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Ivanova, M. orcid.org/0000-0002-9779-7970 and Anderson, B. (2024) The politics of Byzantine studies: Between nations and empires. The English Historical Review, 139 (600). pp. 1230-1249. ISSN 0013-8266

https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceae159

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The English Historical Review
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The Politics of Byzantine Studies: Between Nations and Empires

Byzantium after the Nation: The Problem of Continuity in Balkan Historiographies. By DIMITRIS STAMATOPOULOS (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022; pp. 410. £61);

The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe. Edited by NATHANAEL ASCHENBRENNER and JAKE RANSOHOFF (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2021; pp. 478. £33.95);

Rival Byzantiums: Empire and Identity in Southeastern Europe. By DIANA MISHKOVA (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023; pp. 300. £90).

Byzantine studies is neither the oldest nor the largest of the historical disciplines, but it is among the oddest. Its peculiarities, however, are rarely discussed by its practitioners, nor have they been much noted by intellectual historians. The appearance in recent years of multiple book-length studies of the discipline and its histories is therefore welcome. The quality of the three works here reviewed is such that each simultaneously complements and complicates the image presented by the others. The resulting view, if still far from complete, is nevertheless much greater than the sum of the parts.

Three peculiarities stand out especially, each closely related to the others. The first is the discipline's distinctive multinational constellation. The International Association of Byzantine Studies is composed of some thirty-nine national committees,[1] including twenty-four current NATO members, five former Soviet republics and four Soviet-aligned satellite states. The oldest centres for Byzantine research in the Western world are located at the heart of historic institutions of educational privilege: in Washington DC (Dumbarton Oaks, administered by Harvard University); the universities of Munich, Oxford and Princeton; and the Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Istanbul has emerged as a new hub in

1. International Association of Byzantine Studies, Catalogue of National Committees, available online at aiebnet.gr/national-committees (accessed 25 June 2024): Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, USA and Vatican City.

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the last thirty years with research centres and faculty posts at Boğaziçi and Koç Universities.[2] These have come to complement long-standing traditions of Byzantine studies, with chairs and endowed centres, in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Russia and Ukraine. The last handful of quinquennial International Byzantine Congresses took place in London, Sofia, Belgrade and Venice; and the next will be in Vienna. The discipline and its practice therefore bridge traditional divides between west and east, the first and the second worlds. But the stakes of Byzantine studies and the material conditions of those teaching them vary widely across these states. In the main centres of the Western and North Atlantic world, Byzantine studies is a luxury, a space for curiosity for the obscure afforded by immense institutional wealth. In much of the Balkans, Russia and Ukraine, it is the bread-and-butter medieval module for any degree in history, ethnography, philology or theology, and is often delivered by scholars who teach at more than one institution to make ends meet.

This geographic breadth, which extends far beyond the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire in any period of its history, is partly explained by the second peculiarity, namely, the absence of an obvious successor state. Although Greece may appear as a natural successor due to linguistic continuity and the political prominence of the Orthodox Church, the contest over Byzantium's legacy began immediately after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, long before the foundation of the Hellenic Kingdom in 1820. Some among the conquering Ottomans, not least Sultan Mehmed II, considered themselves Byzantium's heirs, while others in the same court rejected the imperial legacy.[3] And the legitimacy of Ottoman rule in the eastern Mediterranean was fiercely contested by foreign powers, including at various times the popes, the Habsburgs, the Bourbons, the Romanovs and, ultimately, the Kingdom of Greece.[4]

Contested succession points to the third peculiarity of Byzantine studies: its status as a historical discipline whose object of study is not a region or an era but a state. Roman studies exist, but are usually folded into Classics; and while there are journals of (e.g.) Mamluk and Mongol studies, they are not accompanied by the institutional apparatus (such as dedicated research institutes and endowed chairs) of Byzantine studies.[5]

2. See a recent oral history project: 'Being A Byzantinist in Turkey' (Koç University, 2024), at https://gabam.ku.edu.tr/en/research/projects/gabam-projects/being-a-byzantinist-in-turkey-oral-history-project/ (accessed 25 June 2024).

3. S. Yerasimos, *Légendes d'empire: La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques* (Paris, 1990).

4. A. Pertusi, *Storiografia umanistica e mondo bizantino* (Palermo, 1967); H. Ragsdale, 'Evaluating Traditions of Russian Aggression: Catherine II and the Greek Project', *Slavonic and East European Review*, lxvi (1988), pp. 91–117; M.L. Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor, 1919–1922* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1998).

5. On the intrinsic statism of Byzantine studies, see N.S.M. Matheou, 'Methodological Imperialism', in B. Anderson and M. Ivanova, eds, *Is Byzantine Studies a Colonialist Discipline? Toward a Critical Historiography* (University Park, PA, 2023), pp. 75–82.

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A discipline focused on a state whose legacy is contested must, by definition, be highly politicised. Indeed, practitioners of Byzantine studies have historically participated not only in 'small-p politics' (in the sense that all history or scholarship is political), but also in 'large-P Politics', taking roles in government and helping to articulate their states' claims to sovereignty. In Diana Mishkova's *Rival Byzantiums*, we encounter three Byzantinists who served their countries as Prime Minister in the first half of the twentieth century: Spyridon Lambros in Greece (1916–17), Nicolae Iorga in Romania (1931–2), and Bogdan Filov in Bulgaria (1940–43). Even those Byzantinists who did not directly engage in politics were subject to intensive political scrutiny. For example, and as we discuss further below, the same decades witnessed the arrest of Soviet Byzantinists and eventually the execution of Vladimir Beneshevich, the head of the Soviet Academy's Byzantine Commission.

Analyses of the politics of Byzantine studies remain scarce. They constitute (as we have written elsewhere) 'not the intellectual production of a self-conscious field of critical historiography', but 'an undercurrent of locally occasioned critical reflections'.[6] The contrast to neighbouring disciplines is striking. Archaeologists, for example, have long recognised the intrinsically political stakes of their field. Already in 1984, Bruce Trigger proposed that archaeology could be divided into 'three basic types …: Nationalist, Colonialist, and Imperialist', taking it as a given that all archaeological practice is informed by and contributes to contemporary politics.[7] Subsequent scholarship has both built on and expanded Trigger's typology.[8] For example, beginning around the year 2000, scholars established Indigenous archaeology as an autonomous and dynamic perspective on disciplinary history—albeit one that Trigger had previously excluded from his purview.[9]

The three books under review allow us to propose an analogous typology for Byzantine studies, starting from the assumption that every practice of Byzantine studies has a politics inherent in it, just as every practice of history has a philosophy inherent in it, even if it is not explicitly stated. In the volumes at hand we can identify versions of all three of Trigger's founding types: a nationalist, a colonialist and an imperialist Byzantine studies. Our aim thereby is not to draw firm divisions between modes of scholarship. As Dimitris Stamatopoulos

6. B. Anderson and M. Ivanova, 'Introduction: For a Critical Historiography of Byzantine Studies', in Anderson and Ivanova, eds, *Colonialist Discipline*, p. 3.

7. B.G. Trigger, 'Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist', *Man*, new ser., xix (1984), p. 355.

8. See, especially, J. Habu, C. Fawcett and J.M. Matsunaga, eds, *Evaluating Multiple Narratives: Beyond Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist Archaeologies* (New York, 2008).

9. B.G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 29. Key responses include J. Watkins, *Indigenous Archaeology: American Indian Values and Scientific Practice* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2008); B. Hamann, 'The Social Life of Pre-Sunrise Things: Indigenous Mesoamerican Archaeology', *Current Anthropology*, xliii (2002), pp. 352–82; S. Atalay, *Community-Based Archaeology: Research With, By and For Indigenous and Local Communities* (Berkeley, CA, 2012).

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demonstrates in *Byzantium after the Nation*, late nineteenth-century intellectuals occupied multiple and sometimes contradictory political positions over the course of their public careers, their allegiances alternating between old empires and new nations. The case is hardly different today, as resurgent nationalisms everywhere erode the foundations of the (always tenuous) post-1989 internationalist–liberal consensus. Both the material conditions under which scholars work and the political expectations placed upon the Byzantine heritage vary widely from country to country. Scholars working within the empire's erstwhile territories face different challenges from those working outside; not everyone receives the same resources to support their curiosity, nor the same freedom to be critical of received narratives.

Nevertheless, a heuristic typology of disciplinary politics helps to break down a strict opposition between 'Western' and 'Eastern' schools of Byzantine studies. It points, namely, to a dilemma confronted by all Byzantinists: whether to rehabilitate Byzantine imperialism as a model of effective multinational co-operation, or condemn it as an elite imposition and a hindrance to the fulfilment of national aspirations.

No identities are more seemingly fixed in Byzantine studies than the national, which are (for example) baked into the structure and governance of the International Association of Byzantine Studies. Diana Mishkova's monumental study moves beyond lament to undertake a critical assessment of the roles that Byzantine history has played in the founding narratives of Southeastern European nations. The influence of imperialism on the discipline is less obvious, which renders Stamatopoulos's excavation of an imperialist–ecumenist view of Byzantium in the works of late Ottoman intellectuals especially significant. Politics figure less prominently in the essays on early modern Byzantine studies collected by Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff in *The Invention of Byzantium*. Nonetheless, by reading backwards from Mishkova and Stamatopoulos, it becomes clear that key aspects of disciplinary politics, including its colonial imbrications, emerged before the nineteenth century.

Thus Trigger's three kinds of archaeology—nationalist, imperialist and colonialist—are also useful for thinking about the politics of Byzantine studies. Yet, and also as in archaeology, their preponderance can obscure the existence of alternative modes of scholarship. Accordingly, we conclude by highlighting two topics that receive little attention in the books under review: the persistence of indigenous Byzantine modes of scholarship after the end of the Byzantine state, and the distinctively collaborative mode of scholarship practised in some Communist states during the 1950s. Whether or not these provide direct models for future scholarship, they are key areas for future historiographical research, in so far as they weaken the grasp of the imperialist/nationalist binary. Once we have a firmer grasp on all the things that Byzantine studies has done, we can turn to the more pertinent question of what we want it to do today.

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I

In so far as Byzantinists have addressed the politics of our discipline, it is a truth universally acknowledged that Byzantine studies suffers from nationalism. However, this truism carries its own problems, foremost of which is the common assumption that nationalism is an Eastern European problem. This we will return to. The second problem is that this universal truth has rarely been interrogated with the depth and precision of Diana Mishkova. *Beyond Balkanism* demonstrates that Byzantine studies has always been at the heart of regional politics, and that, while nationalism is ubiquitous, there are many different ways in which Byzantium could serve the nation. In Mishkova's words, Byzantium's peculiar achievement in Southeastern Europe was to have 'galvanised the proper creative forces of the medieval Balkan nationalities, stirring them to forge cultural values on their own' (p. 303). Nationalism could be both profoundly derivative and endlessly creative.

Mishkova's study traces the nineteenth-century emergence of five national historiographies that had to figure out what to *do* with Byzantium: the Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Serbian and Turkish. Whereas Turkey approached the Byzantine Empire from the perspective of a direct successor to its capital and much of its territory, each of the other traditions sought to recover the origin stories of its respective *Volk* from the imperial records of medieval East Rome. The nation looked to Byzantine chronicles to find its ancient origins, before the emergence of Slavonic and Romance texts. Even once Slavonic and Romance historiographies were established in the Middle Ages, they never surpassed the breadth and detail of the Byzantine record. So, Byzantine chronicles were where the nation found out about its great kings, its major battles, even its borders. The stakes of Byzantine studies were high from the outset.

Yet for all its usefulness, this historical record posed uncomfortable questions. Was Byzantium the enemy or the forerunner? A glorious civilisation, or the source of corruption and decline? These questions were as valid for Ottomans and Turks as they were for Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians and Romanians. The pendulum swung back and forth over the course of the twentieth century. As nations earned their sovereign territories, as the historical discipline became professionalised, as political regimes changed, as diplomatic relations soured, each of the historiographical schools explored by Mishkova swung between condemning Byzantium and claiming its mantle.

Byzantium began as the unwanted other to more vigorous cultural–racial forces. Nineteenth-century Ottoman historiography blamed Byzantium for decline (pp. 173–6), and contrasted it to the subsequent enlightenment. In 1918, between two stints as Rector of Bulgaria's first university, Vasil Zlatarski (1866–1935) published the first volume

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of his foundational three-volume *History of the Bulgarian State in the Middle Ages*. In the process he was also appointed the deputy head of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. His tomes made clear that Bulgaria flourished in periods free of Byzantine interference and declined when the Byzantinised elite took charge (p. 96).

Alternative, more positive views of Byzantium emerged after the turn of the twentieth century. The Kingdom of Greece, fresh from the humiliation of the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, had Asia Minor on its mind. Byzantium, became, in the words of the Greek intellectual Dimitrios Vikelas (1835–1908), a 'martyr in the cause for the human race' for fighting Muslims and protecting Europe from the Qur'an (p. 88). Demostene Russo (1869–1938), an Ottoman subject from Eastern Thrace who moved to Romania in 1894, claimed that if Byzantium had not held back the Turks they would have 'imposed on the whole of Europe the Koran instead of the Gospel' (p. 115).

The view of East Rome as the bulwark against Islam persisted in Eastern Europe and beyond, thus rendering the Byzantine legacy more attractive to predominantly Christian states. Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) claimed that it was the Romanians, not the Slavs, who had maintained an 'undeniable tradition' of Byzantine succession (p. 118). Byzantium became respectable enough that Georgiy Ostrogorski (1902–76), an eminent Russian émigré who made Yugoslavia his home, could boast that the Byzantines also borrowed from the Slavs, and not just the other way round (p. 244). Even early twentieth-century Turkish historians such as Ahmet Refik (1880–1937) found something to rehabilitate: a 'patriotism of the land' where Byzantium had once ruled was sufficient cause to embrace Byzantine heritage (p. 177).

Fascism and socialism contributed to the push and pull between these stories, but in Mishkova's account, nationalism remained the unshakeable foundation upon which all history was built. Whether condemned or rehabilitated, Byzantium always served the nation state. Stalinism in Romania, for example, rehabilitated the Romanians' relationship with medieval Slavs (p. 264) at the expense of interest in Byzantium, in order to strengthen Soviet camaraderie. But by the 1970s, when Ceauşescu's regime restored the anti-Slavonic consensus of the early twentieth century, academics promoted the cult of Iorga and reasserted Romania's claim to the East Roman legacy (pp. 271–2). Across the socialist states of the Balkans, Mishkova persuasively shows, the anti-socialist historiography of the 1970s—which saw itself as a radical alternative—was in fact romantic nationalism repackaged (p. 251). The same was true in the NATO member states of Turkey and Greece, where the language of ethnic nationalism and religious identity was mobilised in support of anti-communism (p. 286). While the Greek state embraced a newly imagined Greek Byzantium to construct a narrative of ethnic continuity, the Turkish republic swiftly distanced itself from Byzantium for the very same reasons.

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Barring a short interlude of communist internationalism in the 1950s, which we discuss below, Mishkova represents the twentieth century as the century of the nation; and despite periodic attempts at rehabilitation, the nation often found Byzantium wanting. Therefore, while *Rival Byzantiums* is a book purportedly about 'identity and empire in Southeastern Europe', it effectively demonstrates how nationalism trumped both in the writing of history.

The rigour of Mishkova's analysis and the steadiness of her focus on nationalism highlight the lack of a comparable study of Western and Central European schools of Byzantine studies. To be sure, Western medievalists have amply illuminated the role played by European nationalisms in the writing of early medieval history. This story usually begins in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with roots stretching back to the reign of Louis XIV.[10] The role of nationalism in the (e.g.) French and English schools of Byzantine studies is, by contrast, little discussed.

Consider, for example, the contributions to *The Invention of Byzantium*, which rarely invoke nationalism when examining the motives of early modern humanists and antiquarians active at various Western courts. Nevertheless, these scholars seem all to have faced the same dilemma as national academies in Eastern Europe: whether to praise Byzantium or to disdain it, claim it as a noble predecessor or disavow it as a foreign tyranny. National filiation plays no less a role in the answers that they formulated. As Aschenbrenner and Ransohoff write in their conclusion, Italian humanist 'historians like Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444) and Flavio Biondo reconstructed the origins of their own nations using materials on "barbarian" peoples found in [the sixth-century Byzantine historian] Procopius, among others' (p. 372). This passing remark merits careful consideration, especially as the parallels to the phenomena studied by Mishkova are clear and consequential. The early date for a nationalist historiography will annoy 'modernists', but can be supported by Caspar Hirschi's 'alternative history' of the late medieval origins of nationalism.[11] Thus the received wisdom about the predominance of nationalism in the politics of Byzantine studies is both confirmed and revised. Nationalism is indeed unavoidable, but not restricted to Eastern Europe. It stands equally at the core of the earliest West European engagements with Byzantine history.

10. I. Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013), p. 20 ('the end of Louis XIV's reign … the early phases of the French Enlightenment'); cf. P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), pp. 19–21.

11. C. Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2012). For an explicitly anti-modernist account of the Byzantine state as the nation of the Romans, see A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), pp. 47–8 and *passim*. For a comparison between Hirschi's view and Kaldellis's, see M. Vukašinović, 'The Better Story for Romans and Byzantinists?', *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vi (2020), p. 197.

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II

If the concept of a nationalist Byzantine studies is familiar, the impacts of imperialist and colonialist ideologies on Byzantine studies are less generally admitted. Let us start with a heuristic distinction between these two terms. On the one hand, imperial invocations of Byzantium sought to maintain a balance between great powers. Until the First World War, this effectively meant affirming the Ottoman Empire as the legitimate successor to the Byzantine. On the other hand, colonial Byzantine studies served expansionist projects, including (but not limited to) those of the French and Russian empires. This effectively meant denying Ottoman sovereignty and asserting a competing demand to former Byzantine lands.

It is the signal achievement of Dimitris Stamatopoulos's *Byzantium after the Nation* to have excavated a nineteenth-century countertradition of imperial, ecumenist 'historiographical divergences' (p. xii, n. 1) from 'the national historiographical canon' (p. 1). A revised translation of a study first published in Greek some fifteen years ago,[12] Stamatopoulos's work remains fresh and surprising. He presents a series of close readings of the works of late imperial intellectuals and historians writing in a variety of languages, including Greek, Ottoman, Bulgarian, Albanian and Russian. In place of romantic nationalism, these authors enlisted Byzantium in the service of imperial (Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian) legitimacy, substituting narratives of religious ecumenism (both pan-Orthodox and pan-Islamic) for those of national continuity.

Thus, regardless of their religious and ethnic affiliations, and in contrast to the majority of authors profiled in *Rival Byzantiums* and *The Invention of Byzantium*, Stamatopoulos's imperial ecumenists accepted the legitimacy of the Ottomans as successors to the Byzantines. 'The position of continuity between the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empire' (p. 87) was adopted both by Manuel Gedeon (1851–1943), writing in Greek in the service of the Patriarchate, and by Gavril Krastevich (1817–1898), writing in Bulgarian for journals based in Constantinople. Both sought to reconcile the apparent contradictions between pan-Orthodox aspirations and Ottoman imperial legitimacy.

More ambitiously, Stamatopoulos traces the affinity between these Ottoman Christians and the Russian conservative intellectual Konstantin Leontiev (1831–91). Like Gedeon and Krastevich, Leontiev sought to reconcile two seemingly incompatible ideological positions, namely pan-Slavism and pan-Orthodoxy. For Leontiev, both 'could coexist or rather fuse in Byzantism's cultural form', by means of 'preservation of the imperial structure and preservation of the prevalence of the

12. D. Stamatopoulos, *Το Βυζάντιο μετά το έθνος: το προβλήμα της συνέχειας στις βαλκανικές ιστοριογραφίες* (Athens, 2009).

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religious element', be it Christian or Islamic (p. 210). This ecumenism meant Leontiev, somewhat surprisingly at first glance, admired the Ottoman imperial achievement. On this latter point, Stamatopoulos traces a further parallel between the work of pan-Orthodox pro-imperial scholars and pan-Islamic Ottoman scholars. The key figure here is Şemseddin Sami (1850–1904), whose vision of an enlightened medieval Islamic civilisation plays a role analogous to that played by Byzantium for Gedeon, Krastevich, and Leontiev: as a model for imperial ecumenism in the present.

Stamatopoulos's study is exemplary in its careful reconstruction of the worldviews of late imperial intellectuals whose contributions have been submerged by the creation of national schools. It is also exemplary in its refusal to draw an absolute distinction between imperialism and nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Stamatopoulos notes at the outset, some of the emerging post-Ottoman nations, including Greece and Bulgaria, engaged in their own expansionist projects ('colonial' in the terms that we propose above); just as the Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg empires sought to construct their own versions of 'imperial nationalism' (pp. 12–13) in order to survive in the new era. And many intellectuals moved between imperial and nationalist positions over the course of their careers. An especially good illustration of this is the aforementioned Şemseddin Sami, who early in his career wrote in Ottoman Turkish as an imperial pan-Islamist, then later in Albanian and under the name Sami Frashëri as a convinced nationalist, for whom 'the Albanian is an Albanian before he is a Muslim or a Christian' (p. 298).

Still, the key contribution of Stamatopoulos's study is to establish the possibility of a non-national or even anti-nationalist Byzantine studies, in which the Byzantine state serves neither as the origin nor as the enemy of the modern nation state, but as an ecumenist counterpoint to mono-ethnic national histories. The imperial alternative that Stamatopoulos excavates rests on the recognition of Ottoman legitimacy, so long as the multi-ethnic empire provides a home to Byzantine culture. The denial of Ottoman legitimacy, by contrast, led to a different approach to Byzantine history, which can usefully be described as colonial.

Aschenbrenner and Ransohoff dedicate *The Invention of Byzantium* to the historian Agostino Pertusi, whose 1967 monograph on 'humanist historiography and the Byzantine world' remains the standard account of the origins of Byzantine studies after the fall of Constantinople, *c*.1500–1750.[13] Pertusi identified two key stimuli for West European interest in Byzantine history: the theological debates of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and the threat of Ottoman expansion. Byzantine history, it is sometimes claimed, provided European powers

13. Pertusi, *Storiografia umanistica e mondo bizantino*, repr. in A. Pertusi, *Bisanzio e i Turchi nella cultura del Rinascimento e del Barocco* (Milan, 2005).

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with privileged knowledge about the Ottoman state, but in practice it is not clear that it yielded much of value. Anthony Grafton writes in his contribution to *The Invention of Byzantium* that 'only the scholars believed' that Byzantine sources could offer 'precise, practical information about the Ottoman world' (p. 87). The contribution of Byzantine studies was rather to buttress arguments against Ottoman legitimacy. In other words, the strategic interest of Byzantine studies was not defensive (supplying insights into the enemy) but rather offensive (supplying grounds to attack).

The French scholar Charles du Cange (1610–1688) is a particularly poignant example. His Byzantine studies are the subject of two chapters by Teresa Shawcross.[14] Du Cange's view on Byzantium resulted in a wholescale denial of Ottoman legitimacy and an assertion of 'French rights to the city of Constantinople … which Louis [XIV] had inherited as king of France' (p. 178). Addressing Louis XIV, du Cange wrote that the throne of the Byzantine Empire 'was one upon which valor and virtue had raised Your Ancestors', adding (in Shawcross's paraphrase) that French rights to the city of Constantinople 'were currently being trampled upon by "usurpers" and "tyrants" of the most primitive kind—an allusion to Ottoman rule' (p. 178). By the turn of the nineteenth century, French claims to the Eastern Mediterranean were supported by real armies on the ground, as Napoleon's campaigns in Egypt and Syria between 1798 and 1801 posed a direct challenge to Ottoman sovereignty.

Meanwhile, the Russian Empire developed its own territorial claims to Constantinople; a topic that is notably under-studied across the three volumes under review, but has recently been developed in depth by Pinar Üre.[15] Over the course of the eighteenth century, the territory of modern-day Ukraine, especially the Black Sea coast and Crimea, was populated by new cities solidifying the Russian conquests of the previous century. This expansion southward into the so-called 'Novorussiya' (New Russia)—often at the expense of the Muslim, Turkic Crimean Tatars—was paired with a growing interest both in ancient Black Sea civilisations and in the history of East Rome, Russia's perceived Orthodox predecessor. The esteemed nineteenth-century school of Byzantine studies at St Petersburg was transported almost *en masse* to the new Imperial University of Novorussiya in Odessa, a classic act of expansionism (and in our definition of the term, decidedly colonial). Its scholars, foremost among whom was Fyodor Uspenski

14. Further on du Cange, see I. Foletti and A. Palladino, 'Byzantium as a Political Tool (1657–1952): Nations, Colonialism and Globalism', in M. Kulkhánová and P. Marciniak, eds, *Byzantium in the Popular Imagination: The Modern Reception of the Byzantine Empire* (London, 2023), pp. 46–9.

15. P. Üre, *Reclaiming Byzantium: Russia, Turkey and the Archaeological Claim to the Middle East in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2020).

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(1845–1928), pursued their goals even further south, through the establishment of a Russian Archaeological Institute in Istanbul.[16]

Meanwhile, Russian intellectuals and diplomats openly articulated their dreams of conquest. In 1876–7, the novelist Fyodor Dostoyevski (1821–81) advocated Russian intervention to liberate Orthodox Slavs in the Balkans, insisting that 'only Russian possession of the imperial city [i.e. Constantinople] would bring peace and freedom to the Slavic-Orthodox world'.[17] The Russian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Aleksandr Nelidov (1838–1910), was sent home for suggesting on multiple occasions that Russia seize the Bosphorus (1881, 1892 and 1895). From 1887, he also became involved in the Archaeological Institute. Russian armed forces clashed with the Ottomans in the Crimean War (1853–6), and again on the ground in Bulgaria and the Caucasus in 1877–8. In January 1878, after successful campaigns in the Balkans, and despite accepting the truce offered by the Ottomans, the Russian army moved towards Istanbul. They only stopped at Yeşilköy, or San Stefano, a mere fifteen kilometres away from the city's Byzantine land walls, where a peace treatise was finally signed.

In the same era, the Kingdom of Greece formulated its *Megali Idea* ('Great Idea'), which aimed at expansion to the core territories of the Byzantine Empire, thereby unifying Greek Orthodox populations under Greek rule. This aspirational territory included the core lands of the late Ottoman state, including what the Greeks still called Constantinople and western Anatolia. In pursuit of this, Greece nearly doubled its territory in the First Balkan War (1912–13), capturing Thessaloniki and key sites in the west Balkans. During the same war, it was the Bulgarians who actually marched on Constantinople. Two of their three army units headed into Eastern Thrace in 1912 and towards Istanbul. After capturing Edirne, Kırklareli and Lüleburgaz on the way, they were stopped at Çatalca, around fifty kilometres away from the walls of Constantinople.

In short, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the prospect of Istanbul colonised was real, and the various colonial claims were fuelled by competing interpretations of the Byzantine legacy. Stamatopoulos writes of Greek and Russian designs that 'both of these two relatively utopian prospects have to be understood in relation to a very real possibility, namely that of imperial France gaining a foothold in Constantinople' (p. 52). But Russia's claim on Istanbul was far from utopian. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Allied Powers secretly agreed to award the city to Russia should they win.[18]

16. On the history of the St Petersburg school of Byzantine studies, see the meticulous I.P. Medvedev, *Peterburgskoe Vizantinovedenie* (St Petersburg, 2006); and Üre, *Reclaiming Byzantium*, p. 65.

17. Üre, *Reclaiming Byzantium*, p. 12.

18. Ibid., p. 149.

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From 1914 onwards, Russian intellectuals started talking about what to do *when*, not if, they conquered Constantinople.[19]

Had it not been for the Bolshevik revolution, Dostoyevski's dream might have come true. As it happened, when Constantinople did fall in 1918, the Greeks' and Russians' fears came true: the French entered the city first, swiftly followed by British and Italian forces. At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos proposed the *Megali Idea* to the gathering: Constantinople should go to the Greeks. But there were far too many competing claims to the imperial city in the room. In the end, after five years of occupation by the victorious Allied Powers, Istanbul fell to the Turkish Nationalists in 1923. The period of occupation nevertheless remained as living political proof of the successful delegitimisation of Ottoman rule over the imperial capital of Constantinople.

Byzantine studies did often serve those emergent polities of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that sought, as in Mishkova's many case-studies, to retrieve a story of national origins from the annals of Byzantine history. But they could also serve those late imperial (Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian) intellectuals studied by Stamatopoulos, who found in the Byzantine empire a model for a multi-ethnic state. Finally, they could serve the colonial expansionist ambitions of both old empires (especially the French and the Russian) and new nations (including the Greek and the Bulgarian).

Analysis of the history of Byzantine studies in terms of national, imperial and colonial modes presents a more complex picture than a simple division into national or linguistic 'schools'. Two points are particularly noteworthy. First, individual 'schools' accommodated multiple, sometimes competing modes. The history of Greek-language Byzantine studies, for example, presents examples of all three: nationalists who sought to distinguish the reborn Greek nation from the decadent Byzantine state; imperialists who viewed Ottoman rule as the fulfilment of pan-Orthodox aspirations under an ecumenical patriarch; and colonialists whose 'Great Idea' claimed the erstwhile territory of Byzantium as the rightful inheritance of the Kingdom of Greece. Secondly, the distinction between the three modes centres around two key questions: firstly, did the Byzantine state nurture or hinder the aspirations of its subjects? And secondly, was the Ottoman state a legitimate successor to the Byzantine? The latter question arguably lost much of its urgency following the abolition of the Sultanate by the Turkish Parliament in 1922. The former question, by contrast, remains at the centre of current debates in Byzantine studies, especially those regarding the social depth of attachment to a Roman identity.[20]

19. Ibid., p. 130.

20. Compare, for example, Kaldellis, *Romanland*, with Y. Stouraitis, 'Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, cvii (2014), pp. 175–220.

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III

Useful as it is, Trigger's tripartite typology may also obscure the existence of alternative modes of scholarship, in Byzantine studies as in archaeology. In the following, we consider two traditions of Byzantine studies that do not neatly fit into the national, imperial or colonial moulds. As before, these traditions are not primarily defined by the ethnic or political identities of their practitioners, rather by the arguments that they advanced and the fora within which they advanced them. Thus we call the first mode 'indigenous', not because its practitioners descend from Byzantine families, but because they worked within Byzantine epistemological frameworks and historiographical genres. Similarly, not all Byzantinists working within our 'state socialist' mode accepted the tenets of Marxism-Leninism as articulated by their respective party leaderships. However, the ethos of collaborative scholarship and the emphasis on material culture produced a distinctively socialist approach to Byzantine and medieval history. Neither mode features prominently within the volumes under review, but both contributed to the complex ideological matrix of Byzantine studies today.

We begin with indigenous Byzantine studies. Nearly all of the Byzantinists who are profiled in the volumes under review were primarily active outside of Constantinople. 'The invention of Byzantium' in Aschenbrenner and Ransohoff's volume is an exclusively West and Central European pursuit; subjects of the Ottoman Empire do not appear as historians. Thus Xavier Lequeux's chapter on the history of hagiography celebrates the Belgian Bollandists for rescuing Greek manuscripts that otherwise 'would have languished in the gloom of libraries' (p. 317)—known to no one except thousands of Orthodox monks and worshippers. Similarly, Mishkova's brief treatment of early Ottoman understandings of Byzantium focuses exclusively on works written in Ottoman Turkish and derivative of West European, mostly humanist, historiography (pp. 170–71). Only Stamatopoulos addresses a handful of scholars who spent part of their careers in Constantinople, most of whom eventually moved to the new national capitals.

In fact, Constantinopolitans had their own form of Byzantine studies, one largely conducted in genres (chronicles, lexica, epigraphic sylloges, saints' lives) that would have been familiar to the Byzantines themselves. Take, for example, the scholars John Malaxos and Manuel Malaxos (their relation to each other remains unclear), who both moved to Istanbul in the middle decades of the sixteenth century. John Malaxos compiled several booklets on the antiquities of Constantinople, epigraphic and architectural, and Manuel wrote a widely read and much copied world history.[21] Only this latter work appears briefly in *The*

21. P. Schreiner, 'John Malaxos (16th Century) and His Collection of *Antiquitates Constantinopolitanae*', in N. Necipoğlu, ed., *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography,*

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Invention of Byzantium, notably not as a work of Byzantine history, but as a specimen of barbaric late Greek used by Western lexicographers. It remains to be studied whether and how the Byzantium invented by John, Manuel and other early modern Constantinopolitans differed from that of their West European counterparts.

For a later example of Byzantine studies in an indigenous mode, consider the career of Skarlatos Byzantios (1797–1878), who grew up in Constantinople before emigrating to the Kingdom of Greece, where he eventually became the director of primary education. He returned frequently to his native city and wrote a monumental three-volume treatise on its topography, archaeology and history; one deeply engaged with the Byzantine tradition of 'patriography' or local urban history.[22] Byzantios accorded a very different role to Byzantium than the national historians Spyridon Zambelios (1815–81) and Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815–91). As Stephanos Pesmazoglou has written, Byzantios 'incorporated Byzantium into Greek history and he was neither apologetic nor did he seek clemency for the Byzantine period'; moreover, he explicitly rejected the anti-Turkish *topoi* that cluttered the writing of Byzantine history both in Western Europe and in Greece.[23] Yet he is not discussed either by Stamatopoulos or by Mishkova, appearing in their books only in passing and in quotes from his contemporaries.[24]

Thus the question of indigenous Byzantine studies opens on to the broader question of what forms of scholarly activity are included within histories of the discipline. Malaxos and Malaxos are perhaps too close to the church, Byzantios too much of a dilettante.[25] Monastic communities were, and remain, custodians of historical memory and religious knowledge throughout the Orthodox world, yet they rarely appear in historiographies of Byzantine studies.[26] The exceptions are

and Everyday Life (Leiden, 2001), pp. 203–14; D. Sakel, 'The Manuscripts of the "Chronicle of 1570"', *Byzantion*, lxxxiii (2013), pp. 363–74; A. Rhoby and P. Schreiner, 'Antiquitates Constantinopolitanae im Osmanischen Reich: Johannes Malaxos und seine Aufzeichnungen im Vat. reg. gr. 166', *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, xxiv (2018), pp. 605–57.

22. Skarlatos Byzantios, *Η Κωνσταινούπολις: ή περιγραφή τοπογραφική, αρχαιολογική και ιστορική* (3 vols, Athens, 1851–69). Volume I has been translated into English by H. Theodorelis-Rigas, *Constantinople: A Topographical, Archaeological, and Historical Description* (Istanbul, 2019).

23. S. Pesmazoglou, 'Skarlatos Vyzantios's *Κωνσταντινούπολις*: Difference and Fusion', in L.T. Baruh and V. Kechriotis, eds, *Economy and Society on Both Shores of the Aegean* (Athens, 2010), pp. 23–78, at 45. See further F.M. Sümertaş, review of Theodorelis-Rigas, *Constantinople*, in *Yıllık: Annual of Istanbul Studies*, i (2019), pp. 213–15.

24. He must be the 'Skarlatos and Byzantios' in Mishkova's translation of a passage from Shishmanov (p. 98); and he is probably the 'Vyzantios' whom Stamatopoulos names in passing as a 'Phanariot personality' (p. 46).

25. For a sweeping dismissal of Greek literary production in the Ottoman Empire, see C. Mango, 'The Phanariots and the Byzantine Tradition', in R. Clogg, ed., *The Struggle for Greek Independence* (London, 1973), pp. 41–66, esp. at 50.

26. Consider, for example, the continuation of Byzantine apocalyptic by contemporary Orthodox clerics: E. Kessareas, '"Signs of the Times": Prophecy Belief in Contemporary Greek Orthodox Contexts', *Social Compass*, lxx (2023), at https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686231154110.

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those monks whose work anticipated later national historiography and could thus be claimed as proto-nationalists: paradigmatically, Paisius of Hilandar (1722–73), whose *Slavonic-Bulgarian History*, composed in a monastery on Mount Athos, was later claimed as the beginning of the Bulgarian Revival.[27] By contrast, national pantheons have little room for those Orthodox Ottoman subjects who (as Cyril Mango once wrote of the Greek Phanariots) 'represented a Byzantine tradition that was basically anti-national'.[28]

Mutatis mutandis, the same considerations apply to state socialist Byzantine studies, whose most characteristic products were collective volumes, and thus less visible than single-authored monographs to a biographically oriented intellectual history. In Russia, the Bolshevik Revolution is usually cast as a grim end to the late imperial flourishing of Byzantine studies, in part because the Soviets did not maintain their predecessors' expansionist designs on Istanbul.[29] The old institutions persevered until 1928, when, among many others, Vladimir Beneshevich (1874–1938), the Secretary of the Byzantine Commission in the USSR, was arrested.[30] At that point the Byzantine commission of the Academy was dissolved, the flagship journal of Byzantine studies (*Vizantiiski Vremennik*) was suspended, and the leading figure of Byzantine studies and first director of the Russian Archaeological Institute at Istanbul, Uspenski, was condemned. Byzantine studies as a whole was branded a politically reactionary pursuit. As such, the discipline once again took centre stage in European politics: Beneshevich was accused of spying on account of research trips to Germany and the Vatican. His arrest was so controversial in Europe that two Nobel laureates, Albert Einstein and Fridtjof Nansen, wrote letters to the Soviet Academy in his support.[31] This may have secured his early release from labour camp, but in 1937 he published a critical edition of a canon law collection by the sixth-century patriarch John Scholasticus in Munich, a key early centre of Byzantine studies. He was swiftly executed as a Nazi spy.[32]

Here, too, as in the nationalist appraisal of Byzantine history, the pendulum swung back at mid-century. Already in the 1940s, as Stalinist intellectuals sought to revive the traditions of imperial Russia, including pan-Slavism, scholarly activity in Byzantine studies was encouraged again and Beneshevich was rehabilitated. A Byzantine congress held in 1945 was dedicated to the memory of Uspenski, while the head of the new department of Byzantine history at the Academy proclaimed that

27. For a recent translation by Evgenia Pancheva, see *A Slavonic-Bulgarian History* (Mount Athos, 2018). On Paisius's reception in later Bulgarian historiography, see R. Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (Budapest, 2004), pp. 151–61.

28. Mango, 'Phanariots', pp. 58–9.

29. See Medvedev, *Peterburgskoe Vizantinovedenie*, pp. 313–22.

30. Ibid., p. 277.

31. Ibid., pp. 279–83.

32. Ibid., p. 290.

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'Byzantine history ties us to the countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe'.[33]

Despite its tendentious origins, this revival of Byzantine studies created an institutional apparatus that survived Stalin and spread beyond Russia and across the Eastern bloc. This moment, in Mishkova's view, was short-lived and confined largely to the 1950s. It remains perhaps the most creative period for Byzantine historiography since the foundations of romantic nationalism were laid in the late nineteenth century, even if those foundations held firm in the end. In the 1960s and 1970s, as the socialist states of the Balkans became disillusioned with Stalinism, they returned to a hybrid 'communist nationalism' (in the apt phrase of Roumen Daskalov), which thought of itself as radical and revisionist, but was largely derivative of the late nineteenth-century nationalist consensus.[34]

Still, the 1950s produced some interesting experiments in medieval studies, the foremost of which was the production of multi-authored, multi-volume, totalising, materialist histories. In 1951, the Soviet Academy of Science published the *History of Early Russian Culture,* written by a plethora of different contributors and organised not by chronology, but by the analytical distinction between base and superstructure (Volume 1: *Material Culture*; Volume 2: *Societal System and Spiritual Culture*).[35] To complement its attempt to apply Marxist-Leninist principles to early Rus' history, the book critiqued 'bourgeois' scholarship on Byzantium, which had excessively elevated the influence of Byzantium at the expense of the achievement of Slavs and oriental peoples. Byzantium was once again an enemy, now because 'nowhere in Europe were class contradictions as acute as in Byzantium' (Mishkova, p. 220, citing Mitrofan Levchenko).

Scholars in the Balkans quickly adopted both the model of collaborative scholarship and the new language of feudalism, class relations, slavery and unfreedom. A *History of the Peoples of Yugoslavia* of 1953 appeared in Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian in 1953, and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences published a three-volume *History of Bulgaria* in 1954.[36] Both projects offered materialist readings of medieval pasts and sought, at least in principle, to foreground 'the people'. They also attempted to make history a collective activity, promoting a shared

33. S.A. Ivanov, 'Byzance rouge: La byzantinologie et les communistes (1928–1948),' in M.-F. Auzépy, ed., *Byzance en Europe* (Saint-Denis, 2003), pp. 54–60. See further S.A. Ivanov, 'The Second Rome as Seen by the Third: Russian Debates on "the Byzantine Legacy"', in P. Marciniak and D.C. Smythe, eds, *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture since 1500* (Farnham, 2006), pp. 55–79.

34. R. Daskalov, *Master Narratives of the Middle Ages in Bulgaria* (Leiden, 2021), p. 197.

35. N.N. Voronin, M.N. Karger and M.A. Tikhanova, eds, *Istoriia kul'tury drevnei Rusi* (2 vols, Moscow, 1951).

36. D. Kosev, D. Dimitrov, Z. Natan, K. Khristov and D. Angelov, eds, *Istoriia na Bulgariia* (3 vols, Sofia, 1954–81); B. Grafenauer, D. Petrović and J. Šidak, eds, *Istorija Naroda Jugoslavije* (2 vols, Zagreb, 1953–60).

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state-wide vision for historical research, as opposed to an individualist pursuit of knowledge and academic status. The preface to the Bulgarian volumes claims to have gathered 'most of the progressive Bulgarian historians' to produce 'the first collective work of Bulgarian history'.[37] These large-scale projects had shared weaknesses, including both the inadequacy of the concepts to address complexities of the source material, and an occasional failure to properly digest the new Marxist-Leninist vocabulary. Mishkova characterises the 1954 *History of Bulgaria* as a fusion of 'neo-Romantic anti-Byzantine sentiment, Marxist-Leninist scholasticism and outright falsifications' (p. 222). These works also reflected the new political hegemony of the 1950s, a Russophile consensus driven by the political strength of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, all these works were still deeply tied to the state, however anti-bourgeois or anti-nationalist the state claimed to be. The *History of Bulgaria* includes an anonymous polemical prologue justifying its existence by quoting the General Secretary of the Communist party and Prime Minister, Georgi Dimitrov: 'Like we need water and bread, we also need a Marxist philosophy of our own for our history'. When the Marxism began to waver, the statism remained strong. By the third volume, published in 1981 as the nationalist tide rose, the Marxist tension between the 'people' and their feudal lords and kings had been dissolved entirely, and (as Mishkova observes) 'the people appeared determined to defend and fortify, together with the feudal lords, the feudal state' (p. 227).

Although it may appear that this genre was short-lived and ineffectual in the grand scheme of Byzantine historiography, one might in retrospect see the collaborative state-socialist projects of the 1950s as the forerunners to one of today's most characteristic scholarly products: the multi-authored Companion or Handbook.[38] Denigrated by tenure and promotion committees for not contributing sufficiently to the prestige of the individual authors and editors, these volumes nevertheless drive the 'normal science' of Byzantine studies today, mustering international collectives of professional scholars to distil consensus out of the existing literature and to map future directions for research for students and scholars alike. There is some value therefore in establishing a collective consensus today, just as there was in the 1950s. The most obvious difference from the state-socialist projects is the introduction of a capitalist mode of production. This has meant both that multiple Companions on the same topic compete for the business of cash-strapped university libraries, while the authors go largely uncompensated; but also that, in the free marketplace of ideas, Companions can

37. Kosev et al., eds, *Istoriia na Bulgariia*, i, Preface.

38. For example: M.E. Stewart, D.A. Parnell and C. Whatley, eds, *The Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium* (London, 2022); S. Efthymiadis, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography* (London, 2011); S. Lazaris, ed., *A Companion to Byzantine Science* (Leiden, 2020).

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propose multiple and contradictory ideas about the Byzantine phenomena they seek to accompany.

IV

In summary, these three volumes collectively represent a major step forward in the project of a critical historiography of Byzantine studies. We can now see our field roughly in the form in which Trigger saw archaeology in the 1980s. Nationalism remains the most visible political ideology, but its contours have come into much clearer focus thanks to Mishkova's detailed and sophisticated study. West European nationalism, by contrast, remains less visible, even if the evidence exists. Imperialism is visible largely thanks to Stamatopoulos's study, which, now that it is available in English, will hopefully receive the readership that it deserves. The politics of Byzantine studies outside of Southeastern Europe remain more opaque, even if the evidence exists here too for the influence of nationalism, imperialism and colonialism. Critical studies of the political investments and entanglements of the French and Russian schools in particular will have much to contribute to our understanding of the colonialist mode of Byzantine studies.

An expansion of the typology will also indicate avenues for future study: here we have highlighted two. Firstly, a comprehensive analysis of 'Second World' Byzantine studies (including but not limited to the Soviet Union) remains a major *desideratum*. Secondly, the existence and nature of an indigenous Byzantine studies have yet to be debated. One pathway forward is the study of Ottoman Greek scholarship on Byzantine studies.[39] Still, we await a definitive account of the Invention of Byzantium in the Ottoman Empire.

Albeit incomplete, the picture presented here is much clearer than it was ten years ago. Immense progress has been made in understanding the origins of the study of Byzantium, and the manifold ways in which the discipline has been entangled with politics. The Byzantine empire's legacy is so ambiguous that, as Mishkova notes, it has helped generate a plethora of creative political responses, claiming or condemning it to different political ends. And yet, even as Byzantine studies has won a tenuous foothold in the universities, its traction in the public sphere is waning. It has been many decades since the last Byzantinist Prime Minister held office (to our knowledge Filov, who died in 1945, was the last). As Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino recently observed: 'At the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectuals and politicians still belonged to one relatively homogeneous cultural elite, something

39. An exciting prospect in this sphere is the current research network on 'Phanariot Materialities', led by Namık Günay Erkal, Firuzan Melike Sümertaş and Haris Theodorelis-Rigas, which should culminate in an exhibition in Istanbul in 2025.

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which certainly is not the case in the twenty-first century'.[40] A new set of political actors has shaped the ambitions of Eastern Europe since the 2000s, when NATO bases proliferated in the region, and membership in the European Union became a political priority. If Byzantium was once not national enough, it is now either not European enough, or (as in contemporary Serbia) useful only in so far as it is conceived as pro-Russian and anti-EU (Mishkova, p. 258). This new nationalist appropriation of Byzantium finds parallels in conservative movements across Eastern Europe, as well as among alt-right and men's rights ('meninist') groups in the United States.[41]

This, in a nutshell, is the paradox of Byzantine studies today. On the one hand, university-based scholars have largely moved to a liberal version of the old imperial-ecumenist view of Byzantium. Thus, for example, in the UK and the US (where the two of us, respectively, teach), undergraduate modules are likely to represent Byzantium as a multi-lingual, multi-cultural polity, and to defend its civilisational achievement against the denigration of Enlightenment *philosophes* and, indeed, earlier generations of Byzantinists. Within Southeastern Europe, as Mishkova observes, university-based scholars tend to emphasise Byzantium's role in forming the cultures of Slavonic and Romance speakers on its periphery, through frameworks stressing conversation, dialogue or mutual influence rather than domination by Byzantium or imitation by the smaller polities in the region (pp. 309–15).

By contrast, and as Mishkova also notes, the nationalist view continues to predominate (and mutate) in the public sphere and guide practices of public commemoration and heritage preservation. In 2020, the Bulgarian government re-named the erstwhile 'Day of the Slavonic Alphabet and Culture' as the 'Day of the *Bulgarian* Alphabet and Culture', thus to distance itself both from the Byzantine-*ergo*-Greek ethnicity of its inventors and from any other Slavonic people who might lay claim to the letters. In a similar vein, Turkish municipal authorities actively suppress the 'Byzantine' character of prominent monuments, such as (in Istanbul) the massive land walls and the Tekfur Palace.[42] The Azerbaijani government promotes a more dramatic form of erasure, by means of the systematic and ongoing destruction of medieval Christian Armenian monuments.[43] Scholars' calls for cultural co-existence and hybrid identities fall on deaf ears; states make pre-modern empires

40. I. Foletti and A. Palladino, *Byzantium or Democracy? Kondakov's Legacy in Emigration: The Institutum Kondakovianum and André Grabar, 1925–1952* (Rome, 2020), p. 28.

41. A. Goldwyn, 'Byzantium in the American Alt-Right Imagination', in Stewart, Parnell and Whatley, eds, *Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, pp. 424–39.

42. K. Durak, 'The Popular Perception of Byzantium in Contemporary Turkish Culture', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, xlvii (2023), pp. 123–39, at 127.

43. Caucasus Heritage Watch, 'Silent Erasure: A Satellite Investigation of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan,' 1 May 2023, available at https://arcg.is/1uvqH8 (accessed 25 June 2024).

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into national forerunners in their drive to homogenise contemporary identities.

In brief, like Byzantinists at the turn of the twentieth century, we today are faced with a renewed battle between imperial-ecumenist and nationalist approaches to Byzantium, albeit one in which scholars have none of their former political clout. Given the outcome of that earlier battle, which concluded with a decisive victory for the nationalists, we might well question the tenacity of our adherence to the liberal-imperialist academic consensus. Must we choose one mode or the other? Are there alternative routes forward for Byzantine studies? The three books under review allow us to pose the question of the future of Byzantine studies with the firmest grasp we have ever had on its past.

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