SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL OF BYZANTINE AND MODERN GREEK STUDIES

No 5 • 2019

Byzantium now – contested territory or excluded middle?

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Among Lennart Rydén's publications, his study of the seventh-century *Life* of Symeon the Fool by Leontius of Neapolis opened many windows to me when I was first discovering the complications and complexities of Byzantine texts and encountered this important writer from Byzantine Cyprus. Nothing was to be taken at face value, and things were not likely to be as they seemed – this was a lesson that sat well for me with the scepticism I had learnt as a student of ancient history at Oxford. The present paper, originating as the 2018 Rydén lecture, given at the Swedish Collegium in Uppsala,[1] falls into two parts, "Contested territory" and "Excluded middle"; both can be taken as arguments against Byzantine exceptionalism.[2]

Contested territory

In the past one could be unselfconscious about Byzantium. It was there for the taking, even if only a few took it up, and its outlines were pretty clear. It was different from the classical world, it had a long political history, it was associated with gold, glitter, court intrigue and decline, and it had a definite end in 1453.[3] For many people, and especially for

[1] I am very grateful to Ingela Nilsson and her colleagues for the invitation and for her generosity in organizing and hosting a stay that included a lecture by my colleague Peter Frankopan at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, a panel discussion after my lecture, with Björn Wittrock, Ingela Nilsson, Peter Frankopan and Olof Heilo, and the launch of two new publications.

[2] Which is defended in outspoken terms by Treadgold 2010.

[3] Sjösvärd 2014 on Yeats, especially "Sailing to Byzantium" (1926) and "Byzantium" (1930); Ekdawi 1996 and Jeffreys 2015 on Cavafy; Cameron 2014a.

anyone fascinated by Orthodoxy, it still has that appeal. Seen in this way, Byzantium was also somewhat reassuring – it seemed like a definable clear-cut entity, not classical and probably not medieval either. But now uncertainty seems to have taken over. It is striking how often one finds the words "lost", "vanished" or "forgotten" in reference to Byzantium in books or in titles.[4] It can only be a matter of time before there is a volume on Byzantium in the publication series *Lost Civilizations* by Reaktion Books. This terminology is all the more surprising when in fact Byzantine studies are thriving as perhaps never before, with new approaches opening up in many different areas.

But Byzantium is also a dream, a subject of the imagination, or, as it was described recently by an Orthodox priest on Twitter, an icon, like Jerusalem: he even added: ''the historical reality is in many ways secondary''.[5] How do we historians and scholars deal with that? A recent conference on the reception of Byzantium with several speakers from Sweden had the title: "Byzantium and the Modern Imagination". Its subject was Byzantium and modernism, but Byzantium is also being re-imagined today. A special issue of the journal *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* in 2016 addressed the question of how scholarship on Byzantium had changed in the forty years since its founding, and Byzantinists now, like scholars in other fields, are asking themselves serious questions about methodology and theoretical approaches.

At least among scholars of the subject the familiar conception of Byzantine writing as hopelessly tedious and imitative has long gone, and indeed Uppsala is now at the forefront of new approaches in literary studies.[6] In relation to Byzantium, literary analyses (and art historical ones too) have been carried far beyond the positivist approaches that used to be standard, despite the obvious obstacle presented by the fact that Byzantine texts are written in a language few can understand, and which is often extremely and even perversely obscure. Even Byzantine

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[4] Davies 2011; Wells 2006; Nilsson & Stephenson (eds) 2014; Harris 2015.

[5] Fr. Kristian Akselberg (@Miklegard11-12h), Norway.

[6] Take for instance the papers in the 2017 volume of the present journal, with five articles relating to the theme of narrative and verisimilitude in Byzantium, and the recently published Messis, Mullett & Nilsson (eds) 2018.

textual criticism is being rescued from the scorn of previous generations of classicists. More and more accessible translations of Byzantine texts are being published and new series are beginning. Companions and handbooks to Byzantine studies also proliferate; they make Byzantium far more accessible than it used to be, and at the very least they tell us that publishers think there is a potential readership. The numbers attending conferences continue to grow, alongside the international congresses for which potential host nations compete sharply with each other, in the style of the World Cup or the Eurovision Song Contest (dramatic scenes have taken place at recent international meetings where the decisions were made). Yet when I wrote in 2008 of an absence of Byzantium in wider historical and intellectual discourse, the argument clearly struck a chord, and the responses occupied the pages of the relevant journal for many months afterwards.[7]

Byzantine studies does not stand alone, any more than other academic disciplines, and is inevitably affected by what is happening in historical and literary studies on a wider scale. I want to set out here some current developments that impinge on Byzantine studies but at the same time present challenges to it.

Some calls have been made already for a redefinition of Byzantine studies, along lines that might make it more appealing at a time when humanities research in general is perceived to be under some threat.[8] The question is in which direction should the discipline go – Should it look towards global history? Does it belong in a long late antiquity? Does it face east or west? Was Byzantium a Mediterranean empire, or a kind of commonwealth? Such questioning of the definition of Byzantium and its place in the present intellectual landscape and the medieval world, and the desire of Byzantinists to rise to the challenges they present are signs of a discipline at a very vigorous stage of development. Debates and disagreements about the definition of Byzantium are signs of life. At the same time, while scholars in some parts of the field, and especially in the fields of Byzantine literature and visual art, are highly innovative, and clearly demonstrate the vitality of new approaches and

[7] Cameron 2008; 2014a.

[8] Neil 2017.

exciting analyses, other areas, including history, have yet to catch up. Why is this so, and is it possible to aim for a more integrated approach?

Let us begin with literary studies, where scholars are currently leading the way with an explosion of new approaches and ground-breaking originality. Orality, performance, narrativity, fictionality, appropriation (in place of the familiar concept of imitation or *mimesis*) are all ways in which literary scholars are now approaching Byzantine texts. The reading of hagiography has undergone a sea change,[9] and with it the uses to which it can be put by historians, and the high literature of middle Byzantium has benefited most from a trend that began especially from the "novels" of the twelfth century and later. These new approaches to high literature are unlocking a body of material that has seemed forbiddingly alien and difficult – obscure for the sake of obscurity and entirely internal in its reference and its projected audience, and only accessible even in its own day to the few contemporaries who had received the right educational skills and belonged to the same small competitive world of Byzantine *literati* as the author. In the case of Michael Psellos, the eleventh-century polymath, even the editor of his *Letters* and other specialists of great experience admit that deciphering the meaning of some of his works is sometimes beyond them, so obscure are their phraseology, language and sentence structure.[10] It is not surprising if many have found this literature off-putting. But positions, preferment and status within the elite of Constantinople depended on skill shown in this complex artistic production, which was judged by audiences better able than we are today to distinguish what counted then for real talent. It is essential to find better ways of understanding literature, audience and society.

We are now experiencing a real upsurge of innovative scholarship, especially on the output of the tenth to twelfth centuries. Its literary production in poetry and prose has been partially revealed by several key publications in recent years,[11] and opens up huge vistas and a wealth of material still largely unstudied. The high literature of this period, ending

[9] See Efthymiades (ed.) 2011; 2014.

[10] Papaioannou (forthcoming); Lauxtermann & Jeffreys 2017.

[11] Including Bernard 2014; Bernard & Demoen (eds) 2012; Papaioannou (forthcoming).

in the disaster for Byzantium brought by the Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople in 1204, offers extraordinarily rich possibilities for new kinds of interpretative scholarship. While the old certainty saw classical literature as self-evidently superior, and Byzantine literature as derivative, tedious and unoriginal, the fact that we no longer inhabit a world in which the classics hold unquestioned dominance, brings some new possibilities with it. Indeed, despite the enormous role played by classical literature in Byzantium, later Byzantine writing in fact developed out of the literature of the Second Sophistic and late antiquity (or, if one prefers it, the early Byzantine period), and this too is experiencing a rethink, emerging as a literature of elaboration, fragmentation and referentiality.[12] Greek writers from late antiquity, including poets like Nonnus and others previously dismissed as inferior and dreary are now seen to exemplify these trends (three recent conferences on Nonnus alone). These are all features that can also be seen in late antique visual art. Some scholars see this taste for obscurity and cleverness, combined with the appropriation of earlier styles and texts, as an aesthetic of decadence, perceptible in the Latin literature of late antiquity as well as the Greek. But decadence is of course exactly the frame within which Byzantium has been trapped, and I doubt that such terminology is helpful. But the liveliness of this discussion, and especially its willingness to bring aesthetics onto the agenda,[13] has some pointers for Byzantium too.

And is this literature late antique, or is it Byzantine? I believe it is a mistake to separate late antiquity from Byzantium. Without falling into the trap of arguing for simple continuity, we gain from taking a longer view. The concept of decadence[14] suggests an end and a decline; it smacks of the superior viewpoint of a traditional classicist (I write as one who was originally a classicist myself); the reality was a process that saw steadily increased value placed on referentiality and complexity, and on the specifics of a high linguistic register. This move towards

[12] Formisano 2018; Elsner & Hernández Lobato (eds) 2017; cf. Roberts 1989.

[13] Long out of vogue as a subject of critical analysis, aesthetics is making a comeback: see Spingou (forthcoming); Barber & Papaioannou (eds) 2017; Schibille 2014; sensory experience: Ashbrook Harvey & Mullett (eds) 2017.

[14] Adopted by Jeffreys 2015 in relation to Cavafy's Byzantium.

the characteristics of a Byzantine literary production that continued developing for centuries is exactly what needs exploring. In the case of one specific literary form, the philosophical dialogue, as I have argued, the advantages of this longer perspective are clear; it makes little sense either to focus only on late antiquity or on such dialogues written in middle and late Byzantium.[15] A similarly long perspective would work for other types of writing too.[16] Late antique scholars and Byzantinists need to talk more to each other; in particular, late antique scholars need to talk to Byzantinists.

No single way of looking at Byzantium will do it justice. Byzantine art has obviously had an appeal for modern artists. In the first part of the twentieth century Byzantine art was an inspiration to the arts and crafts movement and provided fertile imaginative ground for artists and architects. Not surprisingly, the complex status of the image in Byzantium, and the way in which this was translated into visual art set it apart from the western naturalistic tradition and intrigued avant-garde artists. But it was not only artists: poets and writers like Yeats were also drawn to the otherness of Byzantium as they saw it.[17]

But this was when there was much less actual knowledge of Byzantine visual art than now. Modernist painters like Klimt and also Matisse drew inspiration from the Ravenna mosaics even while academic attitudes to Byzantine literature remained positivistic and disparaging.[18] At the time their appropriation of Byzantine art may have been subversive,[19] but the Byzantine "verbal art", or "art of discourse" (the terms are used by Stratis Papaioannou, the editor of Psellos's letters), allusive, complex, referential, imaginative and apt to switch inherited registers, also calls for a response different from the norms of classical philology established in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, despite the lively interest now being shown in Middle Byzantine literature and poetics, the absence of Byzantium from gen-

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15 Cameron 2014b, 58; cf. Cameron & Gaul (eds) 2017.

16 Papaioannou 2009 on the reception of late antiquity in Byzantium.

17 Betancourt & Taroutina (eds) 2015.

18 Taroutina 2015; Nelson 2015; Papaioannou 2015.

19 So also with the English traveller Robert Byron in the 1920s: Cameron 2014a.

eral consciousness and from historical awareness still holds for some kinds of Byzantine literature as well. No wonder the concept of a new Byzantine literary history has proved so elusive. Krumbacher's handbook, published at the end of the nineteenth century, remained basic for decades, and with it the strict separation between secular and religious literature that saw theological writing consigned to a separate handbook altogether; the model was followed later by Herbert Hunger and Hans-Georg Beck.[20] Alexander Kazhdan had embarked before his death on a new history of Byzantine literature, but his functional and materialist conception of what is important will not now satisfy many readers.[21] Others, especially Panagiotis Agapitos, are trying to find a different way of doing it. Tellingly, Agapitos felt that he needed a striking amount of ground-clearing and preliminary publication, as he has explained in a series of open "letters to his readers". His latest manifesto announces that in view of "the size of the papers" (that is, his own preparatory essays) he has abandoned his original project of writing a synthetic literary history and will instead publish all these preliminary studies together in a single volume. They number thirteen so far and cover an immensely wide range of topics, including the history of the discipline and the fraught relation of so-called Byzantine "vernacular" texts with Modern Greek, a question intimately bound up in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with Greek national identity.[22] But they do not claim to be comprehensive. One can only sympathize, and there are indeed inherent problems in the endeavour: besides the vast range to be covered, the very concept of a history – and the same applies to the ubiquitous handbooks and companions now proliferating – necessarily imposes classifications and chronological considerations with the potential to mislead. Perhaps then a history of Byzantine literature is precisely what is not needed at the present moment.

The concept of an intellectual history of Byzantium also raises questions. The recent editors of such a volume clearly had difficulty in deciding on what constitutes intellectual history and what does not, and they

[20] Cf. Rosenqvist 2007, 185-207.

[21] Kazhdan 1999, 2006.

[22] Agapitos 2017 (2018).

too felt the need to organize their material into some kind of chronological frame.[23] But all such chronological surveys are fraught with articulated and unarticulated assumptions. They imply linear development, and usually take views about periodization that may be unhelpful; like a handbook or a companion, a history of Byzantine literature by definition requires the editor or editors to make choices of classification. Of course we need broad categorizations in order to write about literature or history at all, but perhaps we do not need so much agonizing about them.

And yet these various attempts seem to demonstrate that we are at a stage in the study of Byzantium where new and real possibilities are opening up. One can begin to perceive a different Byzantium from that of old, a society and a culture that is not static but like all societies always in a process of reaction and adaptation. The idea of Byzantium as a monolith is absurd. No society can last unchanged for more than a millennium, while the world around it is changing. But grasping a different kind of Byzantium is still difficult. That there is no agreement on many individual topics, that some scholars are still writing in an older mode, and that public perceptions have yet to change, is only what one would expect.

Discovering this different Byzantium requires historians, art historians, theologians and literary scholars to come together. The prevailing model has separated theology from secular literature, and "popular" from high culture; it has also separated visual art too much from literature, literature from history and all of these from theology. But Byzantine society, and the careers and output of its writers and intellectuals, were too complex for that. These cannot be separate disciplines consigned to separate histories and handbooks as though they existed in isolation from each other; nor can they be dealt with simply in terms of having different chapters within such books. Instead they need to be integrated, and the difficulties of achieving this need to be faced and discussed.

[23] Kaldellis & Siniossoglou (eds) 2017.

Excluded middle

So there is plenty of ''contested territory'', whether in terms of analyzing Byzantine literature, trying to define and settle the role of Orthodoxy, or questioning simplistic claims about the legacy of Byzantium. What then of the second part of my title, the 'excluded middle'?

One of the hardest questions to grasp about Byzantium concerns the ideology and values that permeated this society. Perhaps Byzantium simply lasted for too many centuries to allow for such classification. The answer has too often seemed obvious, and the ready answer that has been given is simply, ''Orthodoxy''. But again it is not so simple. As I see it, Byzantium's history in this regard also was one of constant challenge, effort and restatement. In the language of the Byzantine commonwealth envisaged by Dimitri Obolensky in the early 1970s,[24] Orthodoxy is what Byzantium passed on to the emerging societies of the Slavic world, including the Rus''. But there is more than an element of mythical thinking here. This Orthodoxy took what one might call its strongest form in the final stages of the state, when its patriarchs felt able to assert the highest possible view of their role and the role of Orthodoxy; but that was only after many centuries of evolution and vicissitudes, and the reduction of the Byzantine state to a shadow of itself. Many people still believe that the emperor controlled the church, but Byzantium was not the theocratic society that some have claimed, and neither is it as straightforward as it seems simply and without qualification to call it an Orthodox society.[25] The "triumph" of Orthodoxy may have been formally asserted and celebrated with the ending of iconoclasm in the ninth century, but later emperors still found themselves struggling to define what this actually meant. To call Orthodoxy the ideology or "symbolic universe" of Byzantium[26] *tout court*, as many historians do, calls for

[24] Obolensky 1971.

[25] Cameron 2017; Magdalino 2010 places the essential formation of Byzantine Orthodoxy in the period after the ending of iconoclasm; see also Magdalino 2016, ("political Orthodoxy", from Beck 1978).

[26] Given more space in Haldon 2016 than in much of his earlier work.

a detailed look at what it was and how it functioned at any given time in that very long history. Distinguishing this ideology from Byzantine philosophical thinking, and relating it to anything that can be called intellectual history present further challenges. Even after the long history of Byzantine studies these are tasks still in their early stages.

On a broader scale, Byzantium has repeatedly been seen in terms of an Orthodox sphere, distinct from western European Christianity on the one hand and Islam on the other; one thinks of Spengler and Toynbee, but also of neo-liberal thinking after the events of 9-11.[27] Today's political situation demands much more. At the moment Byzantium is in danger of being passed over altogether in a new binary opposition between western Europe and the Islamic world. And if Byzantium itself is not a monolith, neither is the history of Orthodoxy. Bearing in mind the resurgence of Orthodoxy in Russia and elsewhere in eastern European countries, the aggressive behaviour of the Moscow patriarchate, the complications of the status of the Ukraine, and the new prominence of Orthodoxy in the political spectrum, a better understanding of what Orthodoxy in Byzantium was really like is badly needed.

In the current world climate religion is being weaponised, and the claim to a Byzantine heritage politicized even more than before. It features large in discourses of national identity; but what that heritage actually was is less questioned. This paper derives from a lecture given immediately after a conference in Oxford honouring the centenary of Dimitri Obolensky, in which there was much discussion of the ideas and implications of his book on *The Byzantine Commonwealth.* It posited a high view of the Byzantine legacy to the Slavic world that is highly relevant in today's political climate even though the book itself is nearly 50 years old now. It constituted a kind of companion to the well-known book of Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance*, published in 1935, which focused on the Greek and Romanian aftermath of 1453. But while the idea of a Byzantine commonwealth has been widely taken up, the Greek political historian Paschalis Kitromilides, who adopted the title *An Orthodox Commonwealth* for his collected papers,[28] has pointed out that

[27] Discussion in Heilo 2019, 47-54.

[28] Kitromilides 2007; cf. Speake 2018; critique of the concept: Raffensperger 2012.

this "legacy" was not a simple matter, in that it was not passed on intact and unchanged – in the course of its appropriation in the post-Byzantine period it went through a conscious process of redefinition and manipulation. Like the Byzantine influence on the emerging Slav states, the Byzantine element in this post-Byzantine legacy cannot be seen in essentialist terms as something clear-cut and easily identifiable. Returning to these questions also demands a return to the issue of what Byzantium was really like as a society. But Byzantium was not coterminous with Orthodoxy, and orthodoxy was as much a work in progress as Byzantine society itself.

Let us turn then to a broader historical sweep, and an effort to find a place for Byzantium within our understanding of a wider historical development. We need to make a distinction here between the appropriation of Byzantium in Orthodox countries and its place in historical consciousness elsewhere. It remains the case that despite all the new thinking to which I have referred, Byzantium is being squeezed out of European and North American historical agendas. When I wrote about this in 2008, I drew attention to the prevailing western European historical agenda which gives little or no place to Byzantium, and we can now add even more examples and reasons for this historical blindness.

Sad to say, despite many attempts to present Byzantium in more positive terms, and despite the real popular fascination with aspects of Byzantium, especially its visual art, the disdain for Byzantium that we owe to the legacy of Montesquieu and Gibbon from the eighteenth century onwards is still with us today. It is compounded by a casual Eurocentrism in standard histories of Europe, which simply omit Byzantium and trace a linear narrative from classical antiquity to modernity through the western middle ages, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment; the idea of Byzantine exceptionalism is indeed one of the problems. It took some arguing after the beginning of the project, for example, to insert Byzantium into the European Science Foundation project on the Transformation of the Roman World that ran in the 1990s with the explicit aim of integrating European scholarship on the transition from the ancient world to the middle ages. And when Evelyne Patlagean published her last book, *Un moyen âge grec,* in 2007, arguing for the connections be-

tween Byzantium and western Europe from the ninth century onwards, she met with a chilly response from some Byzantinists who felt that their subject was being deprived of its particularism.[29] Patlagean argued for an integrated history – of course with changes of emphasis over time – that embraced not only connections with the west, but also the states of central Europe and the Islamic world.

But in wider historiography the dominance of the western European narrative with Byzantium left to one side has if anything recently increased.[30] John Haldon has often been the sole representative of Byzantine history in collective works on empire or on the transition to the medieval world; even he alternates between the terms east Rome and Byzantium, conveying uncertainty over its status. It is an uncertainty that has not been resolved by Anthony Kaldellis's insistence on the Romanness of Byzantium ("the nation-state of the Romans"), or his attempt to cast Byzantium as the heir of the Roman republic.[31] In relation to Europe Byzantium remains on the edge, not a full member of the group.

Meanwhile in my view the ever more burgeoning discipline of late antique studies poses a direct threat to Byzantium. Ever more journals, series and individual publications, and ever more discussions of periodization, assume that late antiquity is a discrete field. The recent emphasis on the fall of the Roman empire in the west also leaves Byzantium exposed during and after the sixth century. Perhaps in response, some Byzantine historians refer to Byzantium as "a rump state" and see its characteristic shape as emerging only in the seventh century;[32] this is a periodization that has also been adopted by some in relation to cultural and literary history.[33] Again Byzantium is forced onto the retreat. A trun-

[29] On Patlagean, an unusual Byzantinist, see Delacroix-Besnier (ed.) 2016.

[30] Contrast Preiser-Kapeller 2017, though limited to the period 300-800.

[31] Kaldellis 2007; 2015; see Stouraitis 2014.

[32] Haldon 2013, 475; Sarris 2011. Heather 2018, 331 ends with the "demotion" of Constantinople to "regional power status", also arguing that there was no overall planning behind Justinian's wars, but that they set off a chain of further wars that led inexorably to "the fall of the eastern empire".

[33] Agapitos 2012 (2015), n. 29. A new "shorter" late antiquity: Carrié 2017; Inglebert 2017.

cated Byzantium may make some sense in relation to the administrative and economic structures that are Haldon's particular concern, but in broader terms cutting Byzantium off from its late antique roots creates as many problems as it seems to solve. Tellingly, Panagiotis Agapitos felt that he had to address the question of when Byzantium began at considerable length in his preparation for a literary history of Byzantium.[34] Something new has happened with the "explosion" of the industry of late antiquity. Late antique scholarship shows no signs of diminishing. It is not only lively and pervasive: it is characterized by new methodologies and approaches that are being deployed by a veritable army of young and eager scholars, and while the overall number of Byzantinists has surely grown, that of late antique scholars is far greater.[35] Byzantinists may be busy with all kinds of new approaches, and with the sheer effort of dealing with a subject when so much primary scholarship is still lacking, but they also need to engage fully with the implications of the late antiquity boom.

Meanwhile a new front has opened up, as some late antique historians push their coverage later and later, claim Islam as a late antique religion and incorporate the early Islamic world into their horizon. This "turn to the east" involves an enthusiastic embrace of Syriac literature and of late antique Judaism, a new interest in Sasanian Persia, and above all, extends the reach of late antique studies to include the emergence of Islam and the early Islamic centuries. It is relatively new: Peter Brown's *World of Late Antiquity* in 1971 showed the way by making AD 750 its endpoint, but the real explosion in this direction belongs to the last decade or so. Books and articles by specialists on Sasanian Iran, early Islam and so on now routinely mention late antiquity in their titles. One can easily speculate on some of the reasons, and it goes long with the rise of the study of "Abrahamic religions" – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – as a theme and as a heuristic device for explaining the emergence of Islam.[36] Again, after the Arab conquests of the seventh century Byzantium itself is the poor relation, not only geographically, but also culturally. To

[34] Agapitos 2012 (2015).

[35] Cameron 2016.

[36] E.g. Silverstein & Stroumsa (eds) 2015.

take an extreme example, one book not only extends late antiquity in the eastern Mediterranean lands into the tenth or even eleventh century, but also writes disparagingly of Byzantine culture after about 600 in comparison with the admired intellectual world of Baghdad.[37] Syria made the cultural running, not Byzantium, we are told; but the Syriac scholars and translators owed their own intellectual formation to Byzantium. The transmission of Greek learning and philosophy to Baghdad is such an exciting and important topic, it seems, that Byzantium is simply left behind, or worse, derided with the old tropes of unoriginality.

Such a scenario marginalizes Byzantium. It ignores developments in Byzantium after the seventh century and swallows whole the traditional view of a dismal cultural and intellectual collapse after the conquests; it also fails to take Byzantine religious culture seriously. Among the energetic young late antique scholars I have mentioned it is clearly very appealing to learn Syriac or indeed Arabic and to bring the huge intellectual territory of early Islam into a broad late antique context. But too few of the same people, who ought to be potential Byzantinists, think of moving forward into the central Byzantine period or connecting it with their late antique background.

Finally a more promising avenue is opening up in terms of inserting Byzantium into current thinking about global history.[38] This has distinct advantages. It addresses the issue of Eurocentrism and western narratives, and includes Byzantium as a main player. Global history works by looking at connections (connectivity – travel, migration, foreign groups, ideas, objects), by comparison (not necessarily by comparing states), and by asking questions about longterm or contemporary developments in different societies. In the case of Byzantium it could prove to be a way not only of bringing Byzantium into the mainstream but also of exploring the complex role assigned to it by Patlagean and others, with changing connections not only with both the west and the Islamic world, but also with what is now central Europe and the north, and with a shift-

[37] Fowden 2013, 149.

[38] Byzantium is included in its scope by the Oxford Centre for Global History and features in "The Global Middle Ages", a network led by Catherine Holmes, Naomi Standen and Scott Ashley, and see also Moore 2018; Holmes & Standen 2018.

ing relation over time to the Mediterranean. Rome had been a Mediterranean power: Byzantium's reach was far wider. Other historians bring Byzantium into the frame of Eurasia, with a sweep as far east as China;[39] Byzantine coins and imitation Byzantine coins of the sixth and seventh centuries are found on the silk roads and in China,[40] and Byzantium had an important role in the dissemination of ideas, as well as a potential for inclusion in the comparative study of empires and of knowledge networks. Global history is by definition close to comparative history, and emphasizes connections and connectivity; it undercuts by its very nature the problematic idea of Byzantine exceptionalism.

Bringing Byzantium into wider history in this way is exactly what is needed to rescue it from its marginality and to bring it into the consciousness of specialists in other disciplines and periods.

In an interview given in 1997 the Byzantine art historian Ernst Kitzinger described his book *Byzantine Art in the Making*, published exactly twenty years before, as "almost a prehistoric document".[41] Of course far more material had come to light in those two decades, and by 1997 far more information existed on many of the items he discusses in the book; but the comment was based rather on methodological grounds. In only two decades, Kitzinger thought, the practice and methodology of art history had itself changed in fundamental ways. If that is true of one part of Byzantine studies, what of others, and what of other changes in interpretation over much longer periods?

Certainly it also depends on what kind of scholarship is in question: a classic edition of a text can hold the field unchallenged for decades. But Byzantine studies is not impervious to outside influences; the world changes, and as scholars we are inevitably affected by them. I strongly believe that the situation of the individual scholar at any given moment in time affects the questions asked and the way they are approached.[42] Both the issues of our day and the many appeals to past history in popular discourse require us as responsible historians to address their impli-

[39] Di Cosmo & Maas (eds) 2017; Kim, Vervaet & Adal (eds) 2017.
[40] Whittow 2018; Whittow (forthcoming).
[41] Cited from Diebold 2018.
[42] Cameron 2004.

cations very seriously. Appeals to the supposed lessons of Thucydides or the example of the Roman empire are everywhere. But we also urgently need to address the way that Byzantium itself is perceived in wider public discourse, and this is where the model of Byzantine exceptionalism fails. For the questions and methods followed in other branches of both historical and literary studies to be applied to Byzantium, and for historical and literary studies to be brought closer together, is exactly what is needed.

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