Lazarou 1946: 64; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 107; Baroutas, Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 7; Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 6.
- 37 Amantos 1914: 3–5; Adamantiou 1920: 31; Choraphas 1925: 3–4; Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 67–8; Theodoridis and Lazarou 1946: 64.
- 38 Amantos 1914: 17; Adamantiou 1920: 54; Choraphas 1925: 20; Choraphas and Sakellarios 1932: 82.
- 39 Vourazeli-Marinakou 1951: 42–3; Orphanoudakis, Theochari and Tsaktsiras 1978: 133–4; Kalokairinos 1982: 168; Mastrapas 2023: 17.
- 40 Stathakopoulos 2014: 3.
- 41 Dimitroukas and Ioannou 2023: 20.
- 42 See the relevant comment of Sophianopoulou: Sophianopoulou 2022: 63.

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# CHAINED TO THE BARBARIAN

## Byzantium in English-Language Fiction

*Liz James*

Part of Byzantium's modern reception comes in the sphere of "popular culture", ranging from board games (*Justinian*, 1999; *Pandemic: Fall of Rome*, 2018) to references in video games (*Assassin's Creed Revelations*, 2011), film (mainly about the sixth-century empress Theodora), plays (Charles Busch's *Theodora, She-Bitch of Byzantium*, 1992), music (never mind Handel's *Theodora* – 1750, and not about the empress – try Frank Turner's rather wonderful "The hymn of Kassiani", 2019), art, graphic novels, YouTube, podcasts, even a Byzantine Tarot.<sup>1</sup> My focus here, however, is on the written word and specifically historical fiction in English.<sup>2</sup> These stories provide a very particular snapshot of popular perceptions of the Byzantine world and offer us a means of exploring the ways in which that perception has both changed and remained constant over a period of some 150 years.<sup>3</sup>

"Historical fiction" is essentially a story in which a fictional plot takes place among real historical events. Within that broad categorisation, several subsets have been proposed, including neo-historical fiction, alternative history, historical fantasy, historical romance, historical mysteries, fictional biographies and children's historical fiction.<sup>4</sup> There are also debates about how historically accurate historical fiction needs to be, but there is an increasing awareness of what historical novels can tell us beyond the question of what is true to the historic period of the book, including what such novels tell us about our own preconceptions and concerns with the past.<sup>5</sup> Fiction about Byzantium has not been discussed, as far as I can see, in any of these debates, and space will not permit me to develop an analysis beyond a general discussion of some of the ways in which Byzantium has been fictionalised and some of the broader, recurrent tropes in that portrayal, but there is much, much more to be said.

My first task was to find historical novels about Byzantium and to see if there are any obvious trends in subject matter or period. My survey has so far produced a total of 250 "Byzantine" novels in English.<sup>6</sup> The bulk are set in the fourth century (37), the sixth century (61) and the eleventh century (32). They circle round the same events: the Fall of Rome; Justinian (r. 527–65) and more particularly Theodora (c. 497–48); and the First Crusade (1096–99) (15 of the eleventh-century novels, though the Empress Zoe Porphyrogenita

(c. 978–1050) also gets a bit of a look-in). Twenty-five are specifically about the sixth-century empress Theodora, with the remainder of the sixth-century novels (36) involving Justinian and/or his general Belisarius and occasionally his wife Antonina, with Theodora also present. Many of the novels also share a considerable length, as written as a single, often substantive, volume or, very regularly, as a trilogy.

The earliest English-language novel involving Byzantium that I am aware of is Sir Walter Scott's (1771–1832) *Count Robert of Paris* (1832), published very late in Scott's career. The novel is set at the time of the First Crusade, and tells of Robert II (Count of Flanders, 1065–1111), the knight who dared to sit on the imperial throne of Byzantium, his Amazonian wife Brenhilda, the heroic Anglo-Saxon Varangian guard, Hereward and Hereward's long-lost love Bertha. Set against these gallant, but rustic, heroes are the duplicitous Alexios Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), his scheming wife Eirene Doukaina (empress 1081–1118); their blue-stocking daughter Anna (1083–1153); and Anna's lecherous and cowardly husband, Nikephoros Bryennios (1062–1137).

The novel (among other things) portrays a clash of worlds, cultured and corrupt eastern Byzantium and chivalrous but uncivilised western Christendom, that is still apparent in "Byzantine fiction". In many ways, the story of English-language novels about Byzantium is extraordinarily clichéd. The stock elements, from *Count Robert* to the present, involve devious, cowardly Byzantines, scheming for power and often – especially the (powerful) women – sexualised, and straight westerners, who appear regularly, usually as Varangian guards or Crusaders, to get the girl or girls and then save the empire before returning in triumph to their misty western homelands. This broad plotline is apparent in novels as removed from each other as John Mason Neale's (1818–66) *Theodora Phranza* of 1857 (the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the love affair between the beautiful Theodora Phranza, daughter of the emperor's chief advisor, and Sir Edward de Rushton, the exiled English knight and captain of the Varangian guard) and Carol Townend's *Chained to the Barbarian* (2012) in which Lady Anna of Herakleia contemplates marriage with, for variety, enslaved Frankish knight, Sir William Bradfer in order to escape Lord Romanos.<sup>7</sup> In other words, a "them" and "us" scenario is regularly set up, to give us, the western novel reader, some foothold, some point of identity, in the alien oriental corrupt world of Byzantium.

Further, right from the start, Byzantium was pictured as a world in which sexual *mores* were dubious. In Scott's original text, the Valkyrie-like Countess Brenhilda faints whilst engaged in a sword fight with Anna Komnena. The reason for this was her pregnancy, and so this entire scene was omitted from published versions of the novel as too indelicate for contemporary eyes.<sup>8</sup> But the idea of Byzantium as a highly sexualised society remains, encapsulated in the range of novels about the sixth-century empress Theodora over the past 180 years plus. These reach from the prissy to the prurient. Sir Henry Pottinger's (1789–1856) prim three-volume tome, *Blue and Green, or The Gift of God. A Romance of Old Constantinople*, first published in 1879, is one of the first. It opens cheerfully enough: "One Sunday morning in the Year of our Lord 514...", but from this point, it is all downhill. The year of our Lord 514 is a time when, according to Pottinger, "the eastern empire was approaching the lowest stage of that degradation from which, under the rule of Justinian, it recovered for a brief period": "[e]ffeminacy and ultra-refinement walked hand in hand with brutality and ostentation. The corruption of morals extended through all ranks of society".<sup>9</sup> His Theodora is "in many respects opposed to the traditional one as rendered by Gibbon on the evidence of



Procopius”. She is “the victim of circumstances”, a woman with a “nobler side to her nature”. As Pottinger says of her,

Poor Theodora! I confess to great sympathy for her, and were I not cheered by the knowledge that she will at last emerge triumphantly out of all her troubles and wipe away the degradation of her early days by her subsequent career, I should be doleful of the end of the book, which contains the outlines of that degradation.<sup>10</sup>

All the sympathy in the world does not prevent him from exploring that degradation, however. In John Masefield’s (1878–1967) equally prudish *Basilissa* (1940), Theodora restores the sacredness of the stage and the ballet, a noble art form approved of by the Patriarch. She meets the young Justinian, nicknamed Prinny, and the two spend many a pleasant hour discussing theology.<sup>11</sup>

But by the 1950s,

Theodora had a woman’s mind, desires, necessities and viewpoints... Her errors and weaknesses as well as her strengths and achievements are attributable to the essential femaleness in her. Woman is first and primarily the guardian of the race, the giver of life. Since, in renewing the race, she approaches each time the raw primitive frontiers of death, she is, underneath all her frivolities, froths and frills, more unswerving, more remorseless in the pursuit of the end of her being than any man.<sup>12</sup>

And in 2018,

A beautiful courtesan famed for her interpretation of the myth “Leda and the Swan” dances in the Imperial Palaces; stirring hearts, rousing desires, and indelibly changing the course of history ... Now the story of Theodora – the least understood and most maligned woman of antiquity – has been recast to give her a voice.<sup>13</sup>

Douglas A. Burton’s *Far Away Bird* (2020)

delves into the complex mind of Byzantine Empress Theodora. ... From the brothels to the bathhouses, from the theatres to the palaces, Theodora learns to let go of the people she loves most and embrace her own exploitation. ... Empress Theodora is one of the most misunderstood women of history. *Far Away Bird* immerses the reader into a corrupt underworld that history classrooms tend to keep at arms-length. ... *Far Away Bird* reconciles one woman’s notorious past to the making of an empress.<sup>14</sup>

Even in *The Rest is History* (2023), the book of the popular podcast by Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook, Theodora is portrayed as a winner of *Love Island*, paired with former British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947).<sup>15</sup> As we know, sex sells. And so no Theodora novel ever depicts her as the pious daughter of a Monophysite priest from Beirut, as Michael the Syrian (1126–99) did, and none see her as a virtuous woolworker and Monophysite saint.<sup>16</sup>

This brings us to sources, where once more, a level of consistency is apparent. At least one of Scott’s sources for *Count Robert*, though appropriate for the time, continues to exert a pull on portraits of Byzantium, though perhaps now at fourth- or fifth-hand: Edward

Gibbon's (1737–94) *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), which had little time for the Byzantine Empire.<sup>17</sup> Unsurprisingly, one of Pottinger's chief sources was Gibbon; another was that most popular of Byzantine resources for the sixth century, Procopius' (c. 500–65) *Secret History*.<sup>18</sup> In the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels, the Gibbonesque elements feel more immediate; in novels written closer to the present (2024), it is unlikely that Gibbon is still required reading and Procopius, usually undiluted by Fisher and Cameron, dominates.<sup>19</sup> Pottinger in 1879 defended his Theodora: "The tale of Theodora's excessive depravity in her earlier years, unrelieved by any redeeming qualities or circumstances, rests entirely on Procopius' libel ... She elevated herself to be the fit consort of a disciplinarian ... like Justinian". In 2018, Carol Strickland's blurb for *The Eagle and the Swan* claimed that "In his *Secret History* the era's official historian Procopius vilified Theodora as immoral and sexually depraved".<sup>20</sup> Different centuries, same strategy: Procopius was wrong and libelled Theodora but there must be something in it, and so there is licence to include as much sex as an author chooses.

A few words about other works of Byzantine historical fiction. Is it surprising that Justinian is never the hero figure in the "Theodora" novels? In the words of Paul Wellman's *The Female City* (1954), "This grave injustice has been done by history: though Justinian, far her inferior in mind and spirit, has come down to us as 'the Great', the only title given to Theodora is 'the Notorious'".<sup>21</sup> If there is a hero, it is the western outsider. Belisarius in several novels: "strong, brave and staunch as a thorough-bred" according to Pottinger; "a tall fair man of Germanic origin" in Kathleen Lindsay's *Theodora* (1964). Inevitably, in many novels, Theodora has an affair with him. Elsewhere, Masfield introduces Count Atorios from Britain, "a most unusual man, in whom courage and beauty balanced and made something divine", and in James Wellard's *You with the roses* (1966), Theodora is exiled with her lover Julian (a handsome British prisoner, an envoy of King Arthur, huge and fair with splendid arms and legs).<sup>22</sup> Even in Robert Graves' *Count Belisarius* (1938), a notable exception to the general standard of "Byzantine" fiction, Belisarius is an outsider to Byzantine society and the narrator, the eunuch Eugenius, is, despite his name, the kidnapped son of a British chieftain.<sup>23</sup>

Although she dominates "Byzantine" novels, Theodora is not the only empress fortunate enough to gain a place in popular fiction. The empress Eirene (752–803), who restored the icons, also pops up from time to time. She features in two novels with distressingly similar plots – insofar as the fiction goes; the actual history employed by the novelists is rather more variable. In 1912, as empress, Eirene falls for a Scandinavian adventurer who joins the Varangian guard and loves another and is persecuted for it by her and helps to depose her (this is Rider Haggard's (1856–1925) *The Wanderer's Necklace*). Some 70 years later, in 1984, she falls for a Frankish adventurer who joins the Varangian guard and loves another and is persecuted for it by her and helps to depose her (Cecelia Holland's *The Belt of Gold*). No mention of icons or of Emperor Constantine VI (771–97). He, however, gets his turn in *Count No Man Happy: A Byzantine Fantasy* by Paul Kastellanos (2011), a fictionalised biography of Constantine VI, who is comforted in his dreams by Beth, a mid-twentieth-century model based on the 1950s model Bettie Page.<sup>24</sup>

Eirene's fate of love for a Scandinavian freebooter awaits a different empress in Michael Ennis' 1989 bonkbuster, *Byzantium*, which revolves around the torridly tedious, but ultimately unconsummated, affair between the ageing and desperate Empress Zoe (978–1050) and the heroic Varangian guard, Harald Hardrada, who, inevitably, loves another and dies bravely in a battle somewhere in Yorkshire.<sup>25</sup> There is something slightly ludicrous from

an historic perspective about this continual line of Scandinavians entering the Varangian guard and having their wicked ways with the various empresses. Some small variety in life is offered to other empresses in other novels. Emperor Leo III's (675–741) wife, Anthusa Maria, is the nominal heroine of William Stearns Davis' 1924 novel, *The beauty of the purple*. Virtuous but kidnapped, she spends much of the plot being rescued from evil scheming eunuchs by Leo the Isaurian and his trusty sidekick, the red-haired Breton, Fergal, when the pair can tear themselves away from the Avar siege of Constantinople and their heroic defence of the city. And Theophano in Frederic Harrison's (1831–1923) novel of that title, published in 1904 and dedicated to J.B. Bury, has a much more fun time of it. Evil, duplicitous and scheming throughout, she is called the Messalina of her age, the new Theodora, a veritable Clytemnestra, going through husbands, plots and, inevitably, an athletic blond Varangian guard from Norway called Eric, in a desperate, unwomanly bid to keep power. Rightly, she suffers for it. As for the career in novels of the empress Pulcheria (399–453), that can best be described as a rake's progress from nun to sex-beast. In 1907, Ada Teetgen's supposedly serious work of history, *The life and times of the empress Pulcheria*, refers to the empress throughout as St Pulcheria. "She had something of the English Elizabeth's delight for character and might indeed be described as a masculine-minded woman did not that term rob her of the nun-like grace and humility with which her actions were stamped".<sup>26</sup> In contrast to this is Helen Mahler's novel, *Empress of Byzantium* (1952), with its soft-focus pornography and daring hints of homosexual love between Pulcheria and her sister-in-law Athenais-Eudokia, between Theodosius II and his "friend" Paulinus, and of heterosexual hanky-panky between every conceivable couple. Only Theodosios' chickens are deprived of any hanky or panky. Doubtless very risqué in the 1950s, it now reads as turgid in the extreme.

Eunuchs too are interminably popular. Eugenius (*Count Belisarius*), and even John the Chamberlin (eunuch detective-hero of the multi-volume series by the husband and wife team of mystery writers Mary Reed and Eric Mayer, 1999–2018) have an easy time of it compared to the unfortunate Zeno of *Memoirs of a Byzantine eunuch* (2003), who is captured, castrated, sold into slavery and drawn into a labyrinth of sex, heresy, murder and intrigue.<sup>27</sup> Eunuchs are not often protagonists but they are regularly secondary characters, often typified through the usual stereotypes – gross, corrupt, sexually depraved – such as Eusebius in Gore Vidal's (1925–2012) *Julian* (1964).<sup>28</sup>

Generally, the historical novels reproduce the familiar tropes of nineteenth- and indeed twentieth-century popular history, from Gibbon to John Julius Norwich (1929–2018).<sup>29</sup> But "Byzantine novels" speak as well to some of the further categorisations within the idea of "historical fiction". There is a range of "alternative history" novels, in which Byzantium forms a sort of backdrop, to a greater or lesser extent. Harry Turtledove's *Agent of Byzantium* (1987) is one such alt-history, in which Mohammed converts to Christianity and the Byzantine and Persian empires survive into the fourteenth century. Turtledove also created Videssos, a fictional universe that is Byzantium in many ways.<sup>30</sup> Susan Schwartz's alt-history, *Heirs of Byzantium* (1987–88) describes a world where Antony (83–30 BCE) and Cleopatra (69–30 BCE) won at Actium and established an empire.<sup>31</sup> Others, such as Guy Gabriel Kay's *Sailing to Sarantium* (1998), and its sequel, *Lord of Emperors* (2000), have their cake and eat it by creating an imagined Byzantium, not rooted to any particular past. *Sailing to Sarantium* does replay, in part, Justinian and Theodora, but with whiffs of both earlier and later periods than the sixth century and a lot of additional material from the author's imagination.<sup>32</sup> Arkady Martine's *A Memory Called Empire* (2019) and

*A Desolation Named Peace* (2021) are both works of “science fiction” but Martine has said that the former is, in many respects, a fictional version of her postdoctoral research on Byzantine imperialism on the Armenian frontier in the eleventh century, particularly the annexation of the Armenian kingdom of Ani. Her Teixcalaanli empire, with its hierarchies, rituals, literary culture and power, certainly feels very Byzantine.<sup>33</sup>

For historic fantasy, there is Judith Tarr’s *Golden Horn*, set in Constantinople in 1204, with the elf Alf as its protagonist.<sup>34</sup> *A Flame in Byzantium* (Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, 1988) deals in vampirism at the court of Justinian (and Theodora); Keith Topping’s *Dr Who: Byzantium* (2001) features the First Doctor and a very generic Byzantium.<sup>35</sup> Some Byzantine novels move between now and then: Anthony Doerr’s *Cloud-Cuckoo Land* (2021) moves from 1453 to 2020 to the future; Mark Guscini’s *All the diamonds in the world* (2011) is a thriller about a modern historian’s investigation involving a murdered monk at Mount Athos, with flashbacks to the Byzantine empire and the Fourth Crusade; Julia Kristeva’s *Murder in Byzantium* (2006) moves from eleventh-century Europe to the “cultural wasteland of present-day Santa Varvara, threatened by religious cults, gangs, and a serial killer on the loose”.<sup>36</sup> For historical romance, for those who want more than Theodora, then there are Carol Townend’s “Palace Brides” Mills and Boon series, where Byzantium is an exotic setting, with emperors, court intrigues, boudoirs, romance and sex played out.<sup>37</sup> Children’s historical fiction tends to omit sex, whilst often positioning the protagonist as an outsider. For example, the hero of Rosemary Sutcliff’s (1920–92) *Blood Feud* (1976) is Jestyn Englishman. He ends up as a Varangian and then a doctor in Constantinople in the time of Basil II, but does not sleep with an empress or an emperor and is not involved in high politics or luxury. In Henry Treece’s (1911–66) *Road to Miklagard* (1975), the Viking heroes encounter the Empress Eirene, cast as an unglamorous antagonist. However, Tracey Barrett’s *Anna of Byzantium* (1999), a retelling of the life of Anna Komnene from Anna’s perspective, is a rare centring of a Byzantine protagonist (other than Theodora!)

What is most obviously missing from so much of this historical fiction is, I think, the thing that the Byzantines had in abundance: the Christian faith. There is a small group of novels which deal with saints and especially, but unsurprisingly, with repentant whores. Although not strictly “Byzantine”, Paul and Thekla form a popular subject – and several of the Paul and Thekla novels were published by bodies such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Publishing (SPCK) and the American Baptist Publication Society. Clearly, such works are of an improving nature: conversion, not romance. Repentant prostitutes, for their part, occupy an uneasy space between sex and God. Anatole France’s (1856–1924) *Thais* was translated into English in 1909, and Thomas Everett Harré’s (1884–1948) *Behold the woman!* (1916) reads as a re-working of this but with a different repentant, St Mary of Egypt (b. 344). In these novels, whores tend to repent and fanatical monks to fall into temptation and damnation, a trope also apparent in *Hypatia* (1853), perhaps the best-known of these “faith” novels.

Charles Kingsley’s (1819–75) narrative is the story of the eponymous pagan philosopher-teacher who came to an unfortunate end in Christian riots in Alexandria in 415, and her encounters with Christianity in the form of the noble but naive monk Philammon; the fanatical and power-crazed Bishop Cyril and his evil minions; the cynical aristocrat, Raphael, redeemed by the love of a good Christian woman; and the semi-heroic bunch of Arian Goths who consort with the theatre dancer Pelagia, who, by strange coincidence, is the long-lost sister of Philammon. Kingsley’s sub-title for *Hypatia, New Foes with an Old Face* (1853), suggests his desire to compare attitudes to religion in fifth-century Alexandria,

where he depicted a loss of true Christian values (which he defined as a sort of Christian socialism developed from Protestant apologetics), with nineteenth-century England (where the true faith was maintained).<sup>38</sup> Convinced that the study of history was the study of God's developing plan for mankind, he aimed to establish Christianity as the only really democratic creed. In *Hypatia* he created a world in which unity is fragmented into cults and parties and where the poor and the fallen are ignored by all but true Christians. Victoria, the good Christian woman, is as beautiful as Hypatia and as passionate as Pelagia, but a devout Christian who achieves fulfilment through an idealised family life: naturally, Queen Victoria and her Albert wholeheartedly approved. John Mason Neale's *Theodora Phranza*, as one might expect from an Anglican clergyman and founder of the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association, is also about faith, adopting a pro-Eastern Christian, anti-Ottoman position.<sup>39</sup> Neale's "novelette", *Lily of Tiflis* (1860), apparently written for children, takes the martyrdom of the Georgian queen Susanna, and her children, by the brutal Caliph Meruan, aided by his eunuchs, as its theme, producing a story of human suffering in which all die horribly for their faith.<sup>40</sup>

Overt Christianity is more of a feature of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels than of the later twentieth century and the twenty-first. It may be too simplistic to link this to changing attitudes to Christianity, especially in Britain, but the temptation is there. Whilst many of these narratives stress Christianity and the importance of God, they tend to offer a contrast between "true" Christianity, with its emphasis on Victorian philanthropy, and monkish fanaticism and superstition. This both serves as a criticism of Gibbon (who believed that the Roman empire fell as a result of embracing Christianity and frittering away resources on the faith) and as a statement of Protestant values, for the faith of the heroes and heroines is not far removed from that of their authors.

But a novel that engages with Byzantine spirituality, with a worldview in which Christianity was key, a world where it really mattered whether the honour given to the icon was honour passed to the prototype, where people lived and died for their beliefs? That I have yet to find. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395) famously said that:

The whole city is full of it, the squares, the marketplaces, the cross roads, the alleyways; old-clothes men, money changers, food sellers, they are all busy arguing. If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophises about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you ask about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask "Is my bath ready?" the attendant answers that the Son was made out of nothing.<sup>41</sup>

Every man (and I say "man" deliberately) his own theologian. But the passage is also a clear reminder of the huge significance of religion in every aspect of Byzantine life, of the interest in questions about the true faith at every level of society, and, though this is a fourth-century text, it reflects a worldview that remained present throughout the whole history of Byzantium. Sutcliff, a great historical novelist, once noted that she could not write about the Middle Ages because of the significance of faith there, and so she did not.<sup>42</sup> Others have ignored this, replacing faith with sex.<sup>43</sup>

In English-language fiction, perceptions of Byzantium seem to have moved at glacial speed. The Byzantium portrayed in many of these novels is a Byzantium that has changed very little in some ways since the nineteenth century: we have not moved far from Gibbon's

eye view. Fictional recreations of Byzantium have tended to focus on the decadence, exoticism and the “Oriental” nature of that society: they replay the tired old tropes of luxury, avarice, corruption, treason, anarchy, demoralisation, superstition – and add in increasingly graphic accounts of sex. In so many of the works of fiction I have discussed here, Byzantium is repeatedly the other – eastern, exotic and bizarre, non-Classical and unnatural. It seems not to have moved very far from Lecky’s view of 1869: “The history of the empire is a monotonous story of the intrigues of priests, eunuchs and women”.<sup>44</sup> Byzantium still remains a strange and distant empire, perhaps one less known than the Klingon Empire. But why has nothing changed? Why are we still chained to the barbarian?

### Notes

- 1 Frank Turner, *No Man’s Land* (2019); for graphic novels, see the website of Spyros Theocharis and Chrysa Sakei, <https://www.byzantinetales.com/>; John Matthews and Cilla Conway, *The Byzantine Tarot. Wisdom from an Ancient Empire* (London, 2015).
- 2 Many of the poems, plays and films in English about Byzantium are recorded on Paul Halsall’s valuable list, available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/byzantium/texts/byznov.asp>. There are also many fictional recreations of Byzantium in other languages, notably Greek, and I wish that the writings of Panagiotis Agapitos, amongst others, were available in English.
- 3 As sources for the novels mentioned in this chapter, I used: Nield 1911; Paul Halsall’s listing (in endnote 1 above); the novels in the appendix to James 2000; and a variety of Google searches, including the Wikipedia pages discoverable under the titles of “Novels set in the Byzantine Empire” and “Best Books to Explore the Byzantine World”. I also share <https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-best-novels-set-in-the-Byzantine-era#:~:text=There%20are%20several%20well%2Dregarded,of%20Constantinople%22%20by%20Steven%20Runciman>: People also ask: What historical fiction is set in the Byzantine Empire? There are several well-regarded novels set in the Byzantine era that you might enjoy. Some popular choices include “The Secret History” by Procopius, “Count Belisarius” by Robert Graves, and “The Fall of Constantinople” by Steven Runciman. 20 Feb 2021.  
I regret that I found the essays edited by Alişik 2021, especially the essay by Demirtiken on Theodora, too late to incorporate here.
- 4 On neo-historical fiction, see Rousselot 2014, though sadly no mention of Byzantium, which would, as we shall see, fit the exoticising bill to perfection, if not the neo-historical.
- 5 See, for example, the essays in *Rethinking History* 9, 2–3 (2005); Saxton 2020; Addey 2021 on the importance of the “fiction” part of historical fiction. In this context, see also Llewellyn-Jones and Tougher 2022, tracing the queering of Alexander the Great. My own preconceptions and concerns? I don’t like gore (being squeamish), and I find descriptions of sex are usually a bit turgid.
- 6 My huge thanks to Molly Horner who turned my rather ratty list into a brilliant spreadsheet. I don’t claim this is all of the novels, however.
- 7 This is the middle one of three “Byzantine” novels by this author in the Mills and Boon “Palace Brides” Historical Series, the others being *Bound to the Barbarian* (2011) and *Betrothed to the Barbarian* (2012). See <https://www.caroltownend.co.uk/>.
- 8 On this, see Gamerschlag 1980: 105–6, 108–10, and Sutherland 1995, 342–3.
- 9 These quotations are all from Pottinger, *Blue and Green*, vol. 1, 15.
- 10 Pottinger, *Blue and Green*, vol. 2, 46.
- 11 In her biography of Masefield, Spark 1953: 174, Muriel Spark described the book as “the story of a young woman dancer of Byzantium and her historical progress”.
- 12 Paul Wellman, *The Female City. A Novel of Another Time* (1954), 488.
- 13 Carol Strickland, *The Eagle and the Swan* (2018).
- 14 Douglas A. Burton, *The Faraway Bird* (2020). This novel won gold medals in the Readers’ Favorite Historical Personage, IBPA’s Best New Voice Fiction, eLit’s Best eBook in Historical Fiction, Montaigne Medal finalist (Eric Hoffer Book Award), and Screencraft’s Cinematic Book competition. Who am I to judge?



- 15 Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook, *The Rest Is history* (London, 2023), 120–7, *Love Island* being a reality TV show where “attractive young people” are sent to Majorca to become better-acquainted. For the original podcast: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDu5DSQM0GE>
- 16 Michael the Syrian, Chronicle, ed. and tr. Chabot 1899–1924.
- 17 For Gibbon and Byzantium, see Bowersock, Clive and Grabaud 1977; Runciman 1976. For the *Secret History*, see Kaldellis 2010.
- 18 As Pottinger himself explains: *Blue and Green*, Preface, xi.
- 19 Fisher 1978; Cameron 1985.
- 20 Pottinger, *Blue and Green*, Preface, vii; Strickland, *Eagle and Swan*.
- 21 Wellman, *Female City*, 497.
- 22 James Wellard, *You with the Roses, What Are You Selling?* (London, 1966), which, according to the blurb, purports to be a free rendering of the *Secret History*, with some “surprising adventures”. For those who have read the *Secret History*, these adventures are, indeed, surprising.
- 23 In James Conroyd Martin’s *Fortune’s Child* (2019), the eunuch Stephen (this time from Syria) writes the biography of his friend Theodora.
- 24 Kastellanos also authored *Antonina a Byzantine slut* (2012) which claims to clear Antonina’s name.
- 25 This same story is told by Poul Anderson, *The Last Viking* (1980), vol. 1 (of three) and Simon Turney, *The Bear of Byzantium* (2022), volume 2 of a four-volume series, *Wolves of Odin*.
- 26 Teetgen, *Pulcheria*, 3.
- 27 Reviewed by Shaun Tougher in *The Anglo-Hellenic Review*, 27 (Spring 2003), 25, as “enter-taining”, “sensationalist” and populated by “lurid stereotypes”. *Memoirs* is part of a quartet of Byzantine novels, the others being *Theodore* (2000), *False Ambassador* (2001) and *Mappamundi* (2009).
- 28 See Tougher 2008.
- 29 John Julius Norwich authored a trilogy, *A History of Byzantium* (*Byzantium: The Early Centu-ries*, 1998; *Byzantium: the Apogee*, 1991; *Byzantium: Decline and Fall*, 1995). Of Theodora, he noted:

[Procopius’] authority can only be the gossip of the market place, and that, we may be sure, lost nothing in the telling. All the same, such billowing black smoke must presumably issue from some sort of fire; and there can be no doubt that Theodora was, as our grandparents might have put it, no better than she should have been.
- 30 For a list of the full cycle of novels and a plot summary, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Videssos\\_cycle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Videssos_cycle). As H.N. Turteltaub, Turtledove also published *Justinian* (1998) – Justinian II, however.
- 31 The three volumes being *Byzantium’s Crown* (1987), *The Woman of Flowers* (1987) and *Queens-blade* (1988).
- 32 Here the mosaicist hero, Crispin, ends up with the empress Alixana, Theodora by another name.
- 33 See the interview with Vanessa Rose Phin, “An interview with Arkady Martine”, *Strange Ho-rizons*. 25 February 2019: <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/an-interview-with-arkady-martine/> Arkady Martine is the pen name of Anna Linden Weller.
- 34 *Golden Horn* is the middle volume of yet another trilogy including *The Isle of Glass* (1985) and *The Hounds of God* (1986). Robert Silverberg’s *Up the Line* (1969) is a time-travel novel, about which one reviewer noted that if it were not for “the amount and kind of sex introduced” and the “long, descriptive passages on Constantinople”, it “would be a short story or novelette”.
- 35 For all Dr Who fans, I quote the blurb:

Life is cheap in Byzantium. Life is cheap everywhere that the Romans are. ... [T]he Doctor, Ian, Barbara and Vicki arrive expecting to view the splendour of the Roman empire. But events cast them into a deadly maelstrom of social and political upheaval. In the eye of the hurricane they must individually face the possibility of being stranded, alone, in a culture bunker.
- 36 As one would expect of Kristeva, the book crosses several genres. Sebastian Chrest-Jones, a noted professor of human migrations, clandestinely writing a novel about the Byzantine princess-historian Anna Komnene, disappears on a quest to learn more about an ancestor who roamed across Europe to Byzantium during the First Crusade. Detective Northrop Rilsky and the French



journalist Stephanie Delacour, try to solve the mystery whilst involved in an unexpected (to them but perhaps not the reader) love affair.

37 See above, endnote 7.

38 Uffelman 1979: 84–6 and Chitty 1974: 151–6.

39 On *Theodora Phranza*, see Litvak 1994.

40 Available at <http://anglicanhistory.org/neale/tiflis1859.html>. Also see ch. 10 of Litvak 1994.

41 *Oratio de deitate Filii et Spiriti Sancti*, PG 46, col. 557, section B. This is Kallistos Ware's translation in *The Orthodox Church* (London, 1991 reprint), 43–4. If ever I get time, I have a murder mystery planned involving the apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia and Iconoclasts v Iconophiles.

42 See Sutcliffe's comment in a 1986 interview with Raymond H. Thompson:

The Middle Ages I am not at home in. I am interested in them and love to read about them, but I can't write about them, or practically not at all. I think it is because I can't take the all-pervasiveness of religion which has a stranglehold on life. <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/interview-with-rosemary-sutcliffe>.

43 This is not to say that sex did not matter in Byzantium, but that many writers tend to impose somewhat lurid takes on Byzantine sexualities.

44 Lecky 1869.

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# 41

## BYZANTIUM IN MODERN POETRY

### Mythology and Iconicity

*Mark Byron*

Byzantium held a prominent place in the European visual imagination between the early modern period and modernism, yet its significance in poetry was less prominent or consistent prior to the twentieth century. The formation of the modern Greek state in the nineteenth century gave Byzantium a particular inflection in Greek historiography. At a similar moment, Byzantium also offered artists and intellectuals such as William Morris and John Ruskin a model for civic achievement in its art and architecture, which in turn influenced later artistic endeavours such as the Omega Workshops directed by Roger Fry (1866–1934), Duncan Grant (1885–1978) and Vanessa Bell (1879–1965). Byzantinism bore local effects elsewhere in Europe, evident in the Sicilian poet Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–68) who took Byzantine Agrigento as a major theme. Byzantium came into literary prominence with the rise of the Decadent movement in the later nineteenth century, in turn influencing how such poets as W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) and Constantine Cavafy (1863–1933) mediated their Byzantine materials. Their construction of Byzantium as a site of harmonious artistic production suffused with spirituality was based in idealism as much as material historical conditions, in contrast to Ezra Pound (1885–1972) who in his prose as well as in his epic poem *The Cantos* placed great historic value in the Byzantine legal system, architecture, political structures and guild economy. For modern poets as for modern artists, the capital city of Byzantium could function as a place of this world as well as an unattainable ideal world. This range of poetic attitudes towards Byzantine history and culture invites more systematic analysis to show how poets drew on specific ideas and themes in their work relative to other writers and artists.

Byzantium drew the attention of modern poets and writers, often inspiring different responses in artists who otherwise stood in broad aesthetic agreement: the Vorticists Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957) and T. E. Hulme (1883–1917) approved of the geometrical austerity of Byzantine art, while the Italian Futurists led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) expressed disgust at its decadence. Byzantium also served as a focus for travel writing for Robert Byron (1905–41) and Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915–2011), as a source for historical fiction for Robert Graves (1895–1985), Evelyn Waugh (1903–66) and Gore Vidal (1925–2012), and as a context for modern narratives of identity formation for Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) and Rose Macaulay (1881–1958). The strong and enduring investment

of Russian art and literature in Byzantium, particularly from the nineteenth century onwards, is made evident in the poetry of Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938). Elsewhere and later in the century, Byzantium became a powerful icon of an expansive Greek national identity in the poetry of George Seferis (1900–71) and Takis Papatsonis (1895–1976).<sup>1</sup> The following discussion centres upon the modern poets whose work most intensively engages with the history, culture and architecture of Byzantium, and whose approaches to these sources range from visionary idealism (W. B. Yeats) to historical materialism (Ezra Pound) and combinations in between (Constantine Cavafy and Osip Mandelstam).

### W. B. Yeats: Byzantium's Gilded Mirror

W. B. Yeats saw Byzantium iconically, as an ideal centre of art and philosophy, remote in both space and history, captured in his two poems “Sailing to Byzantium” (1927) and “Byzantium” (1932) – still the most famous poems in English on the subject of Byzantium. Yeats never visited Istanbul but drew on direct knowledge of the churches of Sant’ Apollinare Nuovo (conscr. 505), Sant’ Apollinare in Classe (f. 534) and San Vitale (conscr. 547), as well as the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (built between 425 and 450), from his visit to Ravenna in May 1907; the Basilica di San Marco in Venice (conscr. 1094) on the same trip (an itinerary repeated in 1921); and the Byzantine architecture and mosaics in Palermo, Monreale and Cefalù in Sicily from his 1924–25 visit with Ezra Pound. He also read widely on Byzantium, including Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–89), William Morris’s *Byzantine Architecture* (1893), William Gordon Holmes’s *Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905–07), O. M. Dalton’s *Byzantine Art and Architecture* (1911) and Eugénie Sellers Strong’s *Apotheosis and After-Life* (1915).

Yeats also benefitted from Ruskin’s devotion to Byzantine architecture a generation earlier, which prompted Yeats’s famous declaration in *A Vision*: “I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato”.<sup>2</sup> Yeats credits sixth-century Byzantium as a culture where artisans were also philosophers, and where, “maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic, and practical life were one” – an idea he picked up from Morris’s notion of socially integrated art,<sup>3</sup> from reading Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice* (1851–53), and from other interactions with the Arts and Crafts Movement. Both Yeats and Ruskin venerated Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and San Marco in Venice as culminations of Byzantine craft, theology and artistic sensibility. Ruskin’s ecstatic description of San Marco resonates with the concluding stanza of “Byzantium”: the shared use of marble imagery, the union of sea and sky and the implied unity of all aspects of experience.<sup>4</sup>

Yeats’s two poems present Byzantium as both highly symbolic and as materially constituted in the poet’s imagination. “Sailing to Byzantium” developed from a more personal poem in earlier manuscripts – the salmon and mackerel of the first stanza bear affinities with Celtic myth – to the more abstracted symbols of golden birds and “God’s holy fire” inspired by the mosaics in Sant’ Apollinare Nuovo.<sup>5</sup> This tension between the physicality of the natural world and the refined artistry of Byzantium has the sensuous world beat a path to the golden bird on the golden bough. According to Warwick Gould, this image has a tenth-century source in Bishop Luitprand of Cremona following his diplomatic mission to the Porphyrogenetos court in 947 CE, but its provenance was also reported to be connected to Eric Maclagan, the later British Museum director and art historian,

who worked at the Victoria and Albert Museum and who told Yeats about late-Byzantine hydraulic birds.<sup>6</sup>

The tone of “Byzantium” dwells in seemingly abstracted images such as the famous “gong tormented sea”, drawn from Holmes’s *Age of Justinian and Theodora* in its reference to the *semantron* beaten by the church deacon as a summon to prayer, and the dolphin, drawn from Strong’s *Apotheosis and After-Life* where it symbolises the transit of the soul into the afterlife. “Byzantium” assumes a visual theory of touch, turning the mosaic into something haptic: “In this Byzantium the senses merge, going beyond even symbolism’s synaesthetic tendencies to achieve a hallucinatory fervour”.<sup>7</sup> Yeats’s devotion to Byzantine mosaics brings these dimensions together, where valuable material like lapis lazuli is fused at high temperatures to glass or stone tesserae to produce the building blocks for dazzling and transcendent art, as though a physical and chemical alchemy buttresses a spiritual transfiguration or the “artifice of eternity”. The Irish painter Norah McGuinness (1901–80) illustrated Yeats’s books, beginning with *The Secret Rose* in 1927, with icons emulating Sicilian Byzantine mosaics he saw in 1925. The poet, playwright and designer Thomas Sturge Moore (1870–1944) produced the dust jacket design for *The Winding Stair* (1933), displaying emblems of the city, including a boy riding a dolphin and the double dome of Hagia Sophia, continuing a trend for Byzantine architectural themes in Yeats’s book covers and endpapers.<sup>8</sup> Yeats sought to forge a vision of Byzantium into his personal mythology, linking it with Celtic art and visionary poetics and as an alternate polity and society to the fractured Ireland and fragmented Europe of his lifetime.

### Ezra Pound: Culture and Economy in Byzantium

Ezra Pound’s engagement with Byzantium was the most sustained and penetrating among all modern Anglophone poets, spanning art and architecture, history, economics, philosophy and theology, and ranging across primary and secondary textual sources in Greek, Latin, Italian, French and English. This interest came into full force late in his poetic career and is most pronounced in later instalments of his epic poem *The Cantos*.<sup>9</sup> This was at a time when Pound’s encyclopaedic intent came up against the consequences of his allegiances with Italian fascism, resulting in his arrest and incarceration at the end of the Second World War. In *Thrones* (1959), Pound seeks out historic examples of cultures and polities aligning their laws, commerce and artistic achievements in ways that enhance the lives of their citizenry. Byzantium offers two prominent historical phases: the reign of Emperor Justinian (r. 527–65) during which territorial expansion, legal codification and artistic production reached their peaks, and the reign of Leo the Wise (r. 886–912), who codified the regulation of economy and guild activity in *Ἐπαρχικόν Βιβλίον* (*The Book of the Eparch*). Like Yeats, Pound is not especially interested in Byzantium’s role as a centre of Christianity, rather seeking its value in offering guiding principles for modernity: “Antoninus, Constantine and Justinian were serious characters, they were trying to work out an orderly system, a *modus vivendi* for vast multitudes of mankind”.<sup>10</sup>

In Canto 96, the opening canto of *Thrones*, Pound aligns the toponymic and economic origins of Byzantium – “called Bosphorus from the bull tax”<sup>11</sup> – where the etymology of Bosphorus, “ox ford”, indicates its strategic value in trade. In the same canto Pound draws a direct connection between Byzantium and the court of Charlemagne (r. 800–14), namely in Empress Irene’s (r. 797–802) attempt to marry her son Constantine IV to Charlemagne’s daughter Rotrude in 781 – “in the second year of Eirene sent Constans to Carolus

Magnus”<sup>12</sup> – a contract Irene later rescinded. The rise of Charlemagne and particularly his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day in the year 800 by Pope Leo III presented an enduring threat to Irene’s Byzantium. The papacy gave the emergent Holy Roman Empire political legitimacy, and conversely, the Holy Roman Empire buttressed the hegemonic ecclesiastical role of the Roman Church in Europe. Pound’s enduring interest in the Carolingian Empire – centred upon Charlemagne’s grandson Charles the Bald (823–77) and John Scottus Eriugena (815–77), the leading scholar in the Palatine School – returns at this point with the Byzantine Empire as a European geopolitical counterbalance.

For Pound the strengths of Byzantine culture are evident in the supreme aesthetic achievements of Justinian’s reign (r. 527–65): the construction of the Hagia Sophia and the mosaic portraits of Justinian and his consort Theodora that grace the apse of the Basilica di San Vitale in Ravenna. Justinian also codified Roman law in the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (529) marking a critical phase of legal reform stretching from Vespasian in the first century to the *Eparch’s Book of Leo the Wise* in the tenth century. Justinian’s legacy largely rests upon the exhaustive detail of the writings of Procopius (c. 500–65), official chronicler of the empire and advisor to Justinian’s general, Belisarius. In addition to the scurrilous *Secret History* (c. 550) upon which Pound drew directly, and the eight-volume *History of the Wars* (c. 545–53) dealing with campaigns against the Persians, the Vandals and the Goths, Procopius also wrote the panegyric *On Buildings* (c. 550s), documenting the construction of the Hagia Sophia, the city’s aqueducts and other major building works. These achievements were not lost on Pound: “Byzantium gives us perhaps the best architecture, or at least the best inner structure, that we know, I mean for proportions, for ornament flat on the walls”.<sup>13</sup>

Later in Canto 96, Pound turns to the *Ἐπαρχικόν Βιβλίον* (The Book of the Eparch) of Leo the Wise, a legal edict composed between the late ninth and early tenth centuries which received close attention from the historian and philosopher Michael Psellos in the eleventh century before passing into obscurity. Its 22 chapters concern money, banking, food, clothing and construction, as well as guild practices pertaining to honesty, pricing, profit margins, taxation and competition. Pound cites prohibitions against the hoarding of currency and goods alongside decrees for the proper use of scales and weights bearing the Eparch’s seal and coins bearing the emperor’s effigy.<sup>14</sup> Pound quotes from Leo’s text and provides his own translation regarding failure to conform to these regulations – “μὴ τῇ τοῦ ἐπάρχου ἐσφραγισμένον/not stamped with the prefect’s seal βούλλη”<sup>15</sup> – which bore the punishment of the transgressor being “flogged shaved and exiled”,<sup>16</sup> as did selling wine at irregular times or without proper seals. Three chapters of the *Ἐπαρχικόν Βιβλίον* are dedicated to the silk trade reinvigorated by new central Asian routes from China as well as local production by means of imported silkworms. Tyrian purple dye, used for royal silks, was obtained from the Greek “purple fishermen” who harvested sea snails in their tens of thousands. The “fake purple” mentioned in [Chapter 4](#) appears in a visually striking series of glosses midway through Canto 96 in Greek, English and Chinese characters with Wade–Giles transliterations.<sup>17</sup> These entries refer to the regulation of the quality of dyestuffs, where the Greek text directs the expulsion of silk merchants found guilty of manipulating the price of raw silk or engaging in insolence or gossip.

Pound draws upon the Byzantine influence in the early modern epoch to develop major themes in his poem. He saw how the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 and the migration of Greek populations carried profound implications for the resurgence of classical thought in the Latin West, where the influx of Greek scholars, including

Georgios Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452) in Florence for the Council of 1438–39, led Cosimo de' Medici to establish the Platonic Academy in that city under the stewardship of Marsilio Ficino, mentioned in Cantos 8, 21, 23 and 98.<sup>18</sup> The cultural patrimony Byzantium bestowed upon early modern Europe assures its place in Pound's world-historical poem.

### Constantine Cavafy: Trails of History

Born into the Alexandrian Greek community, Constantine Cavafy pursued panhellenic inclinations in his poetry for which medieval Byzantium performed a vital function. He studied historical and literary texts assiduously and arranged his material into a wide range of poems dealing with theology, history, philosophy and biography, inflected by a sense of devotion, on the one hand, and homosexual eroticism, on the other. His interest in the crepuscular and homoerotic was catalysed by the influence of Walter Pater (1839–94) during visits to London in the 1870s.<sup>19</sup> Cavafy also drew inspiration – some of it antagonistic – from the major figures of literary modernism. Cavafy's turn to Hellenism, Byzantium, Alexandrian belatedness and other modes of nostalgia and shades of national identity is entirely at home in the revisionist framework of modernism: “Cavafy has favourite centuries but also a singular readiness to report from, intervene in, ventriloquise and haunt many pasts, historical, mythic, legendary, personal”,<sup>20</sup> providing him with a public façade that insulates his poetics.

Cavafy's complex poetics are reflected in the publication status of his poems: he often drafted poems over the course of several years, editing and rewriting many of them even after publication. His published corpus includes three collections during his lifetime, with a fourth in the process of compilation before his death and classified as “unpublished” poems. Further to this, he repudiated more than two dozen published poems and others were left unfinished.<sup>21</sup> Cavafy came to the subject of Byzantium early in his career in a set of poems mostly composed in 1891 under the heading *Βυζαντιναί Ἡμέραι* or “Byzantine Days”.

Only two of these poems have survived, the poem *Πρὸ τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ* [*Before Jerusalem*] (1891), and the last one, re-written in 1903 and again after 1914 with the title *Θεόφιλος Παλαιολόγος* [Theophilus Palaeologus]. In this latter poem Cavafy concentrates on the last “five tragic words” uttered by Theophilus Palaeologus on the eve of the fall of Constantinople.<sup>22</sup>

The lost poems from “Byzantine Days” are known only for their surviving titles – “Charles the Great”, “The Capture of Nikaia”, “The Restoration of the Icons during Irene's reign” – and appear to examine specific historical events as a critical lens for political and social themes.

Michael Pieris makes a case for Cavafy's informed Byzantinism founded on his reading of primary sources, including Michael Psellos, Procopius, Anna Comnena and Nicetas Choniates, and his careful engagement with historiography, evident in his sustained critical interaction with Edward Gibbon<sup>23</sup> and his reading of Charles Diehl (1859–1944), J. B. Bury (1861–1927) and Constantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–91). Cavafy was indebted to Karl Krumbacher's *History of Byzantine Literature* of 1891 for reversing the stereotype of cultural decadence, and “reinstating Byzantine literature in the canon of world literature



and thus assisting nineteenth-century Greek intellectuals in establishing a line of continuity between modern, medieval, and ancient Greek literature”.<sup>24</sup>

Cavafy’s Byzantine poems can be arranged into two broad themes: his “Julian” poems and poems of great figures in Byzantine history. Reflecting the pattern across his corpus more generally, Cavafy published some of these poems and repudiated others following publication, while others remained unpublished, and others still remained unfinished. Julian the Apostate was a crucial figure for Cavafy: the nephew of Constantine and emperor from 361 to 363, Julian rejected Christianity in favour of Neoplatonic Hellenism. “Julian, Seeing Indifference”<sup>25</sup> illustrates the competition of Christianity with Greek religion during Julian’s reign, drawing on a letter from Julian to the high priest Theodorus who was responsible for the election of pagan priests in the empire. “Julian in Nicomedia”<sup>26</sup> continues the theme of Julian’s devious nature, moving between Christianity and paganism by disguising his Neoplatonic interests. Cavafy indicates Julian’s “raptures over the pagan gods” in the fourth line of the poem, but also his capacity to allay or deflect the suspicions of his father Constantius and half-brother Gallus by returning “to the church at Nicomedia” and reading the Scriptures “loudly and with considerable/piety” arousing wonderment at his Christian devotion. “Julian and the Antiochenes”<sup>27</sup> concerns Julian’s residency in Antioch between 362 and 363 prior to the Byzantine Empire’s Persian campaign, where he restored pagan shrines and criticised the hedonism of the Christian community in a written speech titled *Antiochikos* (“From Antioch”). The poem’s epigraph is taken from the speech, and the poem begins by asking whether Antiochenes are incapable of living without “their daily entertainments” and “erotic predilections”. The Antiochenes have little sympathy for Julian with his “airy prattle concerning the false gods”, his prudishness and “his ridiculous beard”. Daniel Mendelsohn claims that it “stands as one of the most cogent expressions of Cavafy’s vision, so important for our understanding of his intellectual and poetic attitude concerning Greek identity, of Christian Byzantium as a truer expression of the cosmopolitan Greek spirit and élan than Julian’s drearily puritan paganism was”.<sup>28</sup> The unfinished poem “The Bishop Pegasius”, written in May 1920, has both Pegasius and Julian the Apostate test each other’s careful disavowals of paganism on a visit to Ilion in 355 where Pegasius had been Bishop.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the unpublished “Julian at the Mysteries”<sup>30</sup> recounts Julian’s initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries. The poem’s central irony draws on a note in [Chapter 23](#) of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* where Julian’s fear, aroused by light and sound during the ceremony, had him spontaneously and hypocritically give himself the sign of the cross.<sup>31</sup>

Cavafy’s “great figures” of Byzantine history include “Manuel Comnenus”,<sup>32</sup> also known as Porphyrogenetos (Πορφυρογέννητος; “born in the purple”), the twelfth-century Byzantine emperor who oversaw the last great efflorescence of the Komnenian restoration. The poem frames the deathbed scene where Comnenus is dressed in ecclesiastical clothing whilst court astrologers proclaim his good health, “and is delighted/to present the decorous mien of a priest or friar”. Ceremony, ritual and vestments take on symbolic value at life’s end, illustrating the intimate relation between faith and empire. Cavafy also wrote poems on imperial women, including “Anna Komnena” and her grandmother “Anna Dalassene”.<sup>33</sup> In the former poem, Cavafy inserts passages from Anna’s historical poem the *Ἀλεξιάδα* (*Alexiad*, 1148), seeking to rehabilitate the reputation of the Comnenus dynasty as a time of great cultural achievement, and presenting Anna as a singular female medieval historian.<sup>34</sup> Peter Jeffreys elaborates that “Cavafy both admired and pitied Anna and sought



through her to highlight not only the elite intellectual tradition she represented but also the tragedy of her failed attempt to usurp the Byzantine throne”.<sup>35</sup> “Anna Dalassene”<sup>36</sup> depicts a regal figure at home in her family’s status and power. The poem’s rhetoric and stylised tone mimic the hieratic presentation of imperial figures in mosaic, on coins and in manuscripts.<sup>37</sup>

“Waiting for the Barbarians”<sup>38</sup> – composed in 1898 and first published in 1904 – presents the inherent contradictions of imperial power, culturally superior to external enemies but equally reliant upon their existence. At the poem’s outset the court awaits the barbarians, its members dressed in ceremonial refinements as an expression of cultural prestige: “consuls and praetors” wear “scarlet togas with their rich embroidery”, “armlets with all their amethysts” and rings with emeralds and golden staves in a vivid display of decadence. The day of reckoning never arrives; rather, in the poem’s final lines, “some people have arrived from the borderlands,/And said there are no barbarians anymore”. Cavafy’s possible source for the poem is the Byzantine historian Nicetas Choniates (c. 1155–1216) who writes of the anticipated arrival of German ambassadors at the court of Alexios III Angelos in 1196. George Seferis (1900–71) attributes a Phanariot tone to the poem – that is, a Greek noble person under Ottoman rule,<sup>39</sup> carrying an implied critique of Byzantine decadence. In contrast Cavafy’s unpublished poem “Simeon”<sup>40</sup> marks the effect of St Simeon Stylites’ sacrifice and physical privation upon the speaker. The movement between eroticism and historical collapse is given stark treatment in “After the Swim”, an unfinished poem drafted in June 1921,<sup>41</sup> where the yearning for young bodies is contrasted with a memorial for the final days of Byzantium, captured in the image of Gemistos Plethon as the Neoplatonic inheritor of classical teaching. The unpublished poem “Theophilus Palaeologus”<sup>42</sup> provides the perspective of a cousin of Constantine XI Palaiologos (r. 1449–53) on the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The poem revolves on the axis of Theophilus’s declaration on the final day of the empire – “I’d rather die than live”. The line concludes the first six-line stanza, setting up the poet’s assessment in the final line of the following four-line stanza that this truth is an epitome of Greek historical experience.

### Osip Mandelstam: Russia and the New Byzantium

Osip Mandelstam shares with Yeats and Pound a sense of Byzantium as a cultural inheritor of classical antiquity, a *chronotope* providing an essential historical unity across time.<sup>43</sup> Mandelstam never visited Istanbul but had read the works of Procopius as well as Dmitry Aynalov’s *Hellenistic Foundations of Byzantine Art* (1900). His five-quatrain poem “Hagia Sophia”<sup>44</sup> connects Paganism and Christianity in the continuity of classical culture with Byzantium. The second stanza reports that “one hundred seven columns of green marble” were taken from the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. The basilica is afforded spiritual, historical and cultural significance as a forge of human achievement. Its architecture – the third stanza mentions “apses and exedrae”, the fourth pronounces that “forty windows are a festival of light” – is equalled by its artwork, most prominently the four seraphim beneath the dome. The final quatrain declares that these features “will outlive nations and centuries”, where “the resonant sobbing of seraphim/will not warp the dark and golden surfaces”. Mandelstam was familiar with imperial claims for a Russian inheritance of Byzantium – where Europe inherited the western Roman Empire and only later established contact with Byzantium – but he largely dismissed these in favour of seeing the Hagia Sophia as a point

of unity between the material and spiritual worlds, and between nations, expressed in his short poem from the sequence “Octaves” (1933–34):

Certain mosques are alive  
And I can now surmise:  
Perhaps we are Hagia Sophia  
With countless numbers of eyes.<sup>45</sup>  
(Lines 33–4)

Like Yeats and Pound, Mandelstam sees Byzantium as a locus of unity for its constituent civilisations, “a point of observation in the universe from which time, history, and civilisation can be seen in their entirety”.<sup>46</sup>

Each modernist poet invested in the history and symbolism of Byzantium draws on its mythologies and iconicity to further their claims for its relevance to their own time and place: whether Yeats’s idealism amidst a fleshy contemporary materialism, Pound’s quest for an ideal polity invested in the unity of culture, economy and social relations, Cavafy’s indulgence in decadent aspects of Byzantine history and religiosity, or Mandelstam’s idealist historicism. In a letter to the editor of *The Burlington Magazine* in 1908, Roger Fry provided an acute assessment of its artistic affordances as a forerunner of Impressionism. For Fry, “Byzantium represented a lost glory that, reimagined at a distant place of both past and future, could be the location of artistic, cultural and even spiritual renewal”.<sup>47</sup> Understanding how major modernist poets variously navigated such rich resources shines new light on Byzantium’s role in modern literature and culture more generally.

## Notes

- 1 Beaton 1998: 131–40.
- 2 Yeats 1990a: 267.
- 3 Bullen 2024: 194.
- 4 Levine 1983: 30, 32.
- 5 Jeffares 1946: 48.
- 6 Gould 2016: 107, 110.
- 7 Paterson 2023: 130–1.
- 8 Gould 2016: 126–7.
- 9 Pound 1996.
- 10 Pound 1938: 40.
- 11 Pound 1996: 674.
- 12 Pound 1996: 673.
- 13 Pound 1968: 150.
- 14 Pound 1996: 679, 680, and 685.
- 15 Pound 1996: 679.
- 16 Pound 1996: 687.
- 17 Pound 1996: 679.
- 18 Pound 1996: 31, 96, 107, 705.
- 19 Jeffreys 2015.
- 20 Kolocontroni 2021: 64.
- 21 Daniel Mendelsohn adopts the schema of published, unpublished, repudiated, and unfinished poems in his translated edition of Cavafy’s poetry (Cavafy 2013), from which all quotations are taken and any variation on a poem’s publication status duly noted.

- 22 Pieris 1998: 255. Pieris translates the title of the first poem as ‘Towards Jerusalem;’ however, ‘Before Jerusalem’ seems a more accurate translation. Mendelsohn classifies both poems as ‘Unfinished Poems’ in his edition: ‘Before Jerusalem’ (Cavafy 2013: 274) and ‘Theophilus Palaeologus’ (Cavafy 2013: 326).
- 23 Pieris 1998: 254.
- 24 Jeffreys 2015: 227, n. 18.
- 25 Cavafy 2013: 116.
- 26 Cavafy 2013: 119.
- 27 Cavafy 2013: 137.
- 28 Mendelsohn’s note appears in Cavafy 2013: 485.
- 29 Cavafy 2013: 362.
- 30 Cavafy 2013: 290–1.
- 31 The note appears in Chapter XXIII, Gibbon 1993: 416.
- 32 Cavafy 2013: 38.
- 33 Cavafy 2013: 101 and 138, respectively.
- 34 Cavafy 2013: 101.
- 35 Jeffreys 2015: 142.
- 36 Cavafy 2013: 138.
- 37 Jeffreys 2015: 143.
- 38 Cavafy 2013: 192–3.
- 39 Pontani 2018: 277.
- 40 Cavafy 2013: 331.
- 41 Cavafy 2013: 363.
- 42 Cavafy 2013: 326.
- 43 Probststein 2017: 79.
- 44 Mandelstam 2014a.
- 45 Mandelstam 2014b.
- 46 Probststein 2017: 8.
- 47 Goldwyn 2015: 229. See Fry 1908: 374–6.

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## PART VIII

# Embodied Paradigms



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# EMBODIED PARADIGMS

## Performative Responses to Byzantium

*Niamh Bhalla and Dimitra Kotoula*

St Jude, Jude the Apostle or the Apostle Thaddeus, enters cultural history as the carrier of the *acheiropoietos* image of Christ's face, which was miraculously inscribed on a piece of linen, to the sick king of Edessa, Abgar. Later accounts based on an earlier narration recorded by Eusebius in his fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History* narrate this story of the Image of Edessa or the Holy Mandylion.<sup>1</sup> Both an Orthodox and a Catholic saint, the reputation of St Jude as the "Patron Saint of the Impossible" – the salvager of hopeless causes, desperate situations and particularly grave misfortunes – was formed during the early years of Christianity. The celebrated tenth-century encaustic icon at the Monastery of St Catherine's, Mount Sinai, preserves one of the earliest, if not the earliest, depictions of the apostle performing his "mission".<sup>2</sup> Centuries later, in 2015, Florence Welch and her band (Florence + The Machine) performed, as a song this time, the prayer to St Jude – an entrancing evocation of the saint of "lost causes" rooted in the Byzantine tradition: "St Jude, the patron saint of lost causes. St Jude, maybe I've always been more comfortable in chaos".<sup>3</sup> Byzantine performativity has echoed through the ages, mingling with other traditions in ways both enduring and nebulous.

Modernist Greek painter, Yannis Tsarouchis (1910–89), who studied the painting of Byzantium in depth, compared in his *Lessons on Painting* the freedom of the arts of Byzantium to that of a "great contemporary actor" performing a role.<sup>4</sup> Indeed performance and performativity were distinct and indelible markers of Byzantine life and culture.<sup>5</sup> The culture of Byzantium can be defined as a performative culture *par excellence*, from its art, architecture and liturgy to its imperial ceremonial, games and genders. Peter Meinecke has recently argued, imagination for the Byzantines – at least according to Patriarch Photios (ninth century) and John of Damascus (late seventh to early eighth centuries) – communicated directly with the seat of thought and reason.<sup>6</sup> Performances in Byzantium were accordingly improvisational, spontaneous and imaginative or more formulaic and systematic. They varied in nature, as did the range of performative types. This concluding part of the Handbook examines Byzantine reception through the lens of performance. Performativity can be seen as a synthesising and constituent thread woven through Byzantium and most Byzantinisms. Byzantine response is nothing if not performative like the culture from which it springs.



Theatrical enactments, texts, chants and hymns, gestures and clothing, music and miracles, the holy liturgy, and social, political and religious rituals were all performed in Byzantium. Byzantine sacred and secular life, both public and private, were punctuated with prestigious and official or merely every day, mundane performances and ceremonials that resonated and intersected in myriad ways. The visual arts were performances in and of themselves, for example, that coalesced with other embodied enactments. They could point to and comment upon the lived expression of a ritual or ceremonial as the embodied practice of an idea or concept. The personifications that decorate the cloisonné side panels of the lavish ceremonial “Monomachus Crown” are identified as “Humility” and “Truth” by accompanying inscriptions. They embody and imply qualities that were supposed to characterise the Byzantine emperor and that should be practised by the sovereign. This can be compared also to the narthex mosaic in Hagia Sophia where the emperor, often identified with Leo VI the Wise, prostrates himself before the image of the enthroned Christ in a gesture of humility and recognition of the truth of God’s sovereignty. Art intersected with life: the image resonated with imagined performative actions and the deportment of the emperor in space.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, President Barack Obama spoke at length about “humility” and “truth” during the 2015 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC, a long-standing ceremony attended by the Dalai Lama and other international spiritual leaders that has been held since 1953.<sup>8</sup> He described these as the two most important virtues for a leader and their people when interacting with foreign nations and various religious groups.

The embodied paradigms of Byzantine reception have played out across an expanded field of performance types in the modern period, some of which are closer than others to original Byzantine iterations. Those examined in this section are analysed in terms of purpose, appeal, audiences, variations through time and in different spheres as well as socio-political contexts. The impact of such performances on the collective and public imagination in relation to Byzantium is also comprehensively examined. Ranging from film, plays, jewellery and TV, haute couture, and world heritage practices to digital models of Constantinople’s Hagia Sophia in video games and performances of gender, the paradigms presented here offer a unique panorama of the diversity and protean character of these Byzantine receptions.

Citationality in the Derridean sense emerges in ways that are perhaps unsurprising and yet dissonant. Byzantine painting, both its style and iconography, has recently been the subject of a most innovative kind of performative invocation: that of graffiti and street art. “Hagiography is not about reality, but it has to do with conceptual recreations”, claimed Stelios Faitakis (1976–2023) in an interview in October 2017.<sup>9</sup> Faitakis along with Nikos Fikos (b. 1987) came to prominence at the heart of the rising Greek graffiti scene in the mid-1990s, as two of its most prominent and radically innovative artists (Figure 42.1). They had illustrious careers spanning the globe with clear renown on both sides of the Atlantic in particular.<sup>10</sup> Both artists were deeply rooted in the Byzantine tradition of icon painting and were fervent admirers of the icon. They trained as “hagiographers”, though they would later renounce this term. Through their work, they managed to create a solid and intriguingly personal artistic idiom based on “paraphrases” of Byzantine icon painting. In doing so, they literally brought Byzantium into the streets.

Faitakis and Fikos created monumental graffiti and painting-installations that invited viewers to participate and decode their meaning. The two artists exhibited their works



*Figure 42.1* Nikos Fikos, *From the Wasted Love Series*, 2011, Graffiti, Athens and Cyprus. Photograph © Dimitra Kotoula.

at Biennales and in alternative spaces, such as the Building of the Institute of Computational Science at the Technological Institute in Zurich, where Fikos displayed a series of monumental wall-paintings. Through manners, styles and iconographies borrowed from Byzantine painting, they revisited issues such as the dogmatic nature of science, the idolised ego of modern man and the fragmentary, frantic rhythm of the postmodern era. Their background as painter-performers shaped their artistic idiom in general. Although Fita-kis largely moved away from street art for the duration of his career thereafter, his last monumental paintings – exhibited at the Allouche Benias Gallery in Athens in 2022 – are profoundly reminiscent of his past experience as a performer and street artist ([Figure 42.2](#)) Both artists emphatically claimed that they were “just painting” without ideological or socio-political implications or agendas. However, the reinvention of the Byzantine icon as a cultural project in space, a process in which both played a significant role in the twenty-first century, is laden unavoidably with a whole set of ideological implications outside the religious or purely aesthetic spheres.

The most recent 2021 exhibition at the Pera Museum, Istanbul, one of the very few devoted exclusively to this issue, maps the creatively eclectic presence of Byzantium in contemporary popular, primarily performative, culture.<sup>11</sup> A most radical example of this in the twentieth century is the work of Tsarouchis who creatively revisited traditional styles and iconographies to inventively criticise and question the social and political realities of his era in paintings-artefacts that constitute, in fact, incisive commentary. His creation of the iconographic type of the ‘Virgin of the Victory’ – a Mother and Child variation incorporating war scenes inspired by notorious battles at the Greek-Albanian

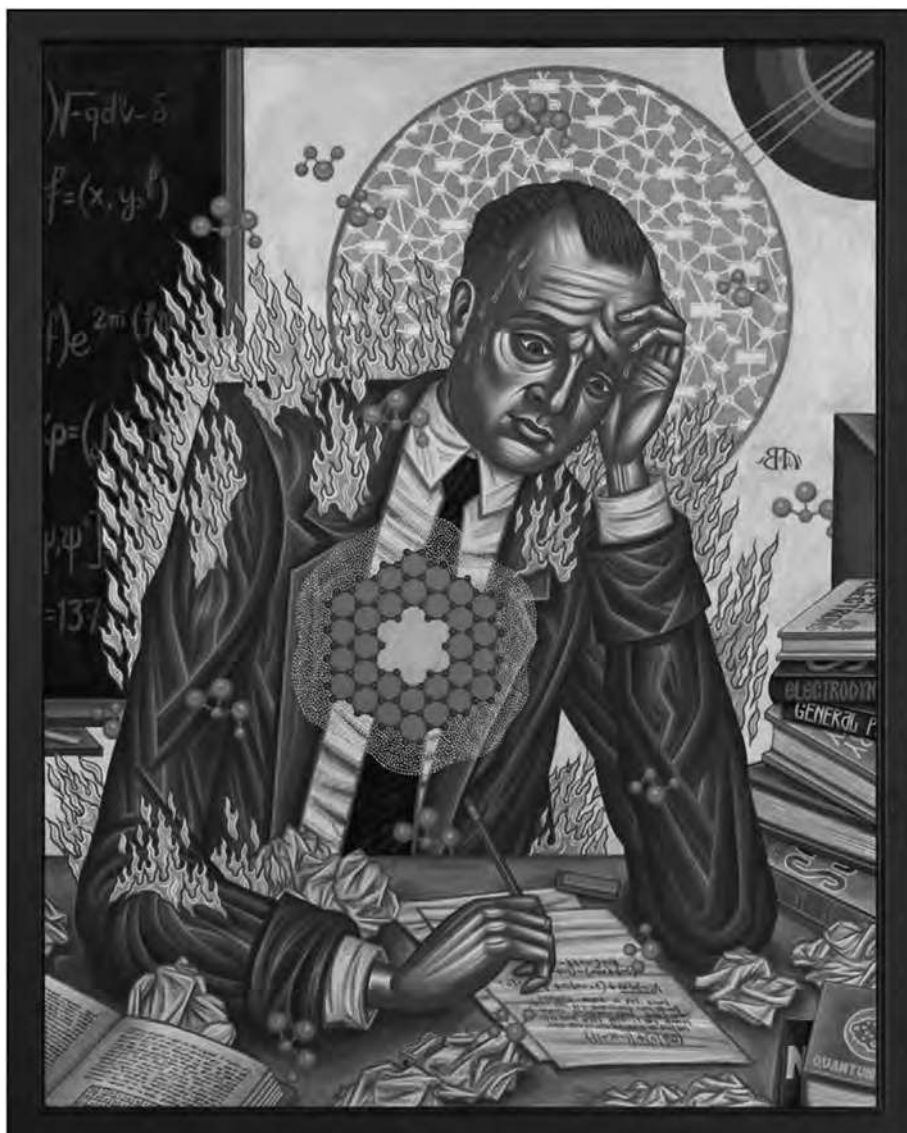


Figure 42.2 Stelios Faitakis, *In agony*. Wolfgang Pauli (1900–58). The theoretical physicist and pioneer in quantum mechanics in agony, 2022, oil on canvas. Photograph © Dimitra Kotoula.

front – celebrates the miraculous intervention of the Virgin in favour of the Greeks during WWII (Figure 42.3a).

Tsarouchis, who served as a soldier himself, had the opportunity to witness these events firsthand (Figure 42.3b).<sup>12</sup> His “Manger”, a small three-dimensional watercolour on thick paper created around the 1940s, features robust, naked male figures as angels. With this bold imagery, the work constitutes a visual manifesto calling for the full assimilation of marginalised individuals and alternative gay and lesbian communities in the then extremely conservative Greek society.<sup>13</sup>

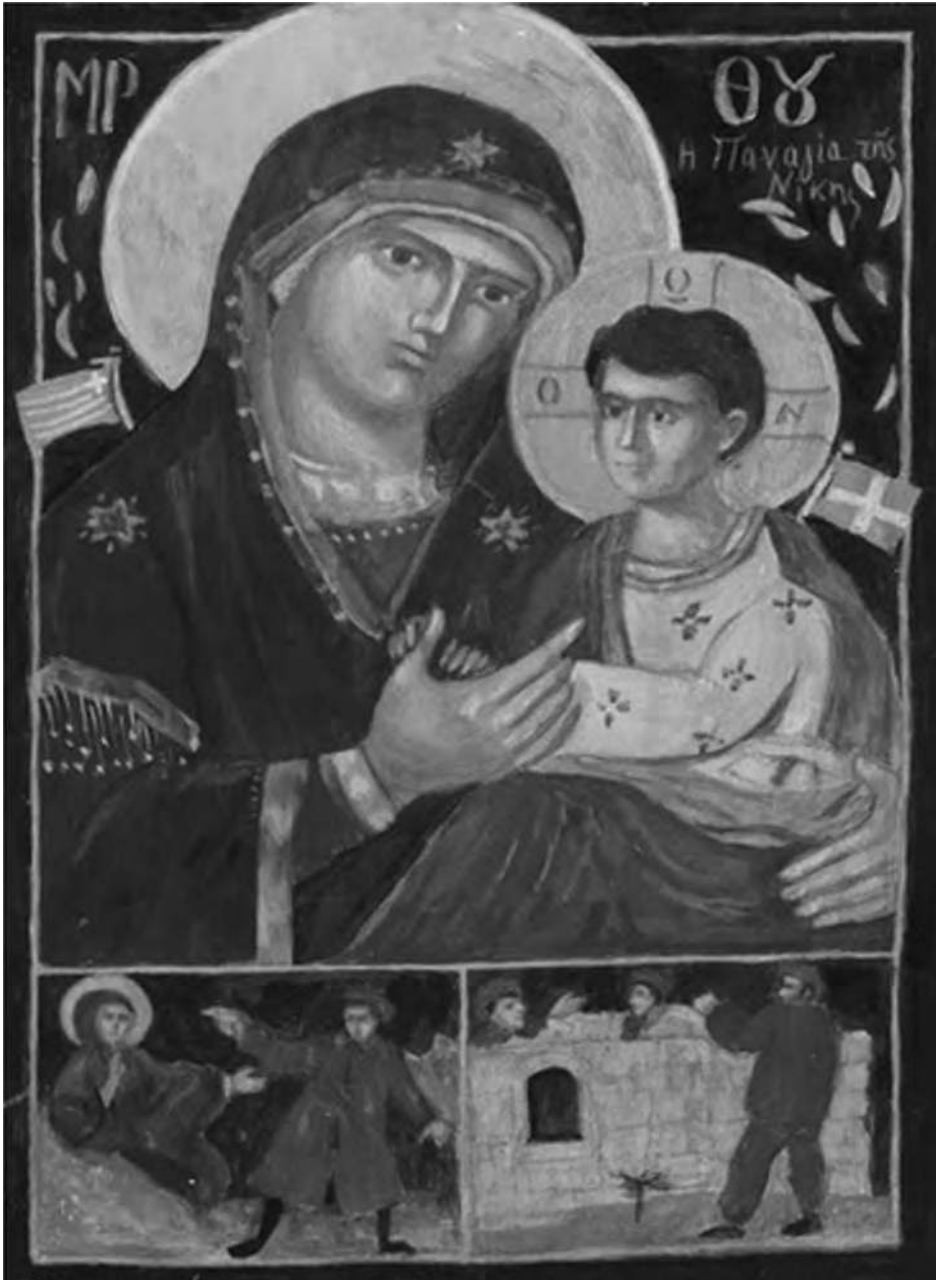


Figure 42.3a Yannis Tsarouchis, Virgin of Victory, 1941. Coloured photograph, detail of [Figure 42.3b](#). By permission of the creator Christos Kaplanis.





*Figure 42.3b* Yannis Tsarouchis with Virgin of Victory on the Albanian Front, 1941. Coloured photograph. By permission of the creator Christos Kaplanis.

The treatment of hagiography as socio-political commentary was later elaborated further by artists such as Rallis Kospidis (1929–2010). His radical reworking of standard themes from Byzantine iconography for the decoration of the Church of the Apostle Paul in Cham-béssy, a commission of the Orthodox Centre in Geneva in 1975, included folklore elements as well as figures and scenes from modern culture ([Figure 42.4a](#)). Particularly illuminating is the majestic scene of the Ascension that decorates the dome: the leader of an African tribe, a young man in blue jeans and a Chinese worker are among the figures included in the lower zone of the scene ([Figure 42.4b](#)).<sup>14</sup> As the painter himself stated to his patrons, it



*Figure 42.4* (a) Rallis Kopsidis, *The Ascension of Christ*, 1975, Fresco, Church of St Paul at Chambésy, Geneva, Switzerland. Photograph © Alamy, CC17WW. (b) Rallis Kopsidis, *Detail from The Ascension of Christ*, 1975, Fresco, Church of St Paul at Chambésy, Geneva, Switzerland. Photograph © Alamy, CC17WW.



Figure 42.5 Poster for the film *Byzantium*, 2012. Photograph © Alamy, 2JJHPRJ.



was the performative dynamics of the scene that tempted him to include innovative details from modern life, prompting him to reinvent its iconography:

It would be a work worthy of prayer if my desire were to be accepted to depict contemporary flying objects in the sky, such as airplanes, spacecrafts, TV antennas, or other modern technological equipment. In so far as we begin from the premise that the Gospel events occur perpetually, and that the Ascension and other Gospel episodes are, for people, events that are eternally repeated, as the Divine Liturgy itself indicates, which is not mere reenactment but a performance—then these scenes could be depicted through scenes from modern life.<sup>15</sup>

In 2012 the vampire film *Byzantium* was released (Figure 42.5). Paradoxically, aside from its title, the movie has nothing to do with the empire of the Byzantines. It takes its name from the “Byzantium Hotel”, the building which features prominently in it as the setting of various key episodes. We cannot be sure what inspired the creators of the film to use this name, though it likely pertained to the creation of a creeping atmosphere of ageing Gothic decay and a liminality of setting. The fate of the hospitality business in the movie, however, could not be associated with historical Byzantium’s fate, as this Handbook as a whole – and particularly this part – proves: the once-thriving “Byzantium Hotel” falls into disrepair in the course of time, while the desperate Byzantines of the last years of the once-glorious empire could not have imagined the vibrant afterlife of their culture after its supposed death. Byzantium was inherently performative and provocative in its time, arousing covetous fascination and agonist desire. It continues to generate and inspire; its reverberating, performative Byzantinisms live on as fecund heuristics even now.

## Notes

- 1 For a more thorough discussion of the story, see Peers 2007.
- 2 For a discussion of the icon in the context of other visual examples, see Peers 2006: 17, fig. 2.
- 3 Florence + The Machine, “St Jude” (from the album *How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful*, 2015).
- 4 Tsarouchis 2024: 80.
- 5 The literature on the topic, a growing field of Byzantine scholarship, is already remarkably vast. An international conference in 2021 organised by the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation under the title “Performance in Late Antiquity and Byzantium” attempted to revisit earlier and address new parameters of the topic, charting the existing literature.
- 6 Peter Meinecke, ‘Performance: True or False?’ keynote lecture in *Performance in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* at [https://www.academia.edu/47385748/PERFORMANCE\\_IN\\_LATE\\_ANTIQUITY\\_AND\\_BYZANTIUM](https://www.academia.edu/47385748/PERFORMANCE_IN_LATE_ANTIQUITY_AND_BYZANTIUM).
- 7 Dawson 2009.
- 8 For the speech, especially after 9:57 minutes, watch [https://www.google.com/search?q=obama+national+prayer+breakfast+2015&rlz=1C1GCEA\\_enGR912GR912&oq=obama+national+prayer+breakfast+2015&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRigATIHCAIQIRigATIHCAMQIRigAdIBCTE4OTc4ajBqNKgCALACAQ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:2461d2b9,vid:XU7RuilNq4w,st:597](https://www.google.com/search?q=obama+national+prayer+breakfast+2015&rlz=1C1GCEA_enGR912GR912&oq=obama+national+prayer+breakfast+2015&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRigATIHCAIQIRigATIHCAMQIRigAdIBCTE4OTc4ajBqNKgCALACAQ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:2461d2b9,vid:XU7RuilNq4w,st:597).
- 9 From an interview of the painter which appeared in the Greek journal *Lifo*: <https://www.lifo.gr/culture/eikastika/o-stelios-faitakis-den-hortainei-na-koitazei-tis-agiografies-alla-den-niothei>.
- 10 Pitarakis 2021.
- 11 Alışık 2021.

- 12 Kotoula (2023) 130, fig. 8.
- 13 Tsarouchis 2009: 150, fig. 158.
- 14 Kotoula 2023.
- 15 From Rallis Kopsidis' unpublished *Memorandum*. This particular extract is reproduced in Mamahs 2020: 84–5.

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# THE BYZANTINE HERITAGE OF CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

*Nikolaos Maliaras*

Byzantine musical instruments represent a significant yet under-researched aspect of European medieval musical history. Many of the instruments widely used in European culture today were developed and refined in Byzantium, where their forms, playing techniques and contexts of use were established. These instruments played a crucial role in shaping western European musical traditions in later centuries. This chapter will explore some of them,<sup>1</sup> such as the organ, several kinds of trumpets, bugles or horns and the rebec, widely considered the ancestor of most contemporary bowed instruments. This will indicate that the connection between modern European musical culture and Byzantine culture is stronger than generally considered.

During its time, the Byzantine Empire was referred to as the “Roman Empire” by its inhabitants, as it continued the traditions of ancient Rome. It preserved key elements such as governmental institutions, administrative systems, social hierarchies, state ideology, a multicultural society and its legal framework. Although the empire evolved over more than a thousand years, the most significant distinction from its Roman predecessor was the adoption of Christianity, which played a pivotal role in its identity and governance. The Christian medieval Roman Empire, with its capital in Constantinople, served as a model of state organisation, cultural sophistication and political prestige for western European rulers. Many sought to emulate its institutions, including Charlemagne in the late ninth century and Otto I, the founder of the Holy Roman Empire, in the tenth century.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Organ: From Byzantium to Western Europe**

The first musical instrument to examine is the organ.<sup>3</sup> Today, it is one of the most iconic symbols of western European musical culture and it is closely associated with the Christian traditions of Catholicism and Protestantism. The organ was invented in the third century BCE in Hellenistic Alexandria by Ktesibios (third century) and functioned through an innovative hydraulic mechanism, as detailed in ancient drawings and writings, such as the treatises of Heron of Alexandria (first century AD) and Vitruvius (first century BCE). Initially, it had no religious connection but was considered a luxury item, commonly found in the homes of the wealthy during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Later, its powerful

sound made it suitable for large public gatherings and mass (often bloody) entertainments, where it was used to signal the beginning or end of events and ceremonies, much like modern loudspeakers in sports stadiums.

With the rise of Christianity, most public spectacles disappeared, leaving only chariot races, which were held at the Hippodrome of Constantinople, adjacent to the emperor's palace and the Hagia Sophia. Over time, the organ became associated with the Demes – the factions of chariot-racing fans who dominated the Hippodrome. As imperial power strengthened and became more intertwined with religious institutions, the chants and acclamations of the Demes took on a ceremonial tone, particularly during chariot races linked to significant state anniversaries (Figure 43.1).

Gradually, the organ became an integral part of imperial rituals beyond the Hippodrome. The earliest references to ceremonial use date back to the eighth century, while by the ninth and tenth centuries detailed accounts describe its role in palace and imperial court ceremonies. The organ accompanied acclamations of the emperor, reinforcing its association with imperial authority to such an extent that it became a symbol of imperial power.<sup>4</sup>

During this period, the organ was reintroduced to western Europe, where it had largely disappeared following the fall of Rome to the Goths in the late fifth century. As powerful



*Figure 43.1* Marble relief depicting organs of the Demes in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, southeast face of the Theodosian Obelisk base, c. 390 CE, showing musicians with water organs and other instruments, Sultanahmet Square (ancient Hippodrome), Istanbul, Turkey. Photo by RaBoe. Public domain.

rulers in the West established contact with the Byzantine Empire, they sought to emulate its advanced political, economic, institutional and cultural systems. In 757, the Frankish monarch Pepin the Short (714–68) invited officials from Constantinople. Representatives of the Byzantine Emperor, eager to honour Pepin and showcase the grandeur and wealth of their court, arrived with an organ. The instrument was used in ceremonies and made a lasting impression on the Franks.<sup>5</sup> A few decades later, Pepin's successor, Charlemagne (d. 814), after conquering Rome, crowned himself Roman Emperor, directly challenging the authority of the emperor of Constantinople.

The adoption of Byzantine traditions continued under Charlemagne's son, Louis I the Pius (778–840), who, around 25 years later, commissioned an organ from a Greek craftsman in Venice. Modelled after Byzantine designs, the instrument was intended to replicate the splendour of imperial court ceremonies in Constantinople.<sup>6</sup> From that point on, the organ became firmly embedded in western Europe as a symbol of imperial authority and a key element in court rituals.<sup>7</sup> However, the political structure established by Charlemagne and Louis I eventually collapsed, along with its imperial institutions and ceremonies. In the resulting power vacuum, the ecclesiastical authorities and the Pope emerged as dominant forces, providing spiritual unity across Europe. The organ, once a symbol of imperial power, transitioned into the religious sphere, where it enhanced the grandeur of ecclesiastical ceremonies. Over time, it became a fixture in Catholic churches across western Europe, accompanying sacred hymns and liturgical services.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, the organ's fate in Byzantium was markedly different. With the decline of the Byzantine state, the weakening of imperial ceremonies and the abandonment of the Great Palace following the Latin conquest of 1204, the organ fell out of use. It was ultimately replaced by other musical instruments, primarily of military origin, explored in the following section.

### **Military Musical Instruments in Byzantium**

In the realm of military instruments, Byzantium continued the traditions of ancient Rome in a similar manner. The types and functions of these instruments are detailed in texts that discuss camp life, battle preparations, strategic defence, espionage and counter-espionage. Musical instruments played a role both during military campaigns and in everyday camp activities. Additionally, they held significant ritual importance.<sup>9</sup>

The Roman army traditionally used several wind instruments, including the tuba, buccina, tibia and cornu. Of these, only two remained in use in Byzantium: the tuba, a large straight metal bugle with a conical shape, and the buccina, or bukinon, a smaller instrument typically made from natural materials. These instruments were essential for military communication, conveying various signals vital for army operations. The bukinon generally signalled an offensive manoeuvre in battle, whereas the tuba was used to indicate retreat, return to camp or the conclusion of combat. In the daily routine of the camp, the bukinon marked the beginning of the day's activities, while the tuba signalled the end of work and the transition to rest.

Following Roman tradition, the military played a crucial role in the proclamation of emperors, and military instruments became intertwined with imperial ceremonies. A key stage in this development was the *adventus* or *adventus triumphus*, ceremonies held when an emperor or a distinguished general returned victoriously to the capital. During these events, the entire army would march into Constantinople, accompanied

by war prisoners and the sound of military instruments. The loud, resonant tones of these instruments ensured they were heard across vast public spaces, making them an ideal feature of large-scale events. Consequently, military musical instruments were frequently employed in ceremonies unrelated to warfare or military life. Towards the final years of the Byzantine Empire, these instruments gradually replaced the ceremonial organ.

In texts describing ceremonies from the late Byzantine period, a distinction is made between “fine” and “non-fine” instruments. “Fine” instruments produced a soft, discreet sound and were used indoors.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, outdoor ceremonies, parades and public celebrations required louder instruments to project sound over long distances. As a result, military instruments became integrated into outdoor court rituals.

This classification of Byzantine musical instruments closely parallels the system used in western Europe during the same period. By the early fourteenth century, western European instruments were categorised as “high” (*haut*) and “low” (*bas*).<sup>11</sup> “Low” instruments, used indoors, included various types of guitars, the harp, psaltery, the lute and certain bowed instruments such as the rebec, *vielle*, recorder, crumhorn and transverse flute. These correspond to the “fine” instruments described in Byzantine sources. Conversely, loud instruments, such as trumpets, drums, cymbals and shawms, were employed in outdoor settings, just as they were in Byzantium.

The exact process by which these instruments became known and used in western Europe remains insufficiently studied, and the direction of influence is uncertain. During the Crusades, western Europeans encountered the advanced musical traditions of Byzantium and the Arab world, which deeply influenced them. However, cultural exchange likely flowed in both directions, with western European musical practices also impacting the East. While the precise nature of this exchange is unclear, it serves as a testament to how music and musical instruments foster communication and interaction between different peoples and cultures.

Illuminating in this regard is a distinctive type of straight trumpet depicted in a small number of Byzantine images. Unlike most Byzantine bugles, which typically have a conical bore, this instrument features a cylindrical bore and a wide bell.<sup>12</sup> A similar instrument appears in Arabic illustrations from the later Middle Ages, which are chronologically later than the Byzantine depictions. It is still in use today and is known by its Arabic name, *naafir*.

It seems likely that this instrument developed from the earlier Byzantine conical bugle rather than being an original Arab creation, as the Arabs initially used only percussion instruments such as drums and bells.<sup>13</sup> Over time, the conical bugle evolved, eventually leading to a variation with a straight cylindrical bore. This transformation ultimately gave rise to the straight cylindrical trumpet, the ancestor of the slide trumpet, the clarion trumpet of the Renaissance and Baroque periods and, eventually, the modern valve trumpet. The instrument gained popularity in medieval western Europe, particularly after the Crusades (Figure 43.2), with the earliest references dating to the period immediately following the First Crusade (1096). It became known as the *buisine*, a name closely related to the German “*Posaune*”, which refers to the trombone. This strong linguistic and organological connection supports the conclusion that the long cylindrical trumpet and the trombone in western Europe were heavily influenced by Byzantine musical traditions.





*Figure 43.2* Musicians playing añfiles (buisines), from *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Cantiga no. 320, folio 286r, *Códice Rico* (MS T.I.1), thirteenth century, illuminated manuscript, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain. Public domain.

### **The Evolution of Bowed Instruments**

The lyre was one of the most iconic musical instruments of ancient Greece.<sup>14</sup> Associated with Apollo, it also lent its name to lyric poetry. Due to its strong symbolic significance, the name “lyra” continued to be used as a general term for various musical instruments, even after the original Greek lyre had disappeared. In many Greek-language texts from late antiquity and the Byzantine period, the word “lyra” appears with a symbolic meaning.<sup>15</sup>

Although the original instrument ceased to exist, its name endured in cultural memory. Much later, it was assigned to a new class of instruments that emerged in the Mediterranean region around the tenth or eleventh century. These were bowed string instruments that originated in East Asia and spread to the eastern Mediterranean and the Arab world via the Silk Road trade routes.<sup>16</sup> Initially adopted by the Arabs, the instrument quickly became known to the Byzantines, who began using it extensively as early as the tenth century.<sup>17</sup> Upon its introduction to Byzantium, the instrument developed a distinct design and method of construction that differed from its Arab counterpart. While the Arab version had an elongated body and a soundboard made of animal skin, the Byzantines crafted a pear-shaped version inspired by the lute, which had been known in the Mediterranean since late antiquity. They refined it into a smaller instrument with a wooden soundboard, giving it a unique Byzantine identity.



The new instrument, which had distinct musical qualities, adopted the name “lyra”, a term that had remained in popular memory for centuries. The word “lyra” appears in Byzantine vocabulary referring to a bowed instrument, as documented in an Arabic-language source: the Persian author Ibn Khurdadhibh, writing in the ninth century, notes that the Byzantines used an instrument called a “lura” or “lyra”, which corresponded to the Arabic “rabab”, a family of bowed string instruments.<sup>18</sup> This information is corroborated by other non-Byzantine sources. Two western European manuscript miniatures from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries depict a pear-shaped bowed instrument labelled a “lyra” (Figure 43.3).<sup>19</sup>

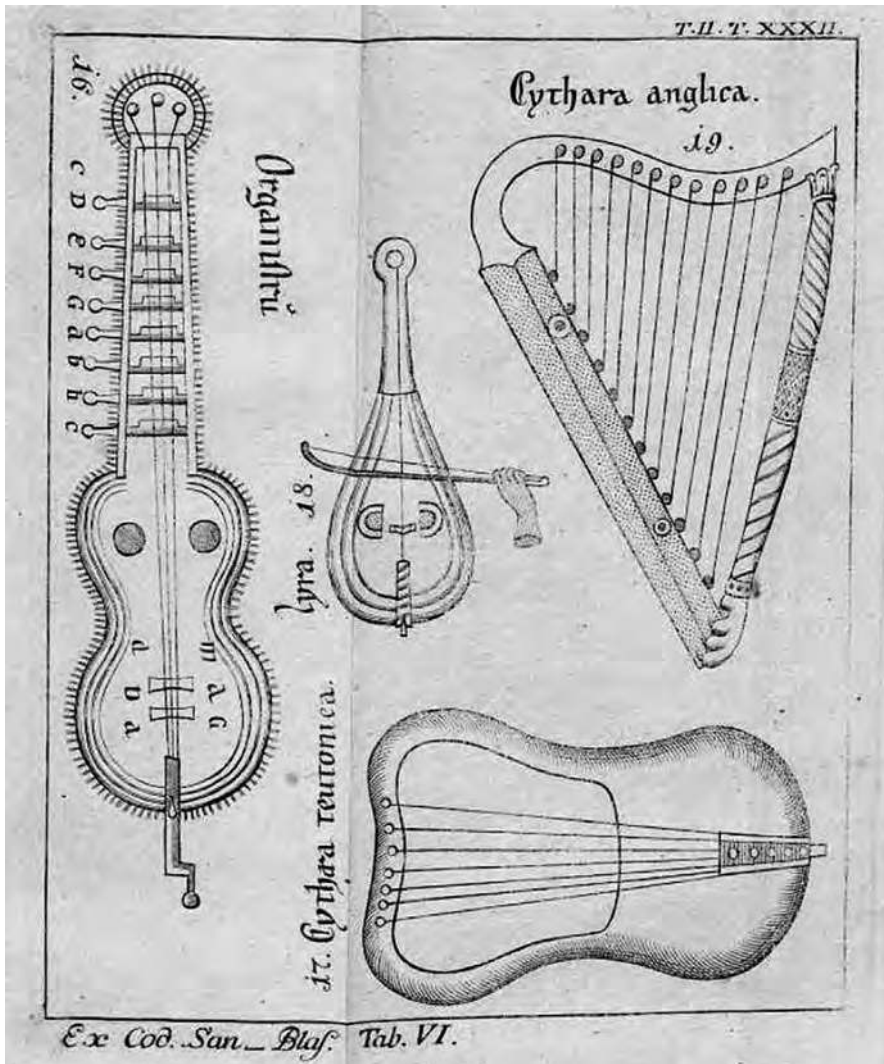


Figure 43.3 Martin Gerbert, drawing of musical instruments including organistrum, lyra, harp (Cythara Anglica) and rotte lyre (Cythara Teutonica), copied from a twelfth-century manuscript of St Blasien Monastery (now lost), published in *De cantu et musica sacra*, 1774, Black Forest, Germany. Public domain.

Additionally, an eleventh-century Arabic-Latin glossary from Toledo translates the Arabic word “rabab” as “lyra”.<sup>20</sup> These sources confirm that the term “lyra” was associated with a pear-shaped bowed instrument. Recent scholarly research on medieval western European texts has also uncovered references to the term “lyre” used to denote bowed instruments.<sup>21</sup> The Byzantine bowed lyre was widely used throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and it continues to be played in several regions today, including the Greek islands of Crete, Kasos, Karpathos, the region of Thrace in Northeastern Greece, as well as Southern Italy and Sicily.

For a long time, scholars studying the history of the medieval rebec, the ancestor of the modern violin, believed it originated from the Arabic rabab, which was widespread across the eastern and western Mediterranean, including Algeria and Morocco. This theory was primarily based on the prolonged Arab occupation of large parts of Spain, leading to the assumption that western Europeans were introduced to the rabab and the technique of playing with a bow through this cultural exchange. However, this perspective evokes the history of the Byzantine bowed instrument, the lyre, as outlined in this study.

The term “rabab” refers to a family of bowed string instruments that differ significantly in shape and construction from the western European medieval rebec. The earliest (thirteenth-century) depictions from Islamic sources – including Iranian and Arabic manuscripts – show rababs with hemispherical resonators and separate necks for the strings.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, their soundboards were typically made of leather.

A particular variation of the rabab, used in regions of Spain under Arab rule, featured an elongated, boat-shaped body, with the fingerboard and body carved from a single piece of wood. This specific variant is still played today in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, retaining its characteristic leather soundboard. Most medieval illustrations of bowed instruments from Arab-ruled Spain emphasise this feature, as seen in the extensive range of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Spanish musical iconographies in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* manuscripts.<sup>23</sup>

However, this instrument was not widespread throughout Spain but limited to specific regions, such as Aragon and Catalonia. In other parts of Spain, a different type of bowed instrument was used – one that closely resembled those found in Byzantine depictions.<sup>24</sup> This instrument is also depicted in the renowned *Cappella Palatina* in Palermo, Sicily, where artistic influences from Arabic, Byzantine and Spanish traditions are evident (Figure 43.4).<sup>25</sup> The most notable similarity to the Byzantine bowed instrument is its pear-shaped body and wooden soundboard with sound holes.

As it is evident from the above analysis, the western European rebec bears a much closer resemblance to the bowed instruments used in the rest of Spain<sup>26</sup> and, ultimately, to the Byzantine lyre. During its peak period in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Byzantium controlled vast territories across the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea,<sup>27</sup> exerting significant intellectual and cultural influence over an even larger area. Based on this historical context, I propose that the early western European rebec originated from the Byzantine lyra, an instrument that was refined and established in Byzantium and continues to be played in some of the islands of the eastern Aegean and the northeastern part of today’s Greece (Thrace).<sup>28</sup> It is likely that Europeans became familiar with the lyra through extensive contact with the Byzantines during the Crusades. This same instrument remains in use in Southern Italy’s traditional music under the name “lira calabrese”.<sup>29</sup> This evidence strongly supports the idea that Byzantium played a crucial – if not decisive – role in shaping the development of such an important instrument in European musical culture as the violin. While Arab influences undoubtedly contributed to this evolution, Byzantium’s proximity, cultural reach and artistic influence were equally, if not more, significant in shaping the instrument’s history.



*Figure 43.4* Musician playing Maghreb rebab, painted wooden ceiling panel, c. 1140s, tempera on wood, central nave ceiling, Cappella Palatina, Palazzo dei Normanni, Palermo, Sicily. Photo by ISL. Public domain.

## Conclusion

My research on Byzantine musical instruments has also extended to other categories, such as lutes and flutes, though it remains incomplete. However, based on available illustrations, it can be concluded with confidence that both the lute family (characterised by a small fingerboard and a large body) and the tamboura family (featuring a long fingerboard and a small body) were widely used in Byzantium. These instruments maintained a consistent form throughout the Mediterranean region. The same applies to flutes, including transverse flutes and single- or double-reed flutes.

We can therefore reasonably assert that most musical instruments used in Byzantium closely resembled those found in medieval western Europe, not only in their physical form but also in their playing techniques and cultural contexts. Ultimately, these similarities extended into modern European musical traditions. Musical instruments functioned as cultural artefacts that facilitated connections between the societies that flourished around the Mediterranean Sea and in northern Europe through dynamic exchanges. These interactions were multidirectional, demonstrating that Byzantium's role in shaping modern European musical instruments was far more significant and influential than previously acknowledged.

## Notes

- 1 For a more detailed analysis of this topic, including examples, texts and depictions, see [Maliaras 2013](#).
- 2 [Maliaras 2007](#): 379 ff.
- 3 For a comprehensive study of the Byzantine organ and its influence on western Europe, see [Maliaras 1991](#) and [Maliaras 2007](#): 267–435, esp. 376–83.
- 4 Most of those accounts are contained in a very important Byzantine source: *The Book of Ceremonies* (“Περὶ Βασιλείου τάξεως” or “De Cerimoniis aulae byzantinae”) compiled in the middle of the tenth century by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos.
- 5 This event has been widely regarded as marking the return of the organ to the West. For detailed arguments challenging this view, see [Maliaras 2007](#): 376 ff.
- 6 For this passage by Ermold the Black, in honor. Hludov. 2520–2525, see [Maliaras 2007](#): 379 and 621 (text 327).
- 7 [Schuberth 1968](#): 81 ff.; [Bowles 1962](#): 14; [Bowles 1966](#): 33; [Perrot 1965](#): 305 ff.
- 8 [Williams 2001](#): 116 ff.
- 9 For a thorough analysis on musical instruments in the Byzantine army, see [Maliaras 2001](#) and [Maliaras 2007](#): 155–265.
- 10 Compare the arguments in [Maliaras 2007](#): 199–201.
- 11 [Bowles 1954](#): 119; [Bowles 1961](#): 68.
- 12 For references to the sources: Holy Cross Ms 42, fol. 33r, from the eleventh century; “Skylitzes matritensis” Ms (Matrit. Gr. Vitr. 26–2), from the twelfth century, fol. 145 καὶ 217r; s. [Maliaras 2007](#), figs. 84, 8 and 108, respectively.
- 13 [Maliaras 2007](#): 185 ff.
- 14 For a comprehensive study analysis in Byzantine bowed instruments, see [Maliaras 2012](#).
- 15 See [Bec 1994](#): 18. Compare the arguments in [Maliaras 2007](#): 65 ff.
- 16 [Liavas 1993](#): 87 ff.
- 17 [Bachmann 1969](#): 33, dates the introduction of the bow in Byzantium to the tenth century.
- 18 For an English translation, see Farmer 1925: 6–7. Compare [Liavas 1993](#): 88 and [Maliaras 2007](#): 43–4.
- 19 For depictions, see a thirteenth-century miniature from the St Blasien Monastery (Black Forest, Germany) and a drawing from Hortus Deliciarum by Herrad of Landsberg (late twelfth century). See Besseler 1931–34: 92; [Bachmann 1966](#): 35, note 69; [Steger 1971](#): 43, 46; Downie 1979–80: 162; [Remnant 1986](#): 11; [Bec 1992](#): 26–7.
- 20 For this information, see [Bachmann 1969](#): 34. Compare [Plastino 1998](#): 116; [Plastino 1994](#): 23; [Downie 1981](#): 326; [Perkuhn 1976](#): 95–6.

- 21 See [Bec 1992](#): 30, 87, 94, 159, 339.
- 22 Find depictions in [Farmer 1966](#): 99 and fig. 94 (a fourteenth-century miniature).
- 23 For additional illustrations, see [Woodfield 1984](#): 22, 23, 27 and 53 (fig. 4, 5, 9 and 14 as well as fig. 3); [Franke and Neubauer 2000](#): 140; [Farmer 1966](#): 107 (fig. 101) and 109 (fig. 102). Downie compiled numerous depictions of bowed instruments; for thirteenth-century examples, see [Downie 1981](#): 496–7.
- 24 For an illustration of a pear-shaped bowed instrument, see [Downie 1981](#): 497. Another significant depiction of an early European rebec (twelfth century) appears in [Rault 1999](#): 61–3.
- 25 For depictions from Spain, see [Alvarez-Martinez 2002](#): 17–9, 23–4, 27–8. Frescoes in the *Cappella Palatina* (Palermo, Sicily, twelfth century) also depict pear-shaped bowed instruments. See [Farmer 1966](#): 59 (fig. 44). Compare [Woodfield 1984](#): 15 and 37.
- 26 [Liavas 1993](#): 90, 92; Downie 1979–80: 164.
- 27 Pear-shaped bowed instruments are still in use in certain Balkan regions, known by various names such as *gadulka* (Bulgaria), *jadranska lijeric*a (Dalmatia), *gusle* (Montenegro). Compare [Steger 1971](#): 47.
- 28 [Page 1974](#): 166–7 discusses numerous construction and technical aspects of the medieval rebec that persist in modern Greek bowed lyres. See also [Anoyanakis 1976](#): 256 ff., Liavas 1983–85: 117–42.
- 29 See [Plastino 1998](#): *passim*; [Plastino 1993](#): 460.

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# BYZANTIUM, DRAMATIC POETRY AND HENRIK IBSEN'S “EMPEROR AND GALILEAN”

*Andrew Walker White*

In the “house of mirrors” that we call reality – caught between what we see and what we wish to see, between our stubborn will and an even-more stubborn reality – the world of art is often deployed in an attempt to mediate between the two. As Arthur Schopenhauer puts it,

Just as the world-as-representation is only the visibility of the Will, so art is the clarification of this visibility, the camera obscura, which shows objects more purely, and lets us survey and comprehend them better, the play within the play, the stage upon the stage in Hamlet.<sup>1</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter, we will posit the dramatic art as one of the chief mediums at our disposal, for reminding us of the limits of our knowledge, the limits of our vision. And where is this yawning gap between perception and reality more keenly felt, than in Byzantium?

Truth be known, modern plays on Byzantine themes have proven to be thin on the ground. The Parisian collaboration of Victorien Sardou (1831–1908) and Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) on the spectacular epic, *Theodora* (first staged in 1884), is the exception which proves the rule. And given the ways in which Sardou moulded the character of the empress to suit Bernhardt’s inimitable histrionic style, we can hardly consider his work a serious reflection on Byzantine themes. For that, we must turn to a dour Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), who produced arguably one of the most potent psychological reflections on early Byzantium and did it in the form of a drama that was ingenious in its construction.

Ibsen came of age as a dramatist in a period defined by an ongoing conversation among prominent nineteenth-century German idealist philosophers, who had argued about the nature of knowledge, and the nature of the world – or as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) might put it – between the mind and the “thing in itself”. The theories promoted by idealists like Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and others had implications for our understanding of humanity’s history as a whole, the history of human thought, not to mention the nature of intellectual and spiritual truth.<sup>2</sup>



The modern-day idealist's vision of history was not unlike those of the theologians of the early Byzantine period, of Emperor Julian's time. For figures like Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), in particular, there was an attempt to reposition the Roman Empire's recent history as the ineffable unfolding of God's will – an approach comparable in some ways to Hegel's attempt to discern ineffable unfolding of mankind's (secularised) intellectual history.

### Byzantium Rehabilitated

Although the eastern Roman Empire had been treated with condescension during the Enlightenment, its conversion to Christianity dismissed as a sign of orientalist decadence, by the late nineteenth century Byzantium had begun to receive more respectful treatment. This was, after all, an era defined by empires of their own, subject to the whims and stratagems of men whose ambitions were no less grand than those of their predecessors in Constantinople. Roman emperors, East and West, continued to fascinate the educated classes, and you were as likely to overhear discussions of Julian the Apostate's (331–63) military tactics as you were his notorious attempts to revive polytheism.

Even Christianity, the universal object of the Enlightenment's scorn, had been revived by the nineteenth century as a serious intellectual pursuit. Judging from Søren Kierkegaard's (1813–55) work, it appears there had been a pronounced backlash against Enlightenment anti-clericalism; one could argue that for Ibsen's generation, Christianity was accepted as a given; it was the form Christian spirituality should take which was the issue.

Kierkegaard's work stands out for its bridging the gap between theology and philosophical thought – an intellectual trend in the West going back at least as far as St Thomas Aquinas' (1225–74) synthesis of Christian theology with Aristotelian thought. And this modern Danish thinker's demand for a total commitment to one's spiritual life, a rejection of what he regarded as “easy” Christianity, created a sort of existential gold standard. Ibsen, a voracious reader, would have absorbed Kierkegaard's ideas among many others, as he pondered how to dramatise and personify the dominant ideologies of his age.

Two factors stand out here, which could have some bearing on how Ibsen might have made conscious and unconscious uses of Kierkegaard's works, beginning with the latter's eccentric writing habits – publishing under pseudonyms, writing treatises like *Enten/eller* (*Either/Or*) which set two diametrically opposed voices against each other. He seems at times to engage in what amounts to Socratic dialogues with himself – and this may have shown Ibsen how to address weighty themes in a creative vein. It's possible to describe Kierkegaard's works as incipient dramas, with various personae asserting themselves here and there, occasionally even bursting forth onto the title page as reputed authors.<sup>3</sup>

Another sign of Christianity's rehabilitation can be found in Kierkegaard's explicit reference to a pivotal figure in early Byzantine – i.e. Greek Orthodox – monasticism: he adopts the pseudonyms of “Johannes Climacus” (St John of the Ladder, c.579–649), not to mention “Anti-Climacus”. Our Danish philosopher-theologian was obviously quite taken with Climacus' complete devotion to the life of the spirit, as found in his famous seventh-century monastic manual, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.<sup>4</sup> Climacus himself did not indulge in fancy, Platonic-style dialogues, choosing to write resolutely in his own voice; but his vision of austere self-denial was clearly one that Kierkegaard greatly admired.

Kierkegaard's apparent embrace of the ideals behind Byzantine monasticism shows how some of the most important aspects of Orthodox Christian theology had been normalised, if not fully incorporated, into mid-nineteenth-century European thought. However much

(or little) Ibsen may have drawn from Kierkegaard's ideas, it is likely that he was interested in the use of a Socratic-style dialogue akin to Kierkegaard's to examine one's inner spiritual life. And the ascetic Dane's use of a pivotal early Byzantine historical figure as an exemplar may have encouraged Ibsen to dig deep into Roman and Byzantine history, when he composed his epic on Julian the Apostate.

Ibsen was not the first Scandinavian writer to treat Julian the Apostate, or to contemplate the significance of the triumph of Christianity over polytheism. Swedish poet Viktor Rydberg (1828–95) had published a novel, *The Last Athenian*, in 1859, which had argued for a synthesis of the old and new spiritual (i.e. pagan and Christian) orders. More recently, in 1866, Danish playwright Carsten Hauch (1790–1872) had staged a play, *Julian the Apostate*, at the Danish National Theatre.<sup>5</sup>

### *Emperor and Galilean in Its Nineteenth-Century Context*

The play *Emperor and Galilean* had a long gestation period from the 1860s to the early 1870s, fateful years which saw an almost complete transformation of Europe, with the revolts of 1848 against European monarchy nearly forgotten and nationalist ideologies coming to the fore. During this time, Ibsen's thought changed as radically as the world around him; initially an advocate for Scandinavian nationalism, the Prussian seizure of Schleswig-Holstein (1866) and the unification of Germany soured him on the idea of a triumphalist national-historical drama. The world he knew was changing all around him, and he – like so many others – was left to contemplate the changes' meaning.

These catastrophic events turned Ibsen inward, towards a contemplation of the individual, and the relative powerlessness of that individual when confronted by world events. In a possible nod to Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788–1860) notion of the world as will, Ibsen asserted that his plays treated “the contrast between what one wants to do, and what one is able to do, between what is willed and what is possible; that is at once the tragedy and the comedy of mankind, and of the individual”.<sup>6</sup> He now sought to create what he called a “world-historic drama”, one which avoided ethnic or national themes and which focused instead on the inevitable struggles between a high-minded intellectual like Julian and the real world.

One measure of Ibsen's accomplishment begins with the title, “Emperor *and* Galilean” (emphasis mine). Julian was famous for mockingly referring to Christians as “Galileans”, reducing them to yet another feisty ethnic faction. The title of Ibsen's play seems odd, since his protagonist, the last polytheistic emperor of Rome, had no intention whatsoever of ruling as a Christian. But embedded within the title is a statement about Ibsen's grandiose vision of Western spiritual and intellectual history, one that encompasses both his own time and the formative, early Byzantine period that defined Julian's life and career. Knowing the full flowering of Christianity which was to come, Ibsen tried to position Julian as a historical figure of grand ambition, who knew the world was on the cusp of epochal change, but whose time had passed without his knowing it. Typical of Ibsen's dramatic method is his embrace, in some form, of the German philosopher Hegel's philosophical dramaturgy, as found in the famous treatise, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Phenomenology of Spirit). This isn't to say that Ibsen is a Hegelian, any more than he is Kierkegaardian; it is more likely that he finds Hegel's scenario a useful dramatic plot device. Hegel is celebrated for his delineation of an ongoing historical conflict of ideas down through the ages, a conflict of *thesis* vs. *antithesis*, with its ultimate resolution in a new synthesis, which contains within

itself elements of the previous two competing ideologies. The German word *Geist* (Spirit) having both intellectual and spiritual connotations, the historical Julian's obsession with intellectual arguments on behalf of traditional Hellenism, and against upstart "Galileans" fit neatly into Hegel's model. Julian's partisanship on behalf of polytheism made him a perfect candidate for a Hegelian-style dialectical treatment, but Ibsen's project was grander than that. The title, *Emperor and Galilean*, posits a theoretical synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity, which simply could not be fulfilled under Julian's reign.

Another dramaturgical layer seems to have its roots in Schopenhauer's refutation of Hegel, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Representation*). Schopenhauer engages in what we might call a post-Hegelian dialectic, contrasting Hegel's vision of a knowable world with a world that can only be known through its *representation*. For Schopenhauer, the world appears only to our senses and is processed into a mental image or *idea*, distinct (in a manner that his predecessor Immanuel Kant would appreciate) from the world itself. The German word *Vorstellung* has its own dual connotation, of "representation" as well as "idea"; Schopenhauer emphasises that our experience of the world, and of history, is limited by our ability to conceive of it – and our conception is always found wanting. Its roots in Plato's theory of forms, one with which Julian was quite familiar, is also significant because it sets the stage (literally) for Julian's downfall, as well as the realisation that his vision of the world will, and of history, was highly flawed.

Ibsen dramatises the Hegelian dialectic of the fourth century in the personae of Emperor Julian (who, like Hegel, presumed to know the secrets of the Gods' will) and the Neoplatonist philosopher Maximus of Ephesus (310–72),<sup>7</sup> an actual historical figure who had published on the subject of Egyptian cult. The play itself is divided into two parts, perhaps a nod to Goethe's (1749–1832) magnum opus, *Faust*; each part consists of five acts. Part 1, "Caesar's Apostasy", traces Julian's growing disenchantment with Christianity, and his embrace of classical Hellenism and pagan philosophy. It is in Act 3, well on the path from Christianity to polytheism, that Julian encounters Maximus, in his home in Ephesus. Maximus, believing Julian to be the pivotal figure he has waited for, conjures up a cryptic vision of past, present and future:

There are three empires ...The first is that empire founded on the tree of knowledge; then that empire founded on the tree of the cross ...The third is the empire of the great mystery, the empire to be founded on both the tree of knowledge and the tree of the cross.<sup>8</sup>

Maximus is portrayed by Ibsen as a mystic whose vision of a "third empire" incorporates concepts from both the Hellenistic and Christian traditions. But this passage on empires also indicates that Ibsen had come across a treatise by the monk Joachim of Fiore (c. 1132–1202), which had divided the history of mankind into three kingdoms: the Kingdom of the Father (corresponding with the age of the Jewish prophets); the Kingdom of the Son (corresponding with the Christian age, currently in progress); and finally the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit, a future, paradise-on-earth when mankind devoted itself to philosophy and governed itself without need for kings or emperors.<sup>9</sup>

In the world of Ibsen's play, Maximus believes Julian to be the herald of a third empire; but over the course of Part 2, he is profoundly disappointed to discover that Julian is obsessed with preserving the spirituality of the past, not with enabling that of the future. Here, the Schopenhauerian element lies more in Ibsen's dramaturgy than in his characters;

Ibsen shows how vain Julian's vision of a renewed polytheistic world is, since Julian's every effort to revive paganism and destroy Christianity is thwarted. Julian's limited vision, and his obsession with creating a world in his own antiquarian image, leads to an open rebuke from Maximus himself. In Part 2, Act 3 (note the centrality of both this scene and the one in Part 1), Maximus uses the metaphor of infancy, childhood and adolescence, to make his point:

You wanted to turn the youth back into a child again. The empire of the flesh has been absorbed into the empire of the spirit. But the empire of the spirit is no more the ultimate state, than that of the youth is ... Oh, you fool, who drew your sword against the future – against the third empire where the twin-natured one shall rule!<sup>10</sup>

Ibsen, like other intellectuals of his age, seems to have been impatient with what he regarded as the stunted spirituality of the times, a Christianity that to him had ossified and was in need of some form of renewal. Ibsen certainly saw Julian as a tragic figure whose flaw was that he lacked any vision of the future and could not conceive of any kind of synthesis between old and new spiritualities. The precise nature of that longed-for synthesis was inaccessible to Ibsen as it was to Julian or Maximus. He himself acknowledged that *Emperor and Galilean* dealt with "the struggle between two irreconcilable powers in the life of the world, something which will in all ages repeat itself".<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps because Ibsen wrote *Emperor and Galilean* primarily to be read, not staged, he made a point of adding delightful, allusive references to characters drawn from several classic plays that readers might recognise quite readily – from *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III* by William Shakespeare (1564–1616) to *La Vida es Sueño* (*Life Is a Dream*) by Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600–81). The choice to divide this long epic into two parts – the first, emphasising Julian's bookishness prior to his military successes, the second, emphasising his blind ambition as emperor – gave Ibsen the opportunity to reveal two aspects of Julian's character, which would bring to mind characters that would be quite familiar to readers of the modern drama.

Like Hamlet, Julian detests life in the imperial court and longs to return to the company of scholars. Part 1, Act 1 finds him in the stifling atmosphere of Constantinople; by Act 2 he has arrived in Athens, where he meets with two old schoolmates, Basil (later St Basil the Great, 330–79) and Gregory (later St Gregory of Nazianzus, 329–90). Julian proceeds to engage Gregory, Hamlet-like, in a pointless debate about what is owed to God vs. what is owed to the emperor.<sup>12</sup> That Ibsen portrays two esteemed fathers of the early Church as Julian's Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern adds a touch of whimsy, perhaps. But unlike Shakespeare's comic duo, Ibsen uses their presence in part to remind us of the irony that St Basil considered pagan literature worthy of study in spite of its dubious morals:

*Julian:* Tell me, Basil, why was pagan sin so beautiful?

*Basil:* You're wrong, my friend. Poems and legends have been beautifully composed about pagan sin. But it *wasn't* beautiful ....<sup>13</sup>

Hamlet references aside, another overarching theme of Part 1 of *Emperor and Galilean* is Julian's growing disenchantment with Christianity and his obsession with occult forms of knowledge rooted in Hellenism. His desire for a mystical, all-encompassing

wisdom leads him to Maximus towards the conclusion of Part 1, Act 3, and to the vision mentioned above, which – in true Delphic fashion – is more cryptic than informative. Readers already familiar with the famous Ancient Greek oracle of Delphi, and with the wiles of its Pythian priestess, are soon invited to contemplate parallels between Julian's story and that of another famous Shakespearean figure, a Scottish nobleman who is himself destined to rule, but who is also destined to be fooled by prophecies, only to come to a humiliating end: Macbeth.<sup>14</sup> In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth is haunted, and misled, by three witches – “the weird sisters” – whose prophecies inspire his murderous rise to the throne of Scotland, but whose warnings thereafter are ignored, leading directly to Macbeth's downfall.

The echoes of Shakespeare's “Scottish Tragedy” are in some cases quite explicit; when Julian's bride, Helena, dies of poisoning in Part 1, Act 4, there are suspicions that Emperor Constantius II (r. 337–61) poisoned her with fresh fruit he had sent – but the investigation is cut short when the tribune Decentius murders the two Nubian servants who had brought them (in much the same manner as Macbeth, who having murdered King Duncan, framed and murdered two of Duncan's servants).<sup>15</sup> Decentius attributes this dual murder, much as Macbeth did, to his supposed outrage at their alleged murder of Julian's wife.

Ibsen seems to draw primarily from Julian's *Letter to the Athenians* when dramatising the events leading up to his (assumed) usurpation of Constantius' throne, choosing to portray Constantius' military moves, and his co-optation of Julian's victories in Gaul, as the events which precipitated Julian's unlooked-for acclamation. The play's scenario, of course, should be taken with a grain of salt; Julian, like so many other elite intellectuals before and since, had a taste for self-dramatisation, which Ibsen found useful to highlight for the purposes of his play.<sup>16</sup>

As for the machinations surrounding the troops' acclamation of Julian as Augustus in Part 1, Act 4, Julian's pose of desiring his entourage to pray for Constantius' health is worth comparing with the strategies adopted by Shakespeare's Richard III; Julian, like Richard, encourages the pose of prayer – to Christ or to Zeus, as his comrades wish – prior to taking power. In Julian's confrontation with mutinous troops, moreover, there is even a possible echo of Mark Antony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar*, because in both cases we have the protagonist addressing a hostile crowd that is soon, through brilliant rhetorical display, drawn to his side.<sup>17</sup>

By Part 2, Julian's reversion to Hellenism complete, Ibsen gives us a vision of both his wisdom in administering justice but also his negative attitude towards the manners and mannerisms of his predecessor Constantius' court. There is an encounter, in Act 1, with the imperial barber Eunapius, decked as he is in silk and gold embroidery, whose imperial frippery is seen in stark contrast with Julian's asceticism. His blithe dismissal of Eunapius from court, moreover, could contain within it echoes of Calderón's Segismundo from *Life Is a Dream*, who, hailed as a prince, famously throws a servant off a balcony because he displeased him.<sup>18</sup> Julian, feeling himself to be the instrument of the divine will, can do no wrong.

In the end, Julian's arrogance as he prepares for his Persian campaign calls to mind none other than that of the Dark Scot, who was as dismissive of the witches' warnings as Julian is of the seers and augurs in his own entourage. In both plays, the double-meaning of the prophecies are ignored – in Macbeth's case, “No man of woman born” finds its final interpretation in the fact that MacDuff, Macbeth's final adversary, “was from his mother's

womb untimely ripped”.<sup>19</sup> In Julian’s case, the Sybil’s warning (in Act 4) to “beware of Phrygia” is seen as pointless, until he learns it is also the name of the town where he was struck, fatally, by a Persian soldier’s spear.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

By all accounts, Ibsen took tremendous pride in *Emperor and Galilean*, regarding it unequivocally as his masterpiece. Internal references within the play show his familiarity with key primary sources, and the overarching themes indicate his interest in rendering Julian a truly modern, tragic and philosophical figure. The drama was designed for private reading, not the stage, but still contained enough lively references to stage classics that the reader’s imagination was given quite the workout; the experience of the play is constantly merging with this or that intellectual or theatrical reference. As a dramatist, Ibsen knew well how to draw in his readership with allusions and direct references to Shakespeare’s works in particular, adding greater depth to the experience of *Emperor and Galilean* as a literary work, in a manner not unknown to readers of Byzantine literature, which is nothing if not highly allusive.

We may remember Ibsen today primarily for his realistic dramas, like *A Doll’s House* or *An Enemy of the People*, and even his early poetic plays, like *Peer Gynt*; but this “world-historic drama” in prose stands alone in its scope, its intellectual acuity, its attention to historical detail, and its literary allusions. He succeeds in bringing early Byzantium alive with vivid characters, carefully drawn, speaking in a language that is familiar; and because of that familiarity, Ibsen reveals the ways in which Julian’s fourth-century intellectual and spiritual concerns mirror those of the modern age, with an arrogant Hellenism reflecting the secular conceits of his time, and our own.

Ibsen never dreamed that this epic could be staged in a conventional manner. It would be some 20 years before the play found its way onto the stage, 30 years before its first performances in Christiania (now Oslo). But as his English translator, Brian Johnston notes, it is possible that *Emperor and Galilean* may yet be produced in our own time in its entirety, on film if not on the stage:

One might dream of some enlightened film producer, armed with an intellect and abetted by a similarly imaginative director (a Scorsese or Bertolucci, perhaps), creating a movie epic out of the play.<sup>21</sup>

Until such a grand production makes its way to our screens, great and small, the drama itself remains a fascinating read, and one of astonishing depth.

## Notes

- 1 [Schopenhauer 1961](#): III.52, translation mine (with apologies to R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp).
- 2 [Ibsen 1999](#): viii–ix.
- 3 On the question of whether Ibsen was influenced by Kierkegaard’s work see especially [Meyer 2004](#): 119–21. As is so often the case with creative artists, the question of influence is easy to speculate upon, but harder to discern.
- 4 Ibsen rejected claims that he was Kierkegaard’s disciple; as with any creative artist, he would point to the playwright’s uses of ideas and strategies for their dramatic, not their polemical value. See [Figueiredo 2019](#): 242–4.

- 5 See [Omdal 2021](#): 5.
- 6 [Omdal 2021](#), from his Forward to a reissue of his play *Cataline*, as quoted in [Figueiredo 2019](#): 305. On the question of Ibsen's debt to Schopenhauer – indeed, his debt to any modern European thinker, see [Sprinchorn 2020](#): 214:  

More than any other dramatist of the post-Goethe era and arguably more than any other imaginative writer of the nineteenth century, he grasped, assimilated, and expressed in artistic form all the great themes of the period. Although he minimized the extent of his reading, a study of his works reveals him to be a man who wanted to know all that was significant in science and philosophy and who kept himself well informed.
- 7 Omdal finds the inspiration for Maximos in Ibsen's long journey through Egypt, where he visited the antiquities as part of the festivities surrounding the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which he witnessed ([Omdal 2021](#): 7–8).
- 8 *Emperor and Galilean*, Part 1, Act 3 ([Ibsen 1999](#): 47).
- 9 See [Sprinchorn 2020](#): 216.
- 10 *Emperor and Galilean*, Part 2, Act 3 ([Ibsen 1999](#): 155).
- 11 [Ibsen 1999](#): viii.
- 12 Compare with William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2.
- 13 *Emperor and Galilean*, Part 1, Act 2, ([Ibsen 1999](#): 33).
- 14 Compare with Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 3.
- 15 Compare with *Macbeth*, Act 2, Scene 3.
- 16 *Emperor and Galilean*, Part 1, Act 4 ([Ibsen 1999](#): 74–5).
- 17 Compare *Emperor and Galilean*, [Ibsen 1999](#), with *Richard III*, Act 3, Scene 7; and *Julius Caesar*, Act 3, Scene 2. Ibsen's writing style here, in true Byzantine literary fashion, is allusive and the references to classic modern dramas are implied.
- 18 Calderon, *Life is a Dream*, Act 2, Scene 5. We might consider Eunapius lucky.
- 19 Compare *Macbeth*, Act 4, Scene 1 (the ambiguous prophecy), and Act 5, Scene 8 (its true meaning).
- 20 *Emperor and Galilean*, Part 2, Act 4 ([Ibsen 1999](#): 178–9, the ambiguous prophecy), and Part 2, Act 5, ([Ibsen 1999](#): 195, its true meaning).
- 21 See [Ibsen 1999](#): xix. [Sprinchorn 2020](#): 200–1 brings Johnston's scenario up to date, conceiving of *Emperor and Galilean* as a television mini-series, whose full worth and genius might not be visible to the average viewer until they have purchased the DVD box set for more detailed viewing.

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## BECOMING TARKOVSKY

The Byzantine Element in *Andrei Rublev**Alexios Mainas*

“The artist’s inspiration comes into being somewhere in the deepest recesses of his [mind] [...] It springs from the totality of his world-view”,<sup>1</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–86), widely regarded as one of the greatest filmmakers in history, reflects in his later years, “A masterpiece only comes into being when the artist is totally sincere in his treatment of his material”.<sup>2</sup> Tarkovsky achieved this mature artistic expression with his second feature film, *Andrei Rublev* (1966), and from that point on remained aesthetically uncompromising. The purpose of this chapter is to revisit the presence of elements of Byzantine spirituality and aesthetics in this film, with an emphasis on the Byzantine icon.

The experience of shooting his debut film, *Ivan’s Childhood* (1962), brought about – by his own account – the awakening of his self-consciousness as a director,<sup>3</sup> while the film’s success<sup>4</sup> secured for him the creative freedom he needed in order to delineate his artistic identity with greater clarity. For Tarkovsky, this meant decisively distancing himself from the Soviet cinematic tradition, which was grounded in montage,<sup>5</sup> and which, especially from 1935 onwards, was constricted within the predetermined aesthetic mould of “socialist realism”.<sup>6</sup> Thus, to the extent that it was permitted by the State Committee for Cinematography, he turned his camera towards themes drawn from Russian tradition and the anxieties of the “Russian soul”.

It is true, though, that the concerns he raises in his films are much broader: the meaning of life, the function of memory and time, the individual’s relationship to origins and place, the relation to one’s fellow human beings etc.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, his photographic and narrative choices allow for intermedia correlations with celebrated works and their creators, either explicitly or implicitly, such as Cervantes in *Solaris* (1972), Da Vinci in *Mirror* (1975) and *The Sacrifice* (1986) and Bach in most of his late films. These correlations extend to motifs such as the sacrifice of a child for the realisation of a non-egoistic aim prefigured in the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22 and Hebrews 11; also in Augustine and John Chrysostom) and therefore open many interpretive trajectories. He believed that each of his films is completed by the viewer as a co-creator.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the so-called poetic logic<sup>9</sup> of his films, the aspiration towards “spirituality”<sup>10</sup> and the metaphysical pursuit of the “absolute” or the “infinite”<sup>11</sup> through art need not necessarily be interpreted through

the prism of his personal religiousness – although he explicitly declared it during the last years of his life, which he spent in self-imposed exile in western Europe. After all, the expression of this religious feeling does not assume clear or rigid forms in his late oeuvre. In the concluding chapter of the only book he published during his lifetime *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema, which appeared in German in 1985 under the title Die versiegelte Zeit: Gedanken zur Kunst, zur Ästhetik und Poetik des Films*, he speaks with deep appreciation for eastern spiritual traditions.<sup>12</sup> During the years of his de facto exile, his relations with the Catholic Church were close – especially with the *integralist* movement, an interpretation of the Catholic faith and social teaching as the basis of public law and civil society.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the numerous avowals of his commitment to Orthodoxy in interviews of his final years<sup>14</sup> make the exploration of relevant motifs in his work particularly compelling.

### Introducing the Film

In none of Tarkovsky's seven feature films is the presentation of religious motifs as conspicuous – indeed, as prominently pronounced – as in *Andrei Rublev*, which has been described as a “manifesto-film”).<sup>15</sup> The core axes of his metaphysical, aesthetic and ethical “worldview”, clearly discernible in this work, would not change thereafter. Against the turbulent backdrop of the late medieval Russian landscape and the Tatar raids, the film poses two critical questions: the relationship between the world and its Creator and the question of the role of art.

Several of the positions articulated by its characters directly express his own views on earthly matters and on art, while in the film's last scenes his metaphysics and aesthetics are placed in explicit parallel: faith and art serve the same conception of “spirituality” and “transcendence”. This conception, in addition to its biblical origins, also has Neoplatonic roots. In many respects, the film constitutes a study on the difficulty of bestowing meaning upon life and art amid the calamities of history and the turmoil of personal destiny.

Tarkovsky does not aim to produce a biographical account of the major Russian painter (hagiographer) Andrei Rublev. Instead, he draws upon the historical – though partly legendary – figure from Russia's distant past, the early fifteenth century, to probe the questions that preoccupied him, along with their possible answers. The narrative structure echoes, in a rather loose manner, the biblical model of *Genesis* and, particularly in its final moments, the Platonic–Neoplatonic pattern of the Allegory of the Cave, a fundamental concept that influenced decisively Byzantine religious and philosophical thought, shaping its aesthetic. Leaving the safety of the monastery, Andrei encounters wickedness, violence and a series of temptations involving questions of faith and theology. During a Tatar raid, he is compelled to kill in order to prevent the rape of a young woman. Shaken to the core by this, he chooses silence and abandons painting. At one point he witnesses the miraculous casting of a bell by a young boy, an event that leads to his spiritual and artistic rebirth.

The circular structure of the plot corresponds to the protagonist's fall and psychological collapse, his long silence as an extended period of trial and purification as well as his final “ascent” as an “illumination”, which would be expressed in his paintings (Figure 45.1).



Figure 45.1 Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–86), *Andrei Rublev*, 1966, Film Screenshot, Mosfilm. Andrei Rublev played by Anatoly Solonitsyn. © Mosfilm. Screenshot Reproduced for Academic Purposes under Fair Dealing/Fair Use.

### ***Rublev and Plotinus***

In the film, the brutality of the historical tableau and its parallels with the atrocities of the modern world raise questions of “theodicy” or “cosmodicy”.<sup>16</sup> Is the condition of the world irredeemably dire? “I want to see the world as You created it”,<sup>17</sup> Tarkovsky writes in his diary, and in his book he explains, “The beautiful is hidden from the eyes of those who are not searching for the truth”.<sup>18</sup>

Andrei’s journey in the film is his struggle to accept and recognise the luminal nature of humanity and of the earthly things, in line with Paul’s dictum: “For His (the Creator’s) invisible qualities [...] are clearly perceived, being understood, by the things made” (Rom. 1:20). These function as conduits towards a deeper meaning.

A similar role is assigned to art in the film. Tarkovsky remarks in an interview, “The artist exists because the world is not perfect. [...] Art is born from the flaws of the world and this is the theme of my film *Andrei Rublev*”.<sup>19</sup> For Tarkovsky, as in Byzantine aesthetics for the most part, the artist is a “detector of the absolute”. Through the image is sustained an awareness of the infinite: the eternal within the finite, the spiritual within matter, the “limitless given form”.<sup>20</sup> Art is born wherever there is a “longing for the spiritual, for the ideal”,<sup>21</sup> since art transcends as well as it observes, “its role is to bring spiritual vision”.<sup>22</sup>

Although he does not develop it systematically, the fragmentary and allusive philosophy of art he articulates reflects Byzantine spirituality and is akin to that of Heidegger and other philosophers. It advocates an intuitive apprehension and understanding of the world within a framework of transcendence that is not only beyond things, but also *within* them – permeating and gracing them. Thus, it fosters not merely the “nostalgia for the transcendent”<sup>23</sup> but an active tracing of it in the present, and ultimately the soul’s elevation towards it and its *methexis* (participation in it) – an anagogic process reminiscent of Diotima’s discourse in Plato’s *Symposium* (202e–204c).

Aesthetic categories in Tarkovsky derive primarily from epistemology and carry ethical implications, as in Neoplatonism, the foundation of Byzantine aesthetics. The value of art lies in what it reveals beyond the sensorial reception of the work; it lies in its relation to the “transcendent” as the sphere of truth. For Tarkovsky, the human being is “a moral being, engaged in the search for the truth”,<sup>24</sup> and the artwork “appears as a revelation, a hieroglyphic of absolute truth”.<sup>25</sup> This theory of art – which permeates the entire film and inspires its distinctive ending – stems primarily from Plotinus: art is affirmed as a threshold between the material/sensory and “spiritual” dimensions, which corresponds to Plotinus’ “intellectual beauty”. The final shots of the film, in particular, suggest Tarkovsky’s Neoplatonic and iconophile aesthetics, as discussed in detail below. As later in John of Damascus<sup>26</sup> and Theodore the Studite,<sup>27</sup> so also in Plotinus, the image, despite its inferior ontological status, refers to its archetype, aiding the mind in ascending to it.<sup>28</sup> “Art must help the human being in his spiritual elevation”<sup>29</sup> and “it would not exist [...] if it were not an expression of the striving toward a higher spiritual ground”,<sup>30</sup> Tarkovsky concludes.

Another affinity shared by the aesthetics of the Byzantine icon, Plotinus and Tarkovsky is their refusal to privilege a faithful reproduction of sensory reality. The artist “does not use ‘descriptions’ of the world; he himself has a hand in its creation”,<sup>31</sup> Tarkovsky claims. Plotinus’ defence of the spirituality of art is similar: just as Phidias fashioned the statue of Zeus not from a sensory prototype but from an ideal form, the artist does not imitate nature (*mimesis*) but creates from something ideal, which ensures a “beauty-from-within” (*kallos ek bathous*).<sup>32</sup> This beauty, as in Diotima’s words in Plato, ignites an “erotic longing” – a desire for elevation and ascent (*anodos* or *anagoge*) to the realm of the intellect and to the “First Principle” (*hen* or *agathon* or *hyperkalon*<sup>33</sup>), on the condition of the “purification” (*katharsis*) of the soul from its passions.<sup>34</sup>

The aim is again, as in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (176b), “likeness to God as far as possible” (*homoiosis theō kata to dynaton*).<sup>35</sup> This is likely the dimension that underlies Tarkovsky’s diagnosis of the analogy between art and faith. Henceforth, he would introduce “imitatio Christi” motifs in all his films – in *Andrei Rublev*, the scene of the crucifixion on the snowy hill.

Tarkovsky’s constant conviction would remain that “the absolute is only attainable through faith and in the creative act”.<sup>36</sup> Art is the second gateway to the absolute or the infinite – Tarkovsky uses the two terms interchangeably – alongside faith, which he understands as a metaphysical trust and as service to one’s fellow human beings. Art and faith are modes of existence: “In art, as in religion, intuition is tantamount [...] to faith. It is a state of mind, not a way of thinking”.<sup>37</sup> Here too he follows Plotinus, who explains that divine knowledge is acquired intuitively, not conceptually or verbally.<sup>38</sup> This is also evident in the way he films nature, “resorting” (*anatrechein*) intuitively to a deeper, hidden source – a “natural wisdom” (*sophia physike*) is evoked through long, slow, candid takes capturing its inner life in a way that imparts a liminal quality and evokes an almost metaphysical, mystical feeling.<sup>39</sup>

The close kinship between the two existential conditions – faith and art – becomes clear at the end of the film, where they are linked through two symbols: the bell and the (hagiographic) image. For Tarkovsky, they simultaneously represent both spheres, since they arise from both the (artistic) skill and prayer. The young boy Boris manages to cast the enormous bell not because he persistently seeks the correct method, but because of the miracle performed on account of his faith. And Andrei regains his creative flame and paints again when – witnessing this miracle – he finds the spiritual depth of faith he had been searching



Figure 45.2 Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–86), Andrei Rublev, 1966, Film Screenshot, Mosfilm. The Attempt to Elevate the Enormous Bell. © Mosfilm. Screenshot Reproduced for Academic Purposes under Fair Dealing/Fair Use.

for. The word “spirituality” connects the two spheres, which constitute, as it were, the two sides of the same coin. For Tarkovsky, then, art, icon painting and cinema included, is a form of prayer and a tracing of the “unknown-yet-known”<sup>40</sup> absolute – and this includes not only iconography but also cinema (Figure 45.2).

### The Threefold Ascent

Two insights help unlock the ending of the film: the artistic and the theological. Tarkovsky mirrors the positive resolution in a threefold manner – through three arts that make explicit his view about the kinship and shared purpose of art and faith, in a way parallel to Byzantine religious aesthetics.

To begin with, the young bell caster’s achievement is not limited to the construction of the bell. The massive object rises in defiance of gravity, which from the film’s opening seems invincible. The peasant Yefim, though suspended in a balloon of lightweight materials, plummets to the ground like a latter-day Icarus under the force of gravity. At the end, the colossal bell – countless times heavier – ascends triumphantly into the air. The difference, for Tarkovsky, likely lies not in the magnitude of the daring but in its origin and purpose. In the first case, it springs from confidence in one’s personal abilities, placed in the service of an individual goal – escaping the Tatar raid. In the second case, the trust is placed in divine powers, which the young caster invokes for the good of the community.

This is a cinematic rendering of the allegory of the fallen human being raised above the earth from which he was formed – a triumph achieved, in this instance, to serve others. It is worthy to note here that even the making of the bell required the right clay – Tarkovsky underscores the dimension of earthliness. The entire sequence symbolically recalls the *Hymn to Love*: “And if [...] I have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). The monk Andrei had embraced silence precisely to avoid becoming a “noisy gong”, lacking genuine faith. But by embracing the young caster and receiving his confession – in a shot evocative of Michelangelo’s *Pietà* – he regains his faith, hope and love for others, leading him to abandon his vow of silence (Figure 45.3).



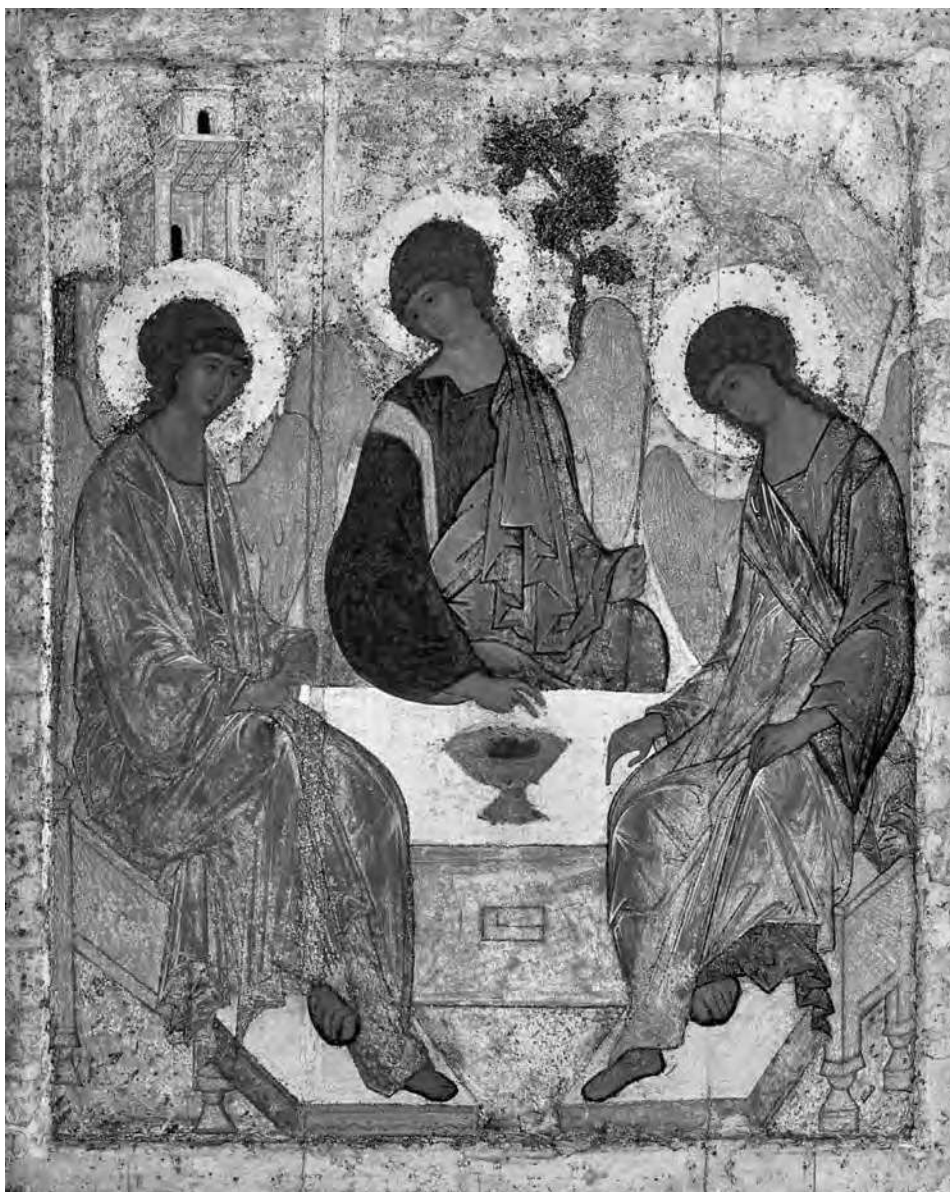
Figure 45.3 Andrei Tarkovsky (1932–86), Andrei Rublev, 1966, Film Screenshot, Mosfilm. The Young Caster Boris Confesses to Andrei. © Mosfilm. Screenshot Reproduced for Academic Purposes under Fair Dealing/Fair Use.

The second ascent is not literal but metaphorical and concerns the art of the Byzantine icon. Actually, it is Andrei's elevation, by divine grace, into the sphere of high spirituality emanating from his light-suffused icons, as expressed in the gentle, serene countenance of the figures he paints, above all in *The Hospitality of Abraham*, with the symbolic presence of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, which intimates a sense of philanthropic nearness, the *parousia* of the Divine. What is depicted – in a Byzantine sense – is the innermost nature of theological realities, the “hidden beauty”,<sup>41</sup> accessible only to the eye that “sees within”.<sup>42</sup> The tragic dimension of history and in it the silence of the “hidden God”<sup>43</sup> seems to have been overcome for Rublev (Figure 45.4).

The third ascent has a performative character and concerns the art of cinema – the film itself. It is rendered through the contrast between the chromatic radiance of the painted icons and the black-and-white scenes throughout the film. The eruption of powerful colours – red, blue, gold – corresponds not merely symbolically to divine properties within the colour semiotics of Byzantine iconography but floods the frame in close-up shots, recalling Tarkovsky's insistence that cinema itself should constitute a form of prayer. The aim of the produced work (movie) is the elevation of the viewer through the offering of hope.<sup>44</sup> This is conveyed by the transition from achromatic imagery to visual splendour and to the Christological and Trinitarian colour symbolism. Until this point, the artist Rublev's *a-poria* – his inability to perceive the grace of the hidden God – had been rendered visually through “chromatic silence” in a world whose contrasts correspond to the shadows cast by objects and persons. At the end, this chromatic silence is overcome miraculously, like the opening of eyes that reveals “the supreme beauty” (*to mega kallos*)<sup>45</sup>: the figures on the icons shine forth in the “centripetal illumination”<sup>46</sup> of faith, the joyous certainty of which is expressed through the clarity and intensity of the colours. What is suggested is an exit from the cave of colourless shadows into the light-saturated, metaphysical realm of the “uncreated light”.

Here Tarkovsky applies what Nelson Goodman called *exemplification*: the artistic form itself enacts what the work claims semantically. The shots of the icons convey, in a sense, the state of grace of the iconographer. For what is shown is primarily his own emergence from the cave, revealed to us in the form of colour images, which can thus be interpreted





*Figure 45.4* Andrei Rublev (c. 1360–1430), *The Hospitality of Abraham* (also known as *The Trinity*), c. 1411–25, Tempera on Wood, 142 × 114 cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Public Domain.

cinematically as “subjective shots”, a rendering of the world through the iconographer’s eyes. In Tarkovsky, as in Plotinus, colour signifies the predominance of light for the soul, which has now become “sun-like” (*helioeides*).

A kind of elevation is also achieved for the viewer through the unexpected chromatic explosion. What Tarkovsky signals with this choice is the invitation to a higher spirituality



through his distinctive cinematic aesthetics. Already in the preceding shots of the film, Tarkovsky had fully developed his own “poetic logic”, his own rendering of cinematic time and a nearly dreamlike iconography. Narrative pace is deliberately slowed so that, within the shots, it approaches narrated time. The objects within the frame acquire their own silence and liminality, as though hinting at or symbolising another, more real dimension, the enigmatic hieroglyphics of which they form. Plotinus already praises, for instance, the iconicity of Egyptian hieroglyphs over alphabetic writing and articulated speech. This is the alternative “gaze” Tarkovsky proposes. Seeing through the eye of the camera’s lens,<sup>47</sup> he reminds us that “now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). The eschatological meaning of the film’s ending – towards which the close-ups of Christ’s face, staring directly at the viewpoint – is that one day, in the light of grace, “we shall see face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

### The Return to the “Cave”

One might expect the film to conclude with hagiographic images – as an explicit encounter with the divine dimension that resolves the anguished journey (*poreia* or *epistrophe* in Plotinus’ terminology) of Rublev. Tarkovsky, however, chooses to show that there is a “beyond”, something on the far side of attaining personal integrity or illumination. This corresponds to the political-ethical lesson of the Allegory of the Cave. There, the philosopher chooses to return to the shadow-laden world of the cave in order to communicate his joyful message to his fellow human beings.

Similarly, Tarkovsky explores the “personal responsibility” of the enlightened one and of the artist, in all three arts by analogy. The bell caster’s mission does not end with the miraculous casting of the bell, but with its use as a signal that summons the people to the formation of a eucharistic community disseminating the evangelical message. Likewise, the regaining of the icon painter’s inspiration and creativity has value primarily when it succeeds in imparting elevation to the faithful across the centuries through his icons, by means of a “selfless creative act”.<sup>48</sup> The same holds for the filmmaker – only the return to our own world of phenomena justifies his artistic explorations. For Tarkovsky, the ethical wager of aesthetically attained spirituality is crucial. “Art invites people to re-evaluate themselves and their lives in the light of the ideal to which it gives form”.<sup>49</sup>

The “poetic quality” that flows into the artistic representation of the world constitutes a kind of loving embrace of beings. The final, colour shot of the film shows white horses in the rain, whose downward course (*kathodos*) symbolises precisely this return from the heavenly sphere to the earthly reality which that sphere irrigates, allowing it to flourish.

### Notes

1 Tarkovsky 1987: 188, cf. see 26–7, 43.

2 Tarkovsky 1987: 46, cf. see 56, 165, 170, 186–7.

3 Tarkovsky 1987: 15, 26–7, 34.

4 It sold 16.7 million tickets in the Soviet Union and received the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

5 In the manner of Eisenstein and Kuleshov, Tarkovsky 1987: 24, 114–24, 183.

6 Also in Pudovkin, Alexandrov and Vertov, Stam 2000: 37–46.

7 Tarkovsky 1987: 34, 36–47, 168, 193, *et alibi passim*.

8 Tarkovsky 1987: 21, 176, 177–8, 183, *et alibi*.

- 9 Tarkovsky 1987: 18, 20–1, 29–30, 35, 150, 206, *et alibi*.
- 10 Tarkovsky 1987: 38, 96, 168, 238.
- 11 Tarkovsky 1987: 37–9, 109, 168, 192, 238, 240.
- 12 On the weighty final page of his book, Tarkovsky references the Vedas, Taoist music, China and “Eastern thought”, commenting that “The East was closer to the truth than the West”. (Tarkovsky 1987: 240.)
- 13 Baecque 1989: 26.
- 14 Gianvito 2006: *passim*.
- 15 Baecque 1989: 171.
- 16 The term was introduced – by analogy with Leibniz’s “theodicy” – by Erwin Rohde, and it refers to the atheistic worldview of his friend Nietzsche, who also employs it. Here it means the following: In the film it does not seem that God is being judged, but rather the condition of the world itself, as well as the possibility of attributing meaning to it.
- 17 Tarkovsky 2006: 209.
- 18 Tarkovsky 1987: 42.
- 19 Baglivo 1987: 17.
- 20 Tarkovsky 1987: 37, *cf./see* 37–8, 39–40, 109, 168, 192, 238, 240.
- 21 Tarkovsky 1987: 38, *cf./see* 168, 192, 238.
- 22 Tarkovsky 1987: 96.
- 23 The expression “nostalgia for the transcendent” was popularised by Berdyaev, whose work Tarkovsky knew, though with reservations.
- 24 Tarkovsky 1987: 58.
- 25 Tarkovsky 1987: 37.
- 26 *Cf./see* John of Damascus, *The Church’s Teaching on Images* (PG 94: *passim*).
- 27 *Cf./see* Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus Against Iconoclasts* III (PG 99: *passim*).
- 28 Büttner 2006: 181.
- 29 Baglivo 1987: 16.
- 30 Illg and Neuger 2016: 69.
- 31 Tarkovsky 1987: 42, *cf./see* 96.
- 32 Plotinus 1964–1982: ff: V 8 [31] 10. *Cf./see* Horn 1998: 643.
- 33 Plotinus 1964–1982: ff: V 8 [31] 8, VI 7 [38] 33.
- 34 Horn 1998: 645.
- 35 Plotinus: I 6 [1] 6.
- 36 Tarkovsky 1987: 39.
- 37 Tarkovsky 1987: 41, *cf./see* 42–3, 49, 168, 239.
- 38 Plotinus 1964–1982: ff: V 8 [31] 5–6.
- 39 Horn 1998: 644.
- 40 *Cf./see* Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology* (PG 3) and *On the Divine Names* (PG 3): *passim*.
- 41 *Cf./see* Mainas 1984: 6–8.
- 42 Plotinus 1964–1982: ff: I 6 [1] 9.
- 43 Isaiah 45:15. *Cf./see* Vulgate: “Deus absconditus”.
- 44 *Cf./see* Tarkovsky 1987: 192.
- 45 Plotinus 1964–1982: ff: I 6 [1] 9.
- 46 Skliris 1984: 53–62.
- 47 The concept of “cinema-eye” is from Vertov. *Cf./see* Stam 2000: 44–6.
- 48 Tarkovsky 1987: 242.
- 49 Tarkovsky 1987: 239.

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# 46

## THE BYZANTINES AMONG US

### Contemporary Jewellery Making and Byzantium

*Jenny Albani*

By purchasing clothes and jewellery, the consumers of contemporary affluent societies wish to participate in fashion trends. On the one hand, they share a style element with other individuals while, on the other, they build up their self-presentation.<sup>1</sup> Jewellery, par excellence, enables wearers to please others through their appearance. Through this delight, consumers desire to distinguish themselves from others and gain their admiration, i.e. to acquire prestige.<sup>2</sup>

As innovation is a salient ingredient of fashion dynamics, contemporary jewellery designers often draw inspiration from the rich artistic heritage of the Mediterranean. In this chapter, I will argue that during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, jewellery fashion drew inspiration from Byzantium. Given that polychromy is a prominent feature of Byzantine jewellery,<sup>3</sup> a quote by Christian Dior (1905–57) can explain in part the taste of contemporary designers and consumers for Byzantine-inspired pieces.<sup>4</sup> The famous representation of Empress Theodora (c. 500–48) and her female attendants (Figure 46.1) in the mosaic at San Vitale, Ravenna (c. 547) – an eloquent manifestation of the use, aesthetics and symbolism of jewellery in Byzantine society – has been a point of reference for contemporary jewellery making.<sup>5</sup>

#### *In Paris, chez Chanel*

According to cultural theorists, shared influences have implications for fashion; if, for instance, images of war make front-page news, military-inspired styles may appear in multiple collections.<sup>6</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, Europeans rediscovered Byzantium.<sup>7</sup> Paris became the leading centre of studies in Byzantine art in western Europe. In addition, the *Exposition internationale d'art byzantin* (International Exhibition of Byzantine art) at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris (28 May to 9 July 1931), displaying more than 1000 Byzantine artefacts along with numerous replicas, casts and photographs, became an event of great importance for a new approach to Byzantine art, especially within the general discourse of modernism.<sup>8</sup>

Coco Chanel (1883–1971), the most influential fashion designer of the interwar years, being receptive to pioneering trends and having been introduced to Byzantine aesthetics by



Figure 46.1 Empress Theodora with Her Attendants, 547, Wall Mosaic, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna. © Following Hadrian, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons.

the exiled Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich Romanov of Russia (1891–1942), was the first to develop a Byzantine style in her jewellery lines.<sup>9</sup> Chanel's Byzantine jewellery – massive and irregular, yet elegant – was the outcome of her study of historical styles, her unconventional design ideas and her inspired collaborations, the most fruitful and long-standing of which was her partnership with the Gripoix House.<sup>10</sup> This Parisian atelier, which opened in 1869 as a family enterprise servicing the couture industry, mastered the creation of jewels made of glass, crystal, metal and artificial pearls.<sup>11</sup> In the 1920s, Chanel approached the Gripoix with a request for Byzantine-inspired jewellery with oversized glass stones of bright colours, and this collaboration was significant for the Byzantine costume jewellery of the Chanel brand.

In the 1930s, Coco Chanel and the gifted Sicilian aristocrat Fulco Santostefano della Cerda (1898–1978), Duke of Verdura, who had worked for La Maison Chanel as a designer since 1927, travelled to Ravenna, where they admired the mosaics of the early Byzantine monuments, especially the portrait of Empress Theodora (Figure 46.1).<sup>12</sup> Fulco designed for Chanel's jewel case a pair of cuff bracelets with Byzantine influences, made of ivory-coloured, lacquered metal inlaid with faceted, multi-coloured crystals forming a Maltese cross (Figure 46.2).<sup>13</sup> Being her favourite piece of adornment, this bangle was also launched by the Chanel House as a piece of costume jewellery and became a success.<sup>14</sup>

In 1953, following the end of World War II, Coco Chanel reopened her fashion house and became a close collaborator of Robert Goossens (1928–2016), an accomplished Parisian jeweller heavily influenced by Byzantine jewellery, among other influences.<sup>15</sup> She joined him in designing “couture jewellery” in the Byzantine style by combining gold with glass paste and rock crystal instead of genuine precious stones. Before her, Cristobal Balenciaga (1895–1972), the Spanish master couturier, had commissioned Goossens to create a Byzantine-style cross necklace in rock crystal for an haute couture show.<sup>16</sup> Goossens, widely known as “Monsieur Bijou”, continued his collaboration with the Chanel House after Coco's passing, working with her successor, Karl Lagerfeld (1933–2019).



*Figure 46.2* Fulco Santostefano della Cerda (1898–1978), Duke of Verdura, Chanel’s Original “Maltese Cross” Cuffs, c. 1930, Silver and Ivory-Coloured Enamel Hinged Cuffs with Gold “Maltese Cross” Elements Set with Precious and Semi-Precious Stones. Photograph © Courtesy of Verdura.

In December 2010, under Lagerfeld’s direction, La Maison Chanel launched the Pre-Fall collection “Paris – Byzance”, including Byzantine-inspired jewellery, such as coronets with perpendulia (hanging ornaments attached to either side of the crown), massive dangling beaded earrings and oversized necklaces replete with beads.<sup>17</sup> Inspired by the representation of Empress Theodora and the lost culture of Byzantium, Lagerfeld designed his collection for modern-day “empresses”, the clientele of the Chanel House.<sup>18</sup>

### **In New York, Between Cultural Internationalism and Multiculturalism**

After an eight-year stay in Paris, Verdura moved to the USA, which, at the end of the 1930s, had developed a growing interest in Byzantine art – perceived as outstanding and exotic – under the influence of the prevailing cultural internationalism.<sup>19</sup> In the beginning, he worked for the jeweller Paul Flato (1900–99) and his numerous movie-star clients, and in 1939 he set up his own studio on Fifth Avenue in New York.<sup>20</sup> His “Byzantine Collection”, featuring pieces full of multi-coloured, semi-precious stones juxtaposed to yellow-gold settings, approached a Byzantine aesthetic.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, luxurious variants of the “Theodora cuffs”, namely Chanel’s “Maltese Cross” cuffs ([Figure 46.2](#)), appeared on the 75th anniversary of the company’s foundation. Nowadays, the firm’s owners, Ward and Nick Landrigan, continue Verdura’s tradition based on his archive, which contains nearly 10,000 original designs, including Byzantine-inspired pieces.



From 1976 to 2004, within the socio-political framework of multiculturalism dominant in the States during the postmodern era, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, organised three highly visited exhibitions presenting the art of the early, middle and late Byzantine periods, respectively, acquainting the general public with the dazzling and lost culture of Byzantium.<sup>22</sup> Following its standard practice of producing and selling merchandise inspired by its temporary exhibitions, the museum's shop was supplied with goods in the Byzantine style, including jewellery. Currently, Neo-Byzantine pieces related to Byzantine jewellery from the permanent collections appear in the Met store, while its website features among its best-sellers a "Medieval Byzantine Statement Necklace", inspired by a tenth-century original with enamelled and semi-precious stone elements.<sup>23</sup>

In the late 1970s, concurrently with the *Age of Spirituality* exhibition, New York saw a renewed interest in jewellery making in the Byzantine style by students of Robert Kulicke (1924–2007), a noted American artist, jewellery maker and teacher who had deepened his knowledge of antique methods and taught them the granulation technique. Through this ancient technique, which reached its peak in Etruscan art and found its way to Byzantium, minute grains of gold are applied to a surface in decorative patterns.<sup>24</sup> Using gold in pure form (20 and 22 karats) combined with gems and the granulation technique, they crafted jewellery with Egyptian, Etruscan and Byzantine touches at high prices, addressing a narrow market consisting of a small number of galleries and private clients. Susan Reinstein (1946–2023), Stephen Paul Adler (born 1965), two jewellers from Kulicke's circle, and Bud Hart, a business partner, opened in 1980 the gallery "Byzantium", where a group of their colleagues, who created designs well suited to the name of the shop, showcased their work. Although "Byzantium" successfully entered the realm of New York jewellery, it disappeared three years later, indicating that luxurious, high-end Neo-Byzantine pieces attracted only a limited clientele. However, Reinstein continued to produce hand-crafted, high-karat gold jewellery with Byzantine elements (Figure 46.3) in the flourishing shops she opened in Manhattan with Brian Ross, a gemstone dealer.<sup>25</sup>

### **In Greece and Italy: Inspiration from a Shared Cultural Heritage**

In both Greece and Italy, Byzantium is part of the cultural heritage. For instance, children in Greece, during the baptism ritual, receive from their godparents a pendant cross – a piece of jewellery with religious significance that has its roots in Byzantium. A look at the contemporary Greek jewellery market reveals an abundance of pieces inspired by Byzantine jewellery, affordable for all social strata.<sup>26</sup> Renowned Athens-based, yet internationally operating, luxury jewellery firms, such as the Zolotas and Lalaounis Houses, and museums (e.g., the Benaki Museum), promote their Byzantine collections on their websites. The Zolotas House, founded in the neoclassical Athens of 1894, co-operates with Greek archaeological museums on the creation of antique-inspired jewellery: the collection "Byzance", which appears in the brand's stores in Athens and Paris, features among these and claims to bring back the glamour of Constantinople, Ravenna and Mystras. It includes rings, pendants, earrings and bracelets mostly made of 18-karat yellow gold, rendered in the age-old goldsmithing techniques of granulation and filigree, and ornamented with precious stones. The Lalaounis firm, established in 1969, includes, among its numerous collections, the Byzantine (in the 1970s), the late Byzantine (1990s) and the "Theodora" Collection (2010s), inspired by Byzantine opulence, fondness for precious stones and architectural forms (Figure 46.4).<sup>27</sup> Its founder, Ilias Lalaounis (1920–2013), an open-minded person,





*Figure 46.3* Reinstein Ross Goldsmiths, Sedona “Nereid” Australian Opal Necklace, 2000–20, in 20K Peach Gold. This 21st-Century Piece by Reinstein Ross Goldsmiths Is Comparable to the Necklace of Empress Theodora on the Mosaic Panel of San Vitale, Ravenna ([Figure 46.1](#)). Photograph © Courtesy of Reinstein Ross Goldsmiths.

contributed to the dissemination of ancient Greek and Byzantine jewellery through more than 70 exhibitions of his creations worldwide. Moreover, he established the first jewellery museum in Greece at the foot of the Acropolis.

In 2013, the renowned Milan-based international brand Dolce & Gabbana presented in its fall/winter collection “Bizanzio” clothes, jewellery and accessories inspired by the twelfth-century mosaics in churches of Norman Sicily, especially those in the Cathedral of Monreale (founded 1183) and the Martorana (founded 1143) in Palermo, attributed to Byzantine workshops. Dominic Dolce (born 1958), one-half of this luxury fashion house, was familiar with these outstanding wall decorations, given that he was born in Polizzi Generosa, a Sicilian town close to Palermo. The brand’s daring creations – clothes made



*Figure 46.4* Ilias Lalaounis (1920–2013), Brooch with a Central “cupola”, 1970–2000, 18-Karat Gold and Precious Stones. Photograph © Courtesy of Ilias Lalaounis Jewelry Museum.

of fabrics depicting parts of the mosaics, including human figures, and colourful jewellery – oversized earrings, most of which are cross-shaped, *opus interrasile* (openwork) diadems and pectoral crosses – expressed the spirit of postmodernity.<sup>28</sup> According to postmodernism, a new creation should consider tradition, cultural context and historical forms. Against this background, in the mid-1960s, the famous Italian fashion firm Bulgari launched jewellery combined with coins and gems from the fifth century BCE to the twentieth century, a practice also in use in Byzantium and post-Byzantine Greece.<sup>29</sup> Given the positive response of its clientele to Bulgari’s “Monete” collection (*gemme numarie*), it figures permanently among the brand’s creations.

### Conclusion

Although no audience survey was conducted for this study, which would have provided more detailed data on attitudes towards Byzantine-inspired jewellery, the above research

demonstrates that Neo-Byzantine jewellery never became a widespread fashion trend, like that of Art Nouveau or the Modern movement. It is an isolated case related to specific socio-economic conditions within the broader contemporary jewellery production framework. Given their association with pioneer designers of luxury fashion houses, including Chanel, Verdura, Zolotas, Lalaounis and Dolce & Gabbana, and their expensive materials, high-quality craftsmanship and eye-catching form, Neo-Byzantine pieces of jewellery pertain to those of high-income classes who, through their possession, demonstrate and enhance their status. Within a similar context, in fashion shows, the brands highlight the relation of their Byzantine-inspired prestige jewellery to the Byzantine Empire and invite their clientele to elevate their status by wearing these creations.

The general public of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been acquainted with Byzantium and its art, through landmark exhibitions in museums worldwide. The fact that historical references in architecture, everyday objects and jewellery are also in line with postmodern notions may explain the demand for historical-style jewellery in museum stores, like those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Benaki Museum and the Lalaounis Museum.

Nowadays, in countries with Byzantine cultural heritage, such as Greece and Italy, numerous ornamental pieces in the Byzantine style are produced and offered to people of middle and lower incomes at an affordable price, possibly assuming in advance the corresponding demand. The most popular Neo-Byzantine piece of jewellery is perhaps the baptismal cross necklace, which every child receives as a gift and will continue to wear at all times, either as a piece of adornment or for protection against evil.<sup>30</sup>

## Notes

- 1 [Scott Hemphill and Suk 2009](#): 1147–53, 1157–9, 1164–6.
- 2 [Wolff 1950](#): 338–40.
- 3 [Spier 2012](#): 6. On Byzantine jewellery, see among others the following comprehensive studies: [Yeroulanou 1999](#); [Bosselmann-Ruickbie 2008](#); [Entwistle and Adams 2010](#); [Bosselmann-Ruickbie 2011](#); [Spier 2013](#).
- 4 Colour is what gives jewels their worth. They light up and enhance the face.
- 5 On the effect of the image of Theodora on contemporary fashion designers, see also [Leardi 2015](#).
- 6 [Scott Hemphill and Suk 2009](#): 1168.
- 7 On the topic of Byzantine revival in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, see among others: [Bullen 2003](#); [Chondrogiannis 2017](#): 39–180; [Bullen 2021](#). For studies on specific aspects of this trend, see [Kourelis 2007](#); [Kotoula 2015](#).
- 8 [Weitzmann 1947](#): 401; [De Lorey and Woodbridge 1931](#): 26. On the exposition, see [Labrusse 2018](#).
- 9 [Baudot 1996](#): 9–10, 76; [Childers 1997](#): 159–60.
- 10 [Mauriès 1993](#): 42–43, 49, 100, figs. on 101, 106, 110, 121, 123–24.
- 11 [Byars 1994](#): 229.
- 12 [Mauriès 1993](#): 34–35; [Mascetti and Triossi 1991](#): 212.
- 13 The Greek cross with flared arms is known as a Maltese cross because it became later the coat of arms of the Knights Hospitaller installed in Malta after the fall of Rhodes to the Ottomans in 1522 ([Dinkler and Dinkler-von Schubert 1995](#): col. 26). The Maltese cross is usually encountered in Byzantine sculpture and minor arts. See, for example, a tomb stele (sixth to seventh century), a marble slab (eleventh century) and an epistyle (eleventh to twelfth century) at the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, inv. nos. BM 1429 T 105, BM 238 T 169, BM 406 T 261 ([Sklavou-Mavroidi 1999](#): nos. 335, 184, 203); moreover, two early Byzantine votive crosses in the Collection C.S, Munich, inv. nos. 1122 and 20 ([Stiegemann 2001](#): nos. I.80, I.81).

- 14 On her preference, see Proddow and Healy 1987: 128; Mauriès 1993, figs. on 79, 88, 136. On the launch, see Mauriès 1993: 36–8, figs. on 89, 90, 95, 108; Baudot 1996: 77.
- 15 On the artisan, see Byars 1994: 220.
- 16 Isaac-Goizé 2016.
- 17 Leardi 2015: 145, figs. 11, 13; Chondrogiannis 2017: 158–9, figs. 238, 244–5.
- 18 Mistry 2010.
- 19 Biliouri 2009: 35–9; Chondrogiannis 2017: 120–32.
- 20 Proddow and Healy 1987: 115, 128; Mascetti and Triossi 1991: 212; Byars 1994: 570. For Fulco's biography, see Corbett 2002.
- 21 Raullet 1987: 119. For the “Byzantine collection” of the Verdura company, see its website (<https://verdura.com/collection/byzantine-collection/>) (accessed 25.5.2023).
- 22 Among the numerous studies on multiculturalism in America, see Takaki 2008. On the exhibitions, see the relevant catalogues *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Byzantine Art, Third to Seventh Century* (19 November 1977–12 February 1978); *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (11 March to 6 July 1977); *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (23 March to 4 July 2004). On the exhibitions and their attendance, see among others Biliouri 2009: 39–45. Chondrogiannis 2017: 186, 195–7, 212–4. Gerstel 2005.
- 23 <https://store.metmuseum.org/medieval-byzantine-statement-necklace-80057235> (accessed 25.5.2023).
- 24 Blauer 1991: 136–8. On this goldsmith technique, see Wolters 1986.
- 25 Blauer 1991: 94–95, 135–45.
- 26 The Athens historic centre is home to several boutiques for Neo-Byzantine handmade jewellery.
- 27 Lalaounis 1984, 138–9; Mascetti and Triossi 1991: 150; Childers 1997: 180; Chadour-Sampson and Lalaounis-Tsoukopoulou 1998, 38–9.
- 28 Chondrogiannis 2017: 160, figs. 247–9.
- 29 On Bulgari's jewellery combining antique coins and gems, see Mascetti and Triossi 1991: 149; Mascetti and Triossi 1996: 111–33, figs 145, 152, 156. For antique intaglios on late Byzantine rings, see Albani 2015. For a ninth-century coin on a later ring, see Kypraiou 1997, no. 237.
- 30 Cf. Tait 1991: 205.

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# FASHIONED AFTER BYZANTIUM\*

*Jennifer Ball*

The exhibition *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2018 put forth a simple idea that the modern and contemporary fashion designers of the exhibition were influenced by their religious upbringing, which was largely Roman Catholic in the case of the mostly French and Italian designers of the show. A nostalgia for the vestments, medieval monuments and ritual practices of their childhood was not merely a backdrop but provided sartorial inspiration. This thesis was revolutionary for its audience, not least because their understanding of ecclesiastical dress came from an American, post-Vatican II and mostly Protestant context where the outfits of clergy and nuns are considered conservative and, even, dour – the very opposite of the ornate medieval churches, opulent vestments and Lenten public processions of these designers' experiences.<sup>1</sup>

An entire gallery of fashions was placed in conversation with the Metropolitan's Byzantine collection in *Heavenly Bodies*, irrespective of the fact that the Byzantine church was Orthodox, not Catholic. Moreover, the designers' riffs on Byzantine design were similarly ecumenical. Domenico Dolce (born 1958) and Stefano Gabbana (born 1962) incorporated inspiration from churches of Norman Sicily into their 2013–14 Autumn/Winter Collection which appropriated a mosaiced archangel Michael from the Cathedral of Monreale in Palermo (begun 1174), for example. Jean-Paul Gaultier (born 1952) mingled (Catholic) ex-votos crocheted into the bodice of his 2007 dress with his stated inspiration, Byzantine icons, which were shown alongside, in another instance. Historical accuracy is not the focus here, however; instead, this chapter seeks to uncover what are interpreted as Byzantine modes of expression – dense and heavy ornament, reflective surfaces that glitter and an understanding of the performativity of objects including garments and how they have been incorporated in a variety of ways into contemporary fashions.<sup>2</sup>

The attraction of fashion designers to Byzantine visual idioms is not a contemporary phenomenon. After visiting mosaiced Byzantine churches in Ravenna, Coco Chanel (1883–1971) in collaboration with Fulco di Verdura (1898–1978) created cuff bracelets, now iconic, with jewelled Greek crosses on them, among many other Byzantinising pieces.<sup>3</sup> Mariano Fortuny (1871–1949) known for his draping, Greco-Roman-inspired designs, also created silhouettes derived from floor-length Byzantine tunics and wide-sleeved dalmatics



that were fashioned from silks that recalled Byzantine or Ottoman textile designs. These early quotations of Byzantine forms sprang up when modern artists, such as Henri Matisse (1896–1954) and the Bloomsbury Group for two examples, seized Byzantine art as fodder for their development of a Primitivist avant-garde.<sup>4</sup> The modernist sensibility, with a focus on the formal, was paramount.

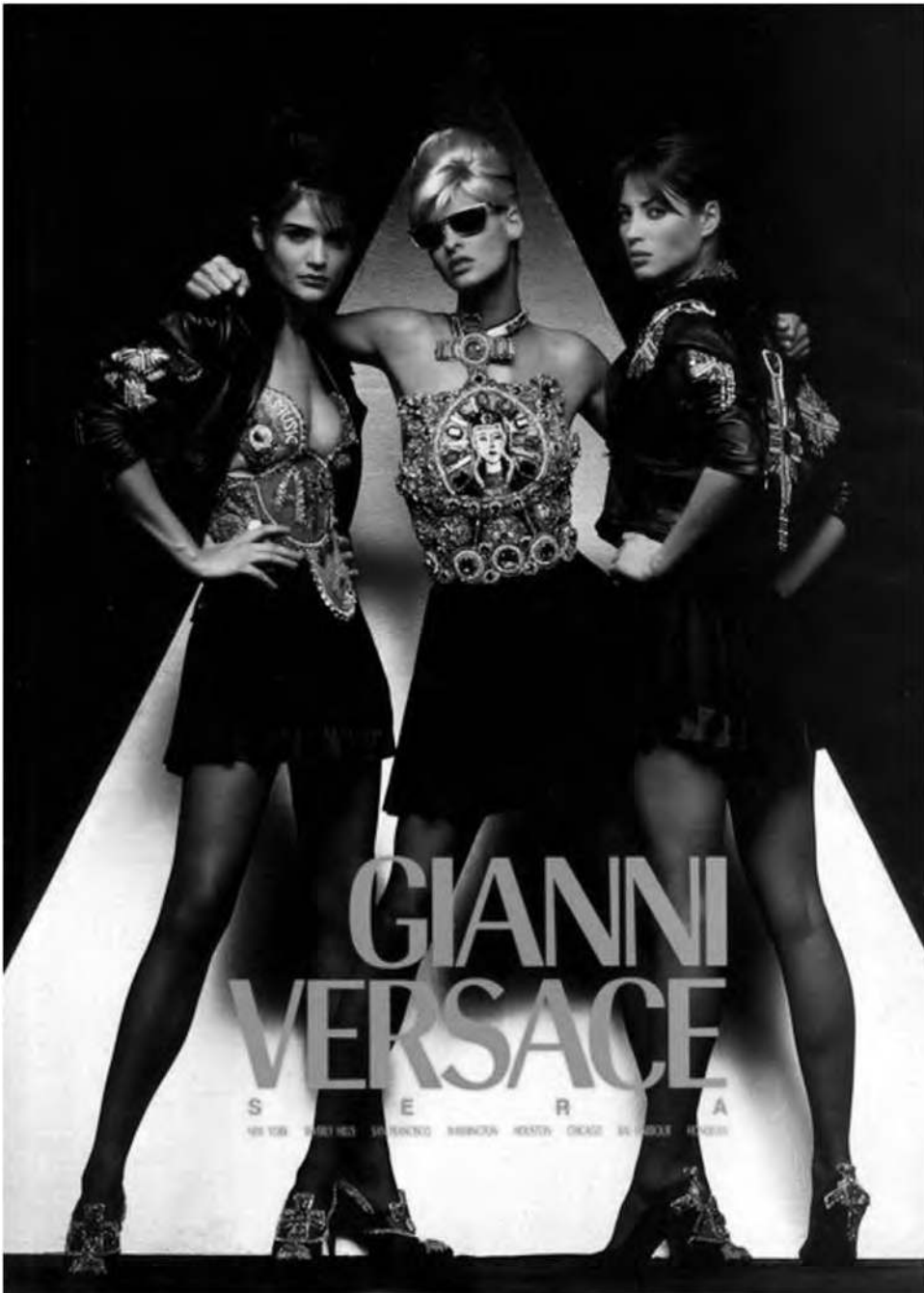
In contrast to modernist designers, Byzantine art inspired contemporary fashion designers, the focus of this chapter, to explore materiality and performativity. Couture is marked by elevated techniques, often done by hand, the use of rich materials and, to some degree, high fashion is always performative as it can push the boundaries of our conceptions of gender or beauty standards, for example. But Karl Lagerfeld (1933–2019), Gianni Versace (1946–97) and Dolce and Gabbana exemplify a particularly opulent use of materials showcased through their use of techniques that optimise reflected light and promote a high density of ornament – visual themes for which Byzantine art was their inspiration.<sup>5</sup> Moreover their designs are performative, shaping the body and by extension the perceptions of both the wearer and the viewer about the body. They use references to Byzantine objects and dress, especially those set within sacred spaces that operate alongside other objects to enliven the senses and mediate between the earthly and the divine, and that could direct the movements of the worshippers.<sup>6</sup>

The Empress Theodora (c. 500–48), wife of Justinian (r. 527–65), pictured with her entourage in a mosaic in the apse of San Vitale, Ravenna (c. 548), wears a jewel-encrusted crown and collar that slopes down over her shoulders. Additional weight is imagined in the floor-length garments that appear to have thickly embroidered designs from the hem to the knee. There are even jewels on her shoes, which combined with the rest of her outfit, if accurately portrayed, must have been extremely heavy. While no surviving Byzantine imperial garments, or indeed almost any garments at all, exist from the Byzantine Empire, depictions of the wealthy in layers of weighty garments, often embroidered and jewelled, are common. People who held official titles were commonly paid in textiles, measured by weight, so the yardage and heft of one's garments were a literal display of wealth.

Byzantine writers often commented on the difficulty of wearing imperial garments, such as the *loros* – a full-length stole, possibly made of leather, entirely covered with gemstones.<sup>7</sup> Michael Psellos (c. 1017–96), for example, wrote about Romanos III's (r. 1028–34) poor health made worse by the “magnificent robes shot with gold ... [which were] a heavy load to him ...”.<sup>8</sup> The dense ornament and presumed weightiness of the high collars, stoles, crowns and long tunics are seen in the ninth- to twelfth-century imperial portraits found in mosaics throughout the upper galleries of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (which were copied by D&G for their menswear line in 2017, to be discussed later). The burden of a load of gems not only spoke to the wealth of the Byzantine Empire but to the strength and permanence of the ruler who would be steadfast against their enemies. John Kinnamos (c. 1143–85) describes Manuel I's (r. 1143–80) victorious return to Constantinople noting that he “... donned double breast-plates, induced thereto by the inexhaustible strength of his body. Over these he put a garment decorated with precious stones, not inferior in weight to what was underneath ...”.<sup>9</sup>

The material sense of the Byzantine imperial garments as encrusted with jewels is magnified by their depiction in mosaic which contained gold leaf on some of the glass tesserae and gave the effect of cut gemstones. The hard surface of the mosaic and the imagined dress depicted is thereby intransigent, conveying the immovability of the wearer. Byzantine mosaics sparked Gianni Versace's imagination in his 1991 collection of bustiers, here worn by Helena Christensen (left), Linda Evangelista (centre) and Christy Turlington (right) (Figure 47.1).





*Figure 47.1* Versace print ad featuring (left to right) Helena Christensen, Linda Evangelista and Christy Turlington, 1991. Photo © Versace, Fair Use.

Emblazoned with a bust of the Virgin, her halo of radiant jewels is almost indiscernible from the thick beading, cabochons and gems, covering the entire piece worn by Evangelista. Held up and fastened around the neck with a large cross, the bustier recalls armour in its stiff form, appearing to sit just off the model's torso. The hard metal and glass in which her body is sheathed contrast with the delicate, thinly pleated mini skirt with which it is paired. Evangelista's power stance, with bared shoulders, conveys dominance: she is a glamorous warrior.

Dolce and Gabbana looked to mosaics in designing several collections through the years.<sup>10</sup> Dresses from their 2013 collection – featured in the Metropolitan's exhibition – appear stiff due to the apparent rigidity of the materials and this effect was accentuated by the use of cylindrical sleeves, masking the bodily form beneath, hearkening to ever-modest Byzantine clothing.<sup>11</sup> Dolce and Gabbana directly appropriated mosaic using gold thread and stitching actual gemstones onto the frocks. They are known for their special attention to hand-done techniques, hosting an annual event known as *Alte Artigianalità* (high craftsmanship), an invite-only couture show for top clients. In 2017, the D&G menswear collection, called *Alta Sartoria* (high tailoring), was trotted out in Palermo, the city of the Cathedral of Monreale from which the designers drew inspiration. The faces of Empress Zoe (r. 1028–50) and Emperor Constantine Monomachos (r. 1042–55) from the eleventh-century mosaics in the Church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul were recreated in luminous beading on the suit jackets and tunics of the menswear (Figure 47.2).<sup>12</sup>

Mosaic prompted designers not only to think about the permanence of gemstones and the wealth they stand in for but it has also been a muse for its ability to reflect light in many directions at once, as tesserae were set at varying angles to give a glittering effect under candle or sunlight. The radiance of the D&G jacket (Figure 47.2) makes this effect clear. It sparkles, and as the wearer moves and gestures, the light animates the surface even more. Other designers have similarly been enticed to use gold and silver to play with light, such as Gianni Versace who created a series of evening dresses after seeing the 1997 Metropolitan Museum exhibition *The Glory of Byzantium*, featuring several processional crosses (Figure 47.3).<sup>13</sup>

Versace used Oroton for these gowns, a mesh fabric of tiny squares made of reflective metal.<sup>14</sup> Embroidered onto the dresses are crosses, in the example here extending the full length of the body turning the wearer, effectively, into a golden cross. In another example made for a wedding, Versace veiled his hypothetical bride completely, ornamenting the veil with a large cross. By linking these dresses with an object that was revered as it was carried in procession above a crowd, Versace has turned his model into an object of performance. Oroton was selected for its ability to move easily as it conforms to the body, unlike dense embroidered fabric. The cross, meanwhile, can be seen from a distance, on a red carpet or on the back of a bride as she walks down the aisle and prompts the wearer to proceed with a rigid posture, embodying the cross form. The radiant surface of the Oroton and the cross emit light creating the effect that the wearer is lit by a spotlight, one that moves with them.

Karl Lagerfeld has been so inspired by Byzantine mosaics that in 2011 he published a photography book of those he saw in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna.<sup>15</sup> Lagerfeld's pre-Fall 2011 collection called "Paris-Byzance" is peppered with references to Byzantine dress: heavily jewelled trims; high collars that descend over the shoulders and chest; glittering, wide belts; the layering of tunics and so on. The geometry of mosaic rather than its light and colour effects, manifests in this collection through clothing that appears made of tesserae. For instance, a pair of black leather pants is formed from a grid of black squares; a boxy, off-the-shoulder, cropped jacket is patterned in a black-and-white lattice; or in a final example, a short-sleeved dress is made in a muted checkerboard fabric of green, red and gold.



*Figure 47.2* Dolce and Gabbana suit jacket, 2017 Menswear Alta Sartoria collection, from Nick Carvell, “Inside the elegant, extravagant world of Dolce & Gabbana Alta Sartoria” in *GQ* (July 11, 2017) <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/dolce-gabbana-alta-sartoria-palermo> Accessed May 15, 2023. Photo: Dolce and Gabbana. Photo: Dolce and Gabbana. © Dolce and Gabbana, Fair Use.



*Figure 47.3* Exhibition views from *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* of Versace's 1997 Processional Cross gowns, 2018. Photo: Jennifer Ball (author).

Lagerfeld further references Byzantine clothing by outlining the body in gem-like ornaments, at the shoulders, waist, neck and hemlines, imitating Byzantine methods of gender-specific, bodily accents. Attention to the body and gender is not something one immediately associates with Byzantine dress, which always covers the skin, except for

the face and hands, and is so voluminous it appears to hide the body. However, as Maria Parani argues, Byzantine women used fitted garments visible at key sites to reveal their body, without showing skin.<sup>16</sup> In Byzantine images of dress, tight sleeves emerge from beneath wide-sleeved over garments; more fitted under tunics emerge around the knee from voluminous over-tunics; high, slender collars display the line of a woman's neck beneath; wide sashes secure the mass of a tunic and simultaneously feature the breasts just above.<sup>17</sup> Many of Lagerfeld's designs in this collection play with similar modes of highlighting the body. In one look, a tunic that extends past the knees is split up to the waist and worn over black, diaphanous under skirting; the model is both covered and revealed (Figure 47.4). The boxy, modest tunic, with wide cylindrical sleeves to the elbow has a gold, jewelled, round collar. A belt of gold tesserae cinches the model's waist, and with its soft triangular form, points downward to the slitted skirt, framing her erogenous zone in contrast to the overall prim cut of the tunic. Gender and conventional desirability are wilfully destabilised in this collection.

Perhaps more than the obvious references to tesserae, the mutability of gender in this collection recalls Byzantine modes of style. The clothing reveals little skin, especially by contemporary standards. Instead, bodies are embroidered with clusters of gems accentuating powerful shoulders, long necks, slender waists and wrists, merely suggesting what is underneath. Some of the women's looks are androgynous or masculine: there are tunics over pants, a bejewelled, shoulder-revealing jacket is worn over a men's shirt. Similarly, the men's clothing in this collection employ large-gemmed pendants, knitted onto their chests and other accessories, now fit for both genders.<sup>18</sup> The designs in this collection oscillate between gender cues and obscuring and revealing the erotic bodies beneath. Lagerfeld anticipates the breaking down of gender binaries seen as commonplace fashion today.

A reviewer of Lagerfeld's pre-Fall 2011 show of the collection noted that the

show is about flexing the muscles of the artisans that the label has gathered under its umbrella. It's about the little black dress crafted from little silk and feather flowers using a level of craftsmanship that's almost gone the way of Byzantium,<sup>19</sup>

which could be said equally of Versace, or Dolce and Gabbana. Byzantine art, particularly mosaic, but also the depictions of silk clothing encrusted with gems, ignited an interest in Byzantine modes and allowed these designers to play with ornament and its reflective qualities, weight and bold colours. The placement and build-up of ornament were not just for the sake of luxury but additionally made these garments performative, transforming bodies into processional objects or plated armour, for example.

Despite the fact that Byzantine artworks from church interiors stimulated these contemporary designers and, in the instance of a borrowed image of the Virgin, were obviously Christian, the resulting clothing does not comment on or demonstrates any particular interest in Christianity. The designers attracted to Byzantine modes of expression stand in contrast to, for example, Valentino (née Valentino Clemente Ludovico Garamani, born 1932) who riffed on the dress of a cardinal in his Fall 2017 couture collection, turning a princely vestment into an exceedingly low-cut woman's dress.<sup>20</sup> Or, in another example, John Galiano (born 1960) gave the pope's garments the extreme curves of a woman with a tiny waist and exaggerated hips.<sup>21</sup> Even if these designers were inspired by the church, there is something nevertheless transgressive about playing with the gender of Catholic



*Figure 47.4* Dress from Karl Lagerfeld's Chanel Pre-Fall 2011 Paris-Byzance Collection. Model: Sasha Pivovarova Photo: Courtesy of Chanel.

vestments, and by extension, the holy men themselves. Versace, Lagerfeld and Dolce and Gabbana have no interest in commenting on Christianity. Byzantine expression, rather, is a vehicle for their material concerns, allowing them to use embroidery and jewels, building them up to reflect light and add weight, and to both reveal and obfuscate the body beneath. What is typically considered erotic – showing skin or softness – is subverted by these designers, whose fashions play with modesty and use a density of hard metal and stone to defy the body beneath and blur gender norms.

## Notes

- 1 \*Thanks to my research assistant for this project Jessica Bal.  
The Second Vatican Council, referred to as Vatican II, was convened by Pope John XXIII from 1962–65, ostensibly to modernise the church. Among its many changes was a distinct updating and simplification of monastic habits and clerical dress.
- 2 Here I use performativity in the sense of J.L. Austin from his 1962 *How to do things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), and other theorists who followed, such as Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. In this thinking, words, or in my study clothing, can bring about change and are a form of social action. For example, Judith Butler argued that gender is not innate but something constructed through language (*Gender Trouble* NY: Routledge, 1990). I argue that fashion itself can construct our understanding of gender and the body.
- 3 See the case study by Jenny Albani in this volume.
- 4 This is explored for example in [Berkowitz 2018](#); [Lewis 2009](#); [Kourelis 2007](#).
- 5 For this short chapter I focus on three contemporary designers, but the use of Byzantine or Byzantine-adjacent aesthetics has also been seen in the designs of Donatella Versace (1997–98 Couture), Christian LaCroix (Fall 1998 Couture), Alexander McQueen (Fall 2010 Ready-to-Wear), Jean-Paul Gaultier (Spring/Summer 2007 Couture) and Naeem Khan (Fall 2013 Ready-to-Wear).
- 6 There are many studies of Byzantine art that touch on performativity. Alexei Lidov's notion of heterotopy, [Lidov 2006](#) and Bissera Pentcheva's work on icons, [Pentcheva 2006](#), to name just two examples.
- 7 For a discussion of the loros, see [Ball 2005](#).
- 8 [Sewter 1979](#): 80–1.
- 9 *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*. [Brand 1976](#): 143.
- 10 *Heavenly Bodies* featured women's clothing from their Fall 2013 collection. The Women's collections for Fall 2011, Spring 2015, 2017 couture, and Fall 2018 also use a mosaic aesthetic for some pieces as does the Men's 2017 couture collection.
- 11 See this dress here: <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/heavenly-bodies/art-and-fashion-images>.
- 12 Nick Carvell, 'Inside the elegant, extravagant world of Dolce & Gabbana Alta Sartoria' in *GQ* July 2017, <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/dolce-gabbana-alta-sartoria-palermo> (accessed May 15, 2023).
- 13 These designs are officially credited to Gianni Versace, but they were produced in 1997, the year he was murdered, at which time his sister, Donatella, was taking an increasing role in designing clothing for the house, and it is widely noted that she designed some of them.
- 14 Oroton is an Australian fashion house (since 1938) that famously used this fabric in 1951 to design its iconic handbag. The mesh metal fabric, previously industrial fabric, is now referred to as Oroton as a result. <https://oroton.com/the-oroton-story> (Accessed May 20, 2023).
- 15 Karl Lagerfeld, *Byzantine Fragments*, Steidl, 2011.
- 16 [Parani 2025](#).
- 17 See, for example, Maria of Alania in her portrait with Nikephoros III Botaneiates in the *Homilies of John Chrysostom* (Paris BN, Coislin 79, f.2v).
- 18 See the entire collection at <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/pre-fall-2011/chanel/slideshow/collection#1>.



- 19 Meenal Mistry, 'Chanel Pre-Fall 2011' in *Vogue Runway* December 6, 2010 <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/pre-fall-2011/chanel#review> Accessed June 27, 2023.
- 20 See look 60 in the entire Fall 2017 Couture collection <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-couture/valentino/slideshow/collection#60> Accessed June 28, 2023.
- 21 There are three versions of this 2018 dress, here worn by Rihanna in 2018: <https://www.thecut.com/2018/05/rihanna-met-gala-2018-pope-outfit.html> Accessed June 25, 2023.

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# BYZANTIUM IN VIDEOGAMES

*Marco Fasolio*

Since the dawn of videogaming in the 1960s, historical or pseudo-historical content has been constantly exploited by developers, with the aim of attracting a diverse group of potential users. Indeed, one of the first-ever created computer games was *The Sumer Game* in which the player managed a Sumerian town as King Hammurabi. This was a purely textual programme written in FOCAL language by David Dymont in 1968 and later “popularised” by David H. Ahl with the name *Hamurabi* (1971) after adapting it to BASIC.<sup>1</sup> Where the requisite graphic technology was available during the initial decades of the history of videogames, the Middle Ages were one of the periods with the greatest potential for fantasy reinterpretation. Elves, dwarves, knights, princesses, crenelated castles and enchanted woods were already well-known to those interested in playing a videogame and could be used to create an almost perfect setting for an immersive adventure. It is no wonder that two of the most successful Role Play Games (RPG) series, namely *Ultima* (1981–99) and *Final Fantasy* (1987–ongoing), were both set in a medieval-like fantasy world.<sup>2</sup> In such a “medieval-friendly” environment, one would expect that Byzantium would also find its place at some point, but, until the late-nineties and especially within the framework of RPGs and similar genres, it was not the case.<sup>3</sup> It is worth pointing out that up until the final decade of the twentieth century, the videogame industry was a purely American, Japanese and, to a lesser extent, western-European affair, with its customers almost entirely located within the Western world and in Japan. Within such a market a Byzantine-based product, or even one with some Byzantinising elements, did not hold any interest for the target audience, not only because of the lack of familiarity with the actual history of the eastern Roman Empire but, perhaps more significantly, also with the most common stereotypes connected to Byzantium. Furthermore, the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century phenomenon of Byzantinism, namely the exotic fascination for – and thus an increased awareness of – some aspects of the Byzantine civilisation, was the prerogative of a relatively small, cultured elite.

Nonetheless, with the release in 1991 of the first chapter of the *Civilization* saga, *Civ* henceforth, the early nineties de facto marked the beginning of the grand historical strategy genre and in 1999, when the Middle Ages became the setting of *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings*, *AoE II* henceforth, Byzantium was “forced” to make its debut, because a



Figure 48.1 Microsoft Studios/Ensemble Studios, *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings*, 1999, digital game screenshot, showing the temple (left) and the wonder (right). © Microsoft Corporation. Screenshot reproduced for academic purposes under fair dealing/fair use.

medieval world without the eastern Romans would have been too much of an oddity for a product that aimed for a minimal amount of realism (Figure 48.1).

Since then, most strategy videogames set during the medieval era, either within a Euro-Mediterranean or a global context, and even a few with a larger chronological span, have given their players the chance to play as the Byzantines, but, as far as other genres are concerned, the “original sin” of the industry still has to be overcome. To the best of my knowledge, an entirely or mostly Byzantine title has yet to be released onto the market, while post-Byzantine or Byzantine-like contents are only found in two or, stretching the concept of Byzantium also to what may vaguely remind us of some of its features, at most three videogames. In this case study, which has no precedent, save for a few articles of mine, plus a couple of others and some lines in a handful of other contributions dedicated to similar topics,<sup>4</sup> we will examine how Byzantine civilisation has been portrayed in videogames,<sup>5</sup> both strategic and non-strategic, trying to understand which of its traits, real or alleged, were exploited by the industry in order to make its products palatable for its audience and hence profitable for its makers.

### **Purple, Orthodoxy, Betas, Eagles and *Romanitas*: Ingredients for a Videogaming Byzantium**

During an interview recorded in January 2021 with the American Byzantinist Anthony Kaldellis, in which he discussed Byzantium in videogames, Troy Goodfellow, who works as a public relations manager for Paradox Interactive,<sup>6</sup> argued that what players chiefly expect when they play as the Byzantines is faith and religion.<sup>7</sup> Even though Goodfellow was referring to strategy titles, which are Paradox’s core business, his statement may be applied to every videogame that displays some kind of Byzantine content, with possibly one partial exception – *Assassin’s Creed: Revelations* (2011), ACR henceforth. Despite similarities in their interpretation and portrayal of Byzantium, historical strategy titles – in which the player usually manages a country as its ruler – and other genres, namely RPGs

and adventure games – wherein users typically impersonate an individual whose actions occur within a more or less pre-determined path – will be discussed separately because of their structural differences.

In the introduction it was mentioned that the first strategic game to portray the Byzantines was *AoE II* in 1999, but, in actuality, their earliest appearance dates back to 1991, when they were included among the selectable options in *Medieval Lords: Soldier Kings of Europe*, originally created as an educational tool by history professor Martin Campion and then released for commercial purposes for Commodore 64 and MS-DOS. *Medieval Lords* did not enjoy great popularity because, even taking into account the technological limitations of the period, the graphics were really poor and the gameplay rather elementary.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, as far as Byzantium is concerned, the game began the “tradition” of identifying the empire with the colour purple. Campion presumably knew that purple had been used for imperial vestments, but it is hard to determine whether later creators had this same awareness or whether they were simply copying from each other to make Byzantium more easily recognisable for historical strategy aficionados. At any rate, the result was that in each series wherein countries/factions were represented by means of fixed colours, e.g., *Total War*, *Crusader Kings* and *Europa Universalis*, *TW*, *CK* and *EU* henceforth, the eastern Romans invariably became the purple dot on the map.

How to represent the Byzantines in a recognisable way in videogames has been a significant issue for designers and their outward appearance, colours included, is obviously a major contributing factor. Cities and buildings are perhaps the most noticeable elements in this regard and giving them an “oriental” style seems to be the customary way to differentiate Byzantium from other civilisations. Although an educated layperson might identify this practice as reminiscent of Orientalism, it is mostly due to technical constraints, because recreating a specific style for each country, especially in games with large numbers of playable options, would greatly increase the production costs and the software’s “weight”. Byzantium is thus commonly grouped with other “oriental” realms, such as eastern-European ones like Russia and Poland or those in the Middle East, like Persia or the Turkic principalities. This expedient clearly separates the empire from its Western counterparts, but it also yields bizarre outcomes, the most astonishing of which are undoubtedly the onion domes of *EU III* and *IV*’s churches and *AoE II*’s “temple/monastery”, the religious building in the game, which closely resembles a madrassa with two minarets.<sup>9</sup>

Staying within the domain of buildings and recognisability, a Byzantinist might argue that since Hagia Sophia is the most iconic Byzantine monument, it would also be the best option to characterise the empire. However, most developers have apparently disagreed, except for the creators of *AoE II*, wherein something like Hagia Sophia (the church of the Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople has been turned into the Byzantine “wonder” – a sort of representative monument specific to each civilisation – in the game.<sup>10</sup> The sole videogame to exploit Hagia Sophia with the unmistakable purpose of “alluring” its players is *Civ V* (2010), in which its domes peep out from behind what might possibly be regarded as the single conscious tribute to Orientalism: Empress Theodora’s portrait (Figure 48.2).

The latter is a clear reworking of Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant’s (1845–1902) painting *L’impératrice Théodora au Colisée*, 1887 (Empress Theodora at the Colosseum) – and maybe also a semi-intentional allusion to the modern depiction of the empress as a *femme fatale*, stemming from Victorien Sardou’s (1831–1908) drama *Théodora* (1884) through the changes made to her posture and level of eye contact in comparison to the original painting.<sup>11</sup> A couple of changes have also been included to make it “more Byzantine”,



Figure 48.2 Firaxis Games/2K Games, *Civilization V*, 2010, Digital game screenshot, depicting Empress Theodora. © Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Screenshot reproduced for academic purposes under fair dealing/fair use.

namely a crown inspired by San Vitale's mosaics and, as anticipated, Hagia Sophia has replaced the Colosseum.<sup>12</sup>

Going beyond this Orientalising veneer to the deeper “non-aesthetic” features of Byzantium as it is reproduced in strategic videogames, it seems that Georg Ostrogorsky's (1902–76) thought has been assimilated somehow by software developers, given that the empire's “pillars” are nearly always Orthodox Christianity, Roman heritage and, to some extent, Greek culture,<sup>13</sup> with varying degrees of impact on the final outcome depending on the series/instalment. Save for *AoE II*, which includes “religious technologies”,<sup>14</sup> but does not assign a specific denomination to each country, the Byzantines are, unsurprisingly, always classified as Orthodox. Furthermore, since some kind of spirituality seems to be one of the Byzantine's most appreciated trademarks among the gaming community, a few titles have also tried to turn it into their main strength, with regard to the advantages it may provide to the player. For instance, in *AoE II* the beginning of each game played as Byzantium is marked by a sort of monks' choir and, unlike all other civilisations, the empire has access to nearly all religious technologies. However, the games that have focused most heavily on this aspect are arguably the last instalments of *Civ*, i.e. *V* and *VI* (2016), wherein significant in-game bonuses connected to the development of the *basileia*'s religious features make the Byzantines one of the most powerful civilisations in the game.<sup>15</sup>

While not denying the crucial role played by Orthodoxy/religion in the crafting of Byzantium within videogames, the element which, based on my experience as a player who is also a professional Byzantinist, exerts more influence on the course of a virtual campaign with the empire is its Roman legacy – often explicitly advertised, as in the case of *Medieval II: TW*. Byzantium's Roman legacy manifests visually through Byzantine military units and buildings, such as cataphracts, dromons,<sup>16</sup> although “Byzantinised” with Greek fire, and aqueducts.<sup>17</sup> In addition, it also manifests “psychologically”, by enticing the player

to “restore the former glory of the Roman Empire”, either by means of a description of the lost prestige of the *basileia* and its “current” pitiable conditions, as in *Medieval II: TW*, or by awarding bonuses to the player who is able to expand the borders of Byzantium as they were during Late Antiquity, like in *EU IV*.<sup>18</sup>

Among the elements of “Ostrogorsky’s triad”, Greek culture is perhaps a lesser factor in strategy videogames than Orthodoxy and *Romanitas*, especially because, despite being inherent to Byzantium in most titles, it has a relatively minor effect on the gameplay compared to the other two. Except for *AoE II* – wherein the empire’s “Romanness” is emphasised to the point that, oddly enough, Byzantine characters speak Latin whenever selected – Greek language and heritage are either explicitly stated, as in *EU*, or implied by the names of emperors, generals, bishops and courtiers, as in the majority of other titles, with *Civ*’s ones holding the uncontested trophy for the effort invested in this specific aspect. *Civ*’s Byzantine rulers, such as Theodora in the fifth iteration of the game or Basil II the Bulgarslayer (r. 976–1025) in the sixth address the player in a sort of reconstructed medieval Greek, clearly distinguishable through its vocabulary and itacistic pronunciation from the language spoken by ancient Greek leaders like Pericles or Alexander the Great in the same game, which really contributes towards the sensation of interacting with a *basileus* or a *basilissa*.<sup>19</sup>

Before turning to RPGs and adventure games, it is perhaps worth considering a few issues regarding Byzantine flags in strategic ones, since the choices made in this regard by product developers are far from trivial. *Civ*’s iterations stand apart in this respect, because their focus on Byzantium’s religiosity “compelled” them to use something to recall it, such as Constantine’s *chi-rho* in the fourth (2005) and sixth instalments or the – Orthodox, but anachronistic – Russian cross in the fifth. All other videogames, however, took the path of using Palaiologan betas, which were strangely held as being more representative than the, perhaps better known, double-headed eagle.<sup>20</sup> Such a decision seems perfectly consistent with *EU*’s starting dates, which are all placed within the very final decades of the empire’s history, but in others cases it undermines plausibility, jarring with *AoE II*’s emphasis on the proximity between its seemingly late-antique Byzantium and ancient Rome or the campaigns in *CK*’s and *TW*’s titles which never begin after the second half of the eleventh century.

As stated in the introduction, Byzantine settings are rarely used in videogames outside of strategy titles, save for a few exceptions that, nonetheless, do not take place during the Middle Ages and whose references to the “proper” *basileia* derive from a rather loose reinterpretation of historical data. The Byzantine-styled domed vaults of the temple district in *Baldur’s Gate II: Shadows of Amn* (2000) are probably a conscious *variatio* – not surprisingly related to religion – inside a medievalising universe, but the only titles with a significant amount of Byzantine content are *ACR* and *Rise of the Tomb Raider* (2015), *RTR* henceforth. The adventures of the player’s avatar in *ACR* unfold in the Ottoman Empire during the Şahkulu rebellion (1511),<sup>21</sup> with most of the action occurring in Constantinople and in the underground city of Malakopeia/Derinkuyu. *RTR*, on the other hand, has a fantasy Byzantine background story that begins in the ninth century, whose traces are followed by Lara Croft, the protagonist of the series, in contemporary Syria and Russia. Even though both versions of Byzantine culture could be deemed equally fanciful, their benchmarks are diametrically opposed, insofar as *RTR* seems to follow most of the prevailing trends observed thus far in strategy games, whereas *ACR* is virtually the only title that incorporates a considerable deal of anti-Byzantine tropes in the gameplay, seeming almost impermeable to influence from other products.<sup>22</sup>

Since one of the player’s main tasks in *ACR* is to help an Ottoman prince to thwart a farfetched plot against his dynasty, the Byzantines or, more accurately, their descendants,



probably seemed a good option for this principal enemy by “screenwriters”. Allied with Şahkulu and led by the historical character Manuel Palaiologos (r. 1455–1512),<sup>23</sup> they plan to overthrow the Ottomans and restore the Byzantine Empire from their powerbase in the dungeons of Derinkuyu (Figure 48.3).

Being villains, the “Byzantines” had to be distinguishable from other characters and assigned some negative features, but quite unexpectedly, the fact that they were Christians as opposed to the Turks was almost left implicit, except for a few iconographic elements that can be glimpsed in their hideout. Although they speak English, like every individual in the game, they frequently add simple Greek phrases during conversations. They also – save for Manuel himself, who is realistically dressed like a wealthy Ottoman subject – wear a sort of vest with a huge drawing of a double-headed eagle, which clearly marks them as Byzantines but looks



*Figure 48.3* Ubisoft Montreal, *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*, 2011, digital game screenshot, showing Manuel Palaiologos and his henchmen. © Ubisoft Entertainment. Screenshot reproduced for academic purposes under fair dealing/fair use.





Figure 48.4 Crystal Dynamics/Square Enix, *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, 2015, Digital game screenshot, depicting the city of Kitež. © Square Enix Ltd. Screenshot reproduced for academic purposes under fair dealing/fair use.

pretty impractical for those who need to act in secret. It is nonetheless their treacherous ways and their plotting from a hidden city that recall some of the oldest anti-Byzantine clichés, such as accusations of duplicity and unmanliness.<sup>24</sup> Their characterisation even seems to follow the use of the word “Byzantine” in contemporary Turkish politics, wherein the adjective usually describes those lay and Westernised elites that, just like Manuel Palaiologos’s henchmen, allegedly conspire to undermine the legitimate government.<sup>25</sup>

*RTR*’s “post-Byzantines”, by contrast, confirm Goodfellow’s assertion that religiosity is the most popular feature of the empire’s subjects in videogames. They descend from the followers of Jacob, also known as the “deathless prophet”, a Byzantine heretic who gained immortality after deciphering a mysterious artefact and, following persecution by the Church, first moved from Constantinople to Syria and then to Russia, where he founded the city of Kitež.<sup>26</sup> Finally, after voluntarily burying the latter with an avalanche during a Mongol siege, the prophet flew into the wilderness of Siberia. Apart from the language of the descendants of the prophet’s original adherents, who speak Greek among themselves, the most fascinating facet of the game is its display of a rather typical “Byzantine dynamic”, namely the conflict, albeit highly fanciful, between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Indeed, almost everything that references Byzantium in *RTR* remains within the sphere of religion, from the story itself, to the ruins of the Syrian settlement, in which the virtual wall-paintings are a clear attempt to imitate Byzantine art by the game designers, to Kitež and its architecture which is reminiscent of the Neo-Byzantine style that came to the fore in Orthodox countries from the second half of the nineteenth century (Figure 48.4).<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite substantial differences between the videogames discussed in terms of purpose, gameplay and potential audience, and the relatively long chronological span under consideration from the earliest games engaging with Byzantium (1991) to the most recent ones (second half of the 2010s), a number of quintessential features of the fictional Byzantium represented in the majority of titles

have been identified. The most “transversal” of what might be labelled the “gaming trademarks of Byzantium” is undeniably faith/Orthodoxy, followed by Greek language and culture and an often Orientalising appearance, while Roman heritage seems a priority within strategy products only. Although deeper insight into whom videogame creators consulted with to build their version of Byzantium might unveil something more about their sources of inspiration, it seems that anti-Byzantine tropes did not easily “penetrate” the products examined, either because of the limited appeal of such tropes to the average user or, save for *ACR* and perhaps the case of *Theodora* in *Civ V*, because the *basileia* did not need the addition of a further “dark allure”, like that of other medievalising fantasy worlds, to become more recognisable and attractive.

## Notes

- 1 Concerning the title, what appears to be a spelling mistake is due to the fact that programmes’ titles could contain up to eight characters only, while “Hammurabi” would have had nine. Both FOCAL and BASIC are early programming languages.
- 2 [Accordi Rickards 2014](#): 18, 64–7, 88 ff.
- 3 On the Middle Ages in videogames, see [Jiménez Alcázar 2009](#): 311–65; 2011: 299–340; 2021: 451–89; [Cortese 2020](#): 93–126.
- 4 [Fasolio 2021](#): 234–63; 2023: 123–45; [Sabanoglu 2024](#): 439–448; [Oguz 2025](#): 1–37; [Vázquez-Miraz, Matos and Freire 2020](#): 194–8; [Jiménez Alcázar 2009](#): 342; 2011: 336; 2021: 467–8, 472–4.
- 5 Our survey will hence exclude “didactic” games, about which, see [Stamou et al. 2022](#): 113–30, as they were purportedly meant to teach something to their users rather than to entertain them like “standard” titles.
- 6 A Swedish publisher specialising in historical strategy videogames.
- 7 [Goodfellow 2021](#).
- 8 [Moss 1991](#): 52–4.
- 9 See also [Fasolio 2021](#): 242–3; 2023: 128, 132, 135–6.
- 10 Under certain circumstances the first player who builds the wonder wins the game.
- 11 On the image of Theodora, see, e.g., [Carlà-Uhink 2020](#): 167–83.
- 12 For a longer and more detailed analysis, see [Fasolio 2021](#): 250–5; [Vázquez-Miraz et al. 2020](#): 197–8.
- 13 [Ostrogorsky 1993](#): 25.
- 14 Namely “technological” advancements that may be “researched” in the temple/monastery, and mostly affect the “effectiveness” of the monks. For example, with “atonement” monks can convert, i.e. practically “steal”, monks of other players.
- 15 See also [Fasolio 2021](#): 240–1, 248–51.
- 16 For example, in *AoE II*, the medieval titles of the *TW* series and the latest instalments of *Civ*. See also [Oguz 2025](#): 5–23.
- 17 Namely in *Medieval II: TW*.
- 18 Such bonuses become available upon the completion of specific missions, which are quite hard to achieve, given that the game starts in the aftermath of the battle of Varna (11 November 1444), when the “real Byzantium” was already on the brink of the abyss. A more detailed analysis of this issue can be found in [Fasolio 2023](#): 128–30, 132–4, 137; 2021: 240–7.
- 19 For a detailed consideration of this topic, see [Fasolio 2021](#): 250–1.
- 20 On Byzantine flags, see [Babuín 2001](#): 5–59; 2010: 109–43.
- 21 A pro-Shia and pro-Safavid uprising that took place in Anatolia. [Boyar 2012](#): 104–6.
- 22 Anti-Byzantine tropes can also be found in *Medieval II: TW*. The description of the Byzantine faction seems to be written as an impoverished emulation of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, but this does not have any actual effect on the campaign. See [Fasolio 2021](#): 244–5; [Fasolio 2023](#): 130–1.
- 23 [Harris 1995](#): 538–44.
- 24 [Hunger 1987](#): 33–47.
- 25 [Bayrı 2023](#): 169–71.
- 26 Probably a reference to the Russian legendary town. See [Goldt 2012](#): 259–80.
- 27 Concerning this style, see [Kishkinova 2014](#): 267–80. See also [Saveliev](#) in this volume. For a lengthier analysis of the two games, see also [Fasolio 2021](#): 256–61.

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## UNESCO AND THE BYZANTINE HERITAGE

*Vassiliki Dimitropoulou*

A number of magnificent monuments built during the glorious Byzantine period have so far been listed as World Heritage sites by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Among them are the magnificent church of Hagia Sophia and the Chora monastery as part of the Historic Areas of Istanbul in Turkey; Mount Athos Meteora the Paleochristian and Byzantine monuments of Thessalonika, Daphni monastery in Attica Hosios Loukas, Boeotia, Nea Moni of Chios and the monastery of St John the Theologian on the island of Patmos, all in Greece; the early Christian monuments of Ravenna in Italy; the cathedral churches of Cefalú and Monreale in Sicily; Studenica Monastery in Serbia; and St Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai in Egypt. The Byzantine Empire, from the fourth century to the fifteenth century, covered a geographical area that extended around the Mediterranean Sea basin and the Black Sea region, spanning three continents. The territory of the once-vast empire today forms part of the national territories of many states, comprising different ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions. Byzantium, as a major producer of art and architecture, has bequeathed an important cultural heritage that has survived to the present day. The significance of the protection and preservation of Byzantine monuments, built on the former territories of the Byzantine Empire, has been recognised by the international organisation UNESCO and, therefore, numerous such monuments and sites have been designated as World Heritage sites.

The aim of this chapter is to present the institutional protection framework of UNESCO for Byzantine monuments included in the World Heritage List. Due to limitations of space, this chapter will not provide a detailed presentation of all Byzantine properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. Rather, it constitutes an introduction and a starting point for future research on this topic. What does the institutional framework of UNESCO include? What is the World Heritage List of UNESCO? What is the process of designation for World Heritage sites? What does it mean for a monument to be designated as a World Heritage site? The answers to these questions will throw light on an area of research with a view to contributing significantly to the discussion of the modern reception of Byzantium; particularly to understanding how Byzantine heritage is appreciated today in the context of this

international organisation and whether Byzantine heritage stands on an equal footing with the legacy of other important cultures.

The UNESCO was founded in 1945 in order to establish the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind” and thereby prevent the outbreak of another world war. UNESCO’s mission is “to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information”.<sup>1</sup> The responsibilities of the international organisation of UNESCO extend to safeguarding the world’s cultural and natural heritage, including Byzantine heritage.

More specifically, the idea of creating an international institution for protecting heritage emerged after World War I.<sup>2</sup> In 1972, UNESCO brought the concept of “World Heritage” into official existence through the adoption of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. The World Heritage Convention became effective in 1975 and the World Heritage Committee is responsible for its implementation.<sup>3</sup> Concerning the practical operation of the World Heritage Convention, the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* were developed in 1977 and have since been continuously revised by the World Heritage Committee to reflect new concepts, knowledge and experiences.<sup>4</sup> It provides a framework for international co-operation in preserving and protecting cultural treasures and natural areas throughout the world, something that is much needed today due to the rise of religious extremism, climate change and the danger of global conflict.

UNESCO fosters the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage by listing those sites whose Outstanding Universal Value should be protected for all people, thereby ensuring their preservation through close cooperation among States Parties. The term “Outstanding Universal Value” is crucial and designates the cultural and/or natural significance that is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of equal importance for both present and future generations of all humanity. Thus, UNESCO reinforces the idea that these World Heritage Sites constitute a common heritage that should be preserved as unique testimonies to an enduring past.<sup>5</sup> Today, the World Heritage List includes 1248 properties located in 170 countries around the world, of which 972 are cultural, 235 are natural and 41 are mixed properties. The term “cultural heritage” refers to a monument, group of buildings or site of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value.

I will turn now to how a site may be inscribed on the World Heritage List and the process of designation for World Heritage Sites.<sup>6</sup> Only countries that comply with the World Heritage Convention can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in the World Heritage List. The process of designation includes the submission of a nomination file for a particular site. However, the property must have already been included in the State Party’s Tentative List, an inventory of important natural and cultural heritage sites which, according to the State Party, demonstrate potential Outstanding Universal Value to humanity and are, therefore, suitable for nomination to the World Heritage List.

The nomination file is submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review.<sup>7</sup> The submitted file is evaluated by two advisory bodies mandated by the World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and/or IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), depending on the criteria the

nominated site is expected to fulfil.<sup>8</sup> The advisory bodies make comments on the content of the nomination file and each case is then examined by the World Heritage Committee, which decides whether the nominated site deserves to be awarded World Heritage status. Once a site has been nominated and evaluated by the advisory bodies, it falls to the World Heritage Committee to make the final decision about its inscription. Once a year, the Committee convenes to decide which sites should be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The Committee can defer its decision and request further information on the sites from the relevant States Parties. Once a site is inscribed as a World Heritage Site, it is regularly inspected by UNESCO, which ensures that the management criteria are satisfied.

What are the selection criteria? In order to be included on the World Heritage List, the sites, apart from being of Outstanding Universal Value, must meet at least one out of ten selection criteria: criteria i–vi concern cultural properties and criteria vii–x concern natural ones.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I will list only the cultural criteria that a nominated monument must meet:

- i to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- ii to exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- iii to constitute a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;
- iv to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- v to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures) or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
- vi to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, ideas or beliefs, artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

But what does the World Heritage status mean for an archaeological site or monument? Being selected and designated as a UNESCO Heritage Site means, first and foremost, that its exceptional authenticity and uniqueness is acknowledged. The World Heritage status is an honour and a privilege and can lead to social and economic benefits. It promotes the site and tends to act as a sign of originality and international quality that attracts local and international tourists. It also gives symbolic value by bringing prestige to the site. At the same time, it becomes an educational tool for the local community, motivating its members to support and preserve the World Heritage, thereby increasing public awareness of the site and its outstanding value. Any listed site is elevated through UNESCO's multilateral declaration of it as a universally protected zone, and practically it is conserved for posterity against major threats. When these sites are well planned for and organised while respecting sustainable tourism principles, they can secure important funds for their preservation.

The sites on the World Heritage List represent the diversity of the world's heritage. They bear witness to the development of human history over thousands of years. UNESCO World Heritage Centre encourages countries to prepare Tentative Lists and nominations

of properties from diverse categories and regions so that not only the World Heritage List may reflect better the full spectrum of the World Heritage but also that its chronological and geographical coverage may widen. Therefore, cultural sites as diverse and unique as the Pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal in India, the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu in the Andes Mountains of Peru, the seventh-century Paharpur Buddhist Monastery in Bangladesh and the Acropolis in Greece are included in the World Heritage List and represent various regions and historical periods.

In addition to the above outstanding World Heritage monuments, there are exceptional examples of Byzantine properties that have been inscribed as World Heritage sites. Regarding the time of their inscription, Byzantine monuments were included at the same time as monuments representing other historical periods and it appears that the historical period to which a monument belongs does not constitute a criterion so far as its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List is concerned. It is the States Parties that decide which monuments comply with the selection criteria for inscription before submitting the nomination file to UNESCO. With respect to the location of the already inscribed Byzantine properties, they are located in different countries covering a geographical area that extends mainly around the Mediterranean Sea basin, something which demonstrates the extensive geographical area of the once vast Byzantine Empire.<sup>10</sup>

For the remainder of this chapter, I will consider some Byzantine monuments and the cultural criteria by means of which they have been inscribed on the World Heritage List according to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in order to indicate the features that the international organisation appreciated in these Byzantine monuments.

**Meteora (Greece, World Heritage List – 1988)** was inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of cultural criteria i, ii, iv and v.<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of Meteora on the World Heritage List means that the international organisation recognised that the dominating Byzantine monasteries, built, despite incredible difficulties, on enormous columns of rock at the time of the great revival of the hermetic ideal, represent a unique artistic achievement.<sup>12</sup> The Meteora monasteries, according to UNESCO, are among the most striking examples of the architectural transformation of a site into a place of retreat, meditation and prayer. The monasteries constitute an outstanding example of the type of monastic construction that illustrates a significant stage in history during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the hermetic ideals of early Christianity were restored to a place of honour by monastic communities. Their frescoes became the primary reference for the fundamental iconographic and stylistic features of post-Byzantine painting, which exerted widespread, long-lasting influence. The net in which intrepid pilgrims were hoisted up vertically alongside the 373-m cliff symbolises the fragility of a traditional way of life that is threatened with extinction. The Byzantine monasteries of Meteora have been regarded as special and unique and have been deemed to be worthy of preservation and protection for the treasures they offer to the world.

**Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (Egypt, World Heritage List – 2002)** is another Byzantine World Heritage Site whose inscription was based on cultural criteria i, iii, iv and vi.<sup>13</sup> According to UNESCO, the architecture of Saint Catherine's Monastery, the artistic treasures that it houses and its symbiotic integration into a rugged landscape combine to make it an extraordinary example of human creative genius. Saint Catherine's Monastery is one of the earliest outstanding examples in the Eastern tradition of a Christian monastic settlement located in a remote area. It demonstrates an intimate relation between natural grandeur and spiritual commitment. The Saint Catherine's area, centred on the holy



mountain of Mount Sinai, is sacred to three world religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Saint Catherine's Monastery is one of the earliest examples of a monastic community and the oldest to have survived intact because it has been used without interruption since the sixth century in its original function.

**The Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna (Italy, World Heritage List – 1996)** are also World Heritage Sites because of their outstanding significance.<sup>14</sup> The serial inscription under the name “Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna” in north-east Italy consists of eight monuments: the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, the Neonian Baptistery, the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, the Arian Baptistery, the Archiepiscopal Chapel, the Mausoleum of Theodoric, the Church of San Vitale and the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, all built between the fifth and sixth centuries. According to their inscription criteria i, ii, iii and iv, the Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna are without parallel because of the crucial evidence they provide of artistic and religious relations and contacts during an important period of European cultural history. The mosaics are among the best surviving examples of this form of art in Europe and have an increased significance due to the blending of Western and Eastern motifs and techniques. These monuments show great artistic skill, including a wonderful blend of Greco-Roman tradition, Christian iconography and oriental and Western styles typifying the culture of the later Roman Empire. UNESCO considers these early Byzantine monuments to be an epitome of the religious and funerary art and architecture of the sixth century.

Last but not least, **Mount Athos (Greece, World Heritage List – 1988)** is another example of Byzantine cultural heritage that has been inscribed on the World Heritage List on the grounds of cultural criteria i, ii, iv, v and vi.<sup>15</sup> According to UNESCO, the transformation of a mountain into a sacred place made Mount Athos a unique artistic creation combining the natural beauty of the environment with the expanded forms of architectural creation. The 20 imposing monasteries and their subsidiary establishments on the “Holy Mountain”, which are presently inhabited by some 1,400 monks, are a veritable storehouse of masterpieces ranging from wall paintings to portable icons, gold objects, embroideries and illuminated manuscripts which each monastery keenly preserves. Mount Athos has exerted lasting influence throughout the Orthodox world, of which it is the spiritual centre, on the development of religious architecture and monumental painting. The monasteries of Athos present the typical layout of Orthodox monastic establishments. The monastic ideal at Mount Athos has preserved traditional human habitations, which are representative of the agrarian cultures of the Mediterranean that have become vulnerable through the impact of change within contemporary society. Mount Athos also acts as a conservator of vernacular architecture as well as agricultural and craft traditions. An Orthodox spiritual centre since the tenth century, the sacred mountain of Athos became the principal spiritual home of the Orthodox Church in 1054. It retained this prominent role even after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Mount Athos is directly and tangibly associated with the history of Orthodox Christianity, which, in varying degrees, is present in more than 20 nations in the twentieth century. For UNESCO, there is no doubt that this thousand-year-old example of Byzantine heritage has retained even today its universal and exceptional significance.

However, Byzantine cultural heritage is not exhausted in monuments. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to future generations, such as “Byzantine Chant”, which was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO in 2019. This list, the result

of another significant Convention adopted in 2003 by UNESCO for the “Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, ensures better visibility for intangible cultural heritage and greater awareness of its significance. Byzantine Chant was inscribed as a living art that has existed for more than 2000 years. It is a significant cultural tradition and a comprehensive music system forming part of the common musical traditions that developed in the Byzantine Empire. Highlighting and musically enhancing the liturgical texts of the Greek Orthodox Church, Byzantine Chant is inextricably linked with spiritual life and religious worship. This vocal art is mainly focused on rendering the ecclesiastical text; arguably, the chant exists because of the Word (Logos), since every aspect of the tradition serves to spread the sacred message. Passed on aurally across generations, the main characteristics of that exclusively vocal music have survived through the centuries.<sup>16</sup>

It becomes evident, consequently, from the aforementioned examples that the designation of Byzantine heritage as World Heritage attests to the fact that Byzantine culture is acknowledged to have outstanding universal value and to stand on an equal footing with monuments of other World Heritage cultures. UNESCO appreciates Byzantine heritage and includes it for protection for future generations to appreciate. Its disappearance would be an irreparable loss to humanity. The designation of Byzantine heritage as World Heritage Sites amounts to recognising their global significance. Byzantine monuments are an integral part of the world’s cultural heritage, and they stand on an equal footing to monuments belonging to other cultures.

To conclude, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is based on the premise that certain places on earth are of outstanding universal value and should, therefore, form part of the common heritage of humankind. The countries that have ratified the Convention have become part of an international community, united in a common mission to identify and safeguard our world’s most outstanding natural and cultural heritage. Accordingly, Byzantine monuments and sites have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and are considered to be of outstanding universal value to humanity. Byzantine heritage sites are characterised as monuments at the top of the heritage hierarchy and are respected worldwide. The fact that Byzantine sites have been designated as World Heritage properties means that the legacy of the Byzantine Empire has been recognised as an important contribution to world civilisation. World Heritage status ensures that the Byzantine legacy is evaluated as worthy to be preserved for future generations. Since there are new designations every year, future research on the subject could well start by presenting an extensive and detailed catalogue of the Byzantine World Heritage monuments worldwide.

## Notes

1 <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief>

2 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>

3 The World Heritage Committee meets once a year and consists of representatives from 21 of the States Parties to the Convention elected by their General Assembly, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention>

4 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

5 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>

6 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/nominations/>

7 Established in 1992, the World Heritage Centre is the focal point and coordinator within UNESCO for all matters related to World Heritage.

- 8 The advisory bodies, three international non-governmental or intergovernmental organisations are named in the Convention to advise the Committee in its deliberations. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is an international, non-governmental organisation that provides the World Heritage Committee with technical evaluations of natural heritage properties. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) provides the World Heritage Committee with evaluations of cultural and mixed properties proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List. The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is an intergovernmental organisation created to promote the conservation of all forms of cultural heritage, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/advisorybodies/>
- 9 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>
- 10 Due to space limitations, this chapter will not present a detailed examination of the Byzantine World Heritage sites.
- 11 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/455>. Meteora has been inscribed as a mixed property on the World Heritage List which means that it contains elements of both natural and cultural significance. The natural criteria will not be presented in this chapter.
- 12 The inscription includes the Monastery of Saint Stephen, the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, the Monastery of Roussanou, the Monastery of Saint Nicholas Anapafsas, the Monastery of Varlaam, the Monastery of the Great Meteoron and the Monastery of Hypapante.
- 13 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/954>
- 14 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/788>
- 15 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/454/>. Mount Athos has been inscribed as a mixed property on the World Heritage List.
- 16 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/>

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