

REVIEW

Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff (eds), *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe*. Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 2021, Pp. xviii + 457.
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The present volume is based on papers delivered at a conference held at Harvard University in 2017, which the editors offer as both ‘a critique of the standard narrative of the development of Byzantine studies’ and a partial and ‘provisional alternative’ (p. 21). The thirteen chapters are sandwiched between interpretative (introductory and concluding) essays co-written by the editors.

The volume is organized into four parts. The first (two papers) deals with fifteenth-century conceptualizations of Byzantium and the past. Fabio Pagini argues that the narrative of Byzantine decline (typically associated with Gibbon) was already ‘deeply rooted in the self-perception’ (p. 44) of late Byzantine intellectuals, particularly George Gemistos Plethon. Elena Boeck offers an engaging reading of Manuel Chrysolaras’ conceptualization of the past and Andrea Mantegna’s relocation of Constantinople’s built environment to Rome in his *Triumphs of Caesar*.

The second and third parts (nine essays) focus on four individual scholars and four thematic areas, although the sections are not in fact organized in this way. It contains studies of Martin Crusius (1526–1607), Charles Du Cange (1610–1688), Martine Hanke (1633–1709), and Bernard de Montfaucon (1655–1741). Each contribution is markedly different, guided by the idiosyncrasies of the contributors’ chosen interlocutor and their textual production. Richard Calis extracts the chronological, genealogical, and linguistic approach of Crusius from a detailed examination of the marginalia of the manuscripts he studied (ch. 4). Teresa Shawcross’ double contribution on the life, work, and afterlife of Du Cange, accompanied by two appendices, marks an important contribution to the study of a central figure in the emergence of the discipline of Byzantine studies (chs. 5–6). William North and Shane Bobrycki deal with figures who have received less attention to date. North offers a corrective to the neglect of Hanke’s ‘self-conscious construction of a Byzantine literary corpus’ (p. 276) in his *De Byzantinarum rerum scriptoribus Graecis liber* (ch. 9); Bobrycki offers a sympathetic portrait of Montfaucon, whom he frames as ‘a scholarly Nestor’ (p. 303). Comparing Montfaucon’s editorial focus and antiquarianism with

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the early pioneers that preceded him and the Enlightenment thinkers that followed, Bobrycki describes a man caught between, and out of step with, both (ch. 10).

The focus of Part 3 is thematic. Contributions focus on historiography, the early modern theatrical reception of Byzantium, lexicography, and hagiography. Anthony Grafton's opening paper constitutes a magisterial overview of western humanist reception of Byzantine historiography, which should be compulsory background reading for students of Byzantine history at any level. Przemysław Marciniak offers a tantalizing overview of the uses to which Byzantium was put in early modern plays (ch. 7). In the process of explicating the 'ahistoricity' (p. 221) of Byzantium's deployment in these plays, Marciniak's study raises a plethora of questions for future research. The development of the lexicography of Byzantine Greek is described 'in five chronologically overlapping sections' (p. 225) by John Considine. Finally, Xavier Lequeux's contribution on hagiography, translated by the editors, describes the editing, organization, and publication of Byzantine hagiographies by the Jesuit Bollandist Society through the *Acta Sanctorum* (ch. 11).

Part 4 focuses on periodization and terminology, with ~~in~~ papers by Frederic Clark and Anthony Kaldellis. Clark considers understandings of Byzantium in periodizing schemata, particularly in the work of Gibbon. Kaldellis elaborates his long-running argument that Byzantium should be understood as a Roman nation-state. Like Pagini, he reaches back to Plethon, but ultimately identifies the nineteenth-century struggles between the Great Powers over the Eastern Question and the specific historical conjuncture of the Crimean War (1853–1856) as the locus for the disciplinary invention of Byzantium and the phenomenon he calls 'Roman denialism'.

In their introduction, the editors challenge the four-stage model of (1) humanist indifference; (2) Baroque enthusiasm; (3) Enlightenment contempt; and (4) nineteenth-century institutionalization, which they attribute primarily to George Ostrogorsky and Alexander Vasiliev. They tentatively propose an alternative tripartite schema of (1) '1400–1500: Preliminary Encounters', (2) '1550–1700: Canonizing and Synthesizing', and (3) '1700–1850: Fabrication of Consensus, Emergence of Autonomy'. However, their main emphasis is on the discursive, contested, and presentist quality of approaches to Byzantium and its meanings. The editors' framing essays succeed in knitting their contributors' essays into an argument that is more than the sum of its parts.

This volume is not merely or primarily another contribution to the increasingly tired debate over the terminology of Romanness, impelled in large part by the forceful and repeated contributions of Kaldellis. It should, rather, be viewed as beginning to fill gaps left by a growing number of detailed studies – or as beginning to plant a few trees, to use the metaphor the editors borrow from Grafton (p. 13) when it comes to early Byzantine scholarship. In the process, it successfully demonstrates that monolithic arguments about when Byzantium was invented or how it was perceived by individual scholars, or, for that matter, groups of them, fail to take account of considerable complexity and diversity of thought.

The editors ‘make no pretense to exhaustiveness’ (p. 382) and it would be unreasonable to expect them to. Even so, two absences are worth noting with an eye to the future of disciplinary study. First, early modern Ottoman conceptions of Rum/ Byzantium are noticeably absent. As early as 1988, Michael Ursinus argued in *BMGS* that Ottoman historiography was relatively uninterested in both (ancient) Roman and Byzantine history until the modernizing impulses of the Tanzimat (1839–1878) saw Ottoman historians absorbing and adapting western and northern European scholarship.¹ Both the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forerunners Ursinus identified and the nature of that nineteenth-century transformation would reward closer investigation and integration into the argument the editors are attempting to make here. Secondly, the volume would have benefited from a more theoretical engagement with questions of disciplinarity, discourse, power, and ideology, not least of the kind imagined by Michel Foucault. Although (early) Byzantinists, led by Peter Brown, have used the theoretical models developed by Foucault to reimagine their premodern objects of study (particularly in the domain of sexuality), they stand to benefit at least as much from the application of his thought to the discipline of Byzantine studies itself.²

This volume is part of an increasingly self-reflexive turn in Byzantine Studies, exemplified by the Ben Anderson and Mirela Ivanova’s *Is Byzantine Studies a Colonialist Discipline? Toward a critical historiography* (Penn State, 2023), Markéta Kulhánková and Przemyslaw Marciniak’s *Byzantium in the Popular Imagination: the modern reception of the Byzantine empire* (Bloomsbury, 2023), and Diana Mishkova’s *Rival Byzantiums: empire and identity in Southeastern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). This book should be read alongside these three volumes.

Although the gender balance of contributors to this volume is disappointing, due in part to factors beyond the editors’ control, the editors, contributors, and the Dumbarton Oaks publications team are to be congratulated on an excellent work of scholarship and a beautifully produced book.

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1 ‘From Süleyman Pasha to Mehmet Fuat Köprülü: Roman and Byzantine history in late Ottoman historiography’, *BMGS* 12 (1988) 305–14. Note that Mishkova largely follows the work of Ursinus in her recent monograph. More recently, see M. Toksöz, ‘The world of Mehmed Murad: writing *Histoires Universelles* in Ottoman Turkish’, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları/The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 40 (2012) 343–63.

2 On Brown’s relationship to Foucault, see his recent memoir: P. Brown, *Journeys of the Mind: a life in history* (Princeton University Press 2023), esp. 576–90.