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THINKING WITH BYZANTIUM*

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ABSTRACT. It is well known that the history of Byzantium does not fit comfortably with mainstream medieval history. This paper returns to the problem in the light of two recent, if opposing, historiographical trends: first, the emphasis on the Mediterranean as a unifying factor, and second, the turn towards the comparative history of western and eastern Eurasia. Neither emphasis accommodates Byzantium well, and it is argued that however difficult it may seem to some historians, any broad approach to medieval history will be inadequate if it does not make space for the history of Byzantium.

Visitors to the recently extended and reorganised Ashmolean Museum in Oxford will not find Byzantium mentioned in the leaflet giving the floor plans and layout. Instead, the Museum's significant Byzantine collections are dispersed – coins under the heading of 'Money' (into a new Cyprus gallery) and icons and other objects into a new (and stunning) gallery on the 'Mediterranean world', which is itself part of a grouping under the heading of 'Asian crossroads'. Byzantium is thus placed with the east, indeed with the far east. 'Rome' has a gallery, but Byzantium does not. Yet the Museum's Byzantine collection is an important one, and in terms of numbers and interest among graduate students, Byzantine studies in Oxford is booming: an attendance of forty or so is not uncommon at a regular seminar, and since 'late antiquity' attracts Byzantinists as well, and the boundary between the two periods (if such they are) is fuzzy in the extreme, there are often many more. A seminar on one or the other takes place virtually every day, and packed audiences are becoming the norm.[1] It is perhaps not surprising, given that the end of the Roman empire and the transition to the medieval world is again a topic of such appeal, if

* This is an adapted version of a paper read to the Society in February 2010, and I am grateful for comments received then; some of the material was included, though with different emphasis, in the Syme Lecture at Wolfson College, Oxford, and the John W. Pope Lecture at the University of Carolina, Chapel Hill, both given in November 2010.

[1] This is aided by the recent creation of an Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity and an Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research.

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we spend time debating about periodisation and definitions. But this also points to some real problems about Byzantium. They were evident also in 2008 when visitors to a spectacular exhibition on Byzantium in London came away bemused, admiring the objects but wondering what it was all about.[2] Non-Byzantinists have been surprised when I have explained that a historian of Byzantium even if not an art historian needs to be familiar with the main repertoire of surviving objects, and more than that, to keep up as far as possible with the latest interpretations and of course datings. Visitors to the exhibition (in my experience) needed a good deal of context, not only on chronology but also about Byzantine society and religion in order to appreciate many of the objects, and in many cases non-specialists come armed with preexisting and unhelpful assumptions. Conversely (since some of the most spectacular objects in the exhibition came from Venice, where they had been taken by the Crusaders and subsequently in some cases adapted for western use), a young Greek academic colleague, brought up in an Orthodox country but not a Byzantinist, said she was amazed to see the 'Byzantine' objects from western collections, and asked if it was really true that Catholics had done the adaptation and remodelling.

Those of us who work on Byzantine history are well aware of these problems. The real Byzantium is nowhere near as user-friendly as the field of late antiquity, which has literally exploded since Peter Brown published his *World of Late Antiquity* in 1971.[3] Judith Herrin has addressed this problem in her last book, and a range of recent handbooks and companions to Byzantium all show awareness of it.[4] I can only ruefully concur when she says that (except for enthusing over icons) telling anyone you are a Byzantinist is a total conversation stopper.

It is therefore intriguing to find a section about Byzantium in a volume of essays by the distinguished strategist Edward Luttwak,[5] and the same author has now published a whole book on Byzantium.[6] Luttwak is not a Byzantinist either, and reviewers have pointed out deficiencies in his book, including the use he makes of various Byzantine military

[2] See Robin Cormack and Maria Vassilaki, eds., *Byzantium 330–1453* (Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2008).

[3] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971).

[4] Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (2007); see Cyril Mango, ed., *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford, 2002); Elizabeth Jeffreys, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford, 2008); Paul Stephenson, ed., *The Byzantine World* (2010); Liz James, ed., *A Companion to Byzantium* (Chichester, 2010), and cf. Averil Cameron, *The Byzantines* (Oxford, 2006).

[5] Edward Luttwak, *The Virtual American Empire: War, Faith and Power* (New Brunswick, 2009); for the phrase 'faith and power' (explicitly acknowledged) see Helen C. Evans, ed. *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004), the catalogue of another of the several major Byzantine exhibitions in recent years.

[6] Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2009).

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manuals.[7] In 1976 he published *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, which was at the time controversial among Roman historians: it argued, indeed it assumed, that the Roman empire actually did have a grand strategy, whereas Roman historians at the time and later argued in the main that Roman military policy did not work like that.[8] The Byzantine book follows on with this model, and in fact an appendix briefly discusses the reception of his earlier book. Luttwak argues that all states have a grand strategy, even if they do not realise it themselves, and that the Byzantine preferred strategy was defensive and relied on diplomacy wherever possible against aggressive warfare or pitched battles. Not surprisingly, Luttwak draws some ideological messages from this, with frequent references to 'discredited Marxist history', disparaging references to historical theory in general, and use of the term 'jihad' for any and every Muslim military initiative. One reviewer regarded this as playful anachronism,[9] but that does not seem adequate.

I wonder what it was that interested Luttwak in Byzantium, beyond the fact that here is another good topic for a continuation of his book on Rome, and that he had (evidently) been to a recent major exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, New York? The Byzantine section in *The Virtual American Empire* consists of three essays. One is a review of the Metropolitan Museum exhibition of 2004 dealing with the last period of Byzantium; another is evidently also a review (though this is not stated) of a major book, *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, which came out in 1997.[10] The first may perhaps have arisen from a review of Warren Treadgold's *History of the Byzantine State and Society*, also of 1997, a book which aimed at replacing the standard work by George Ostrogorsky (on which more below). Luttwak admires Treadgold's *History* as a book for the general reader, but he also takes the opportunity to express his own view that the Byzantine empire lasted because it had a grand strategy, military strength subordinated to diplomacy and used to contain and punish.[11] This ignores the many examples of when Byzantium did prefer military action, as well as its habitual civil wars. But Luttwak's stress on containment is intended as a lesson for contemporary America, and that is behind the longer book

[7] See the detailed review by Anthony Kaldellis, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2010.01.49; for a different approach see the comments of the distinguished scholar of late antiquity Glen Bowersock, *London Review of Books*, 32.3, 11 Feb. 2010, 17–18. See also Luttwak in *Foreign Policy*, 2009, cited by Bowersock (*ibid.*, 18); the concept of an 'operational code' was developed in connection with the Politburo during the cold war period, and depended on the idea of a stable and closed system.

[8] Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century* A.D. *to the Third* (Baltimore, 1976); see for instance Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford, rev. edn, 1992).

[9] *FT Weekend*, 27–9 Nov. 2009.

[10] Henry Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, DC, 1997).

[11] Luttwak, *Virtual American Empire*, 150.

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as well. He further takes an unashamedly synchronic view of Byzantium: 'I recognize that the very different circumstances of subsequent centuries left their marks on Byzantine strategy' – but 'there was enough continuity to define an "operational code" [of warfare], and in thus conflating eight centuries I am reassured by eminent predecessors'.[12] This essentialist approach, seeing Byzantium as an unchanging entity, is exactly one of its problems.

We are currently in an age of agonising about the end of empires. In the literature on late antiquity, which is of course also the early Byzantine period, the fall of the Roman empire has made a comeback as a main topic, as has the role of violence. The concept of holy war in Byzantium is another obvious example of a topic driven by contemporary concerns. Comparisons with contemporary conditions are indeed all the rage, and no less in relation to the history of Byzantium. Cullen Murphy's 2007 book, called in the US *Are We Rome? The End of an Empire and the Fate of America*, is only one in a current genre, of which James O'Donnell's recent book, *The Ruin of the Roman Empire*, is perhaps the most thoughtful and unexpected example.[13] From O'Donnell, a distinguished student of late Latin authors, who has written previously on Augustine, Boethius and Cassiodorus, we have the view from the west: the sixth-century eastern, that is, Byzantine, emperor Justinian is the villain of the piece, with his religious obsession, his unnecessary and destructive wars and his failure to secure Mesopotamia (for which read Iraq), while in contrast Theodoric the Ostrogoth is the unexpected hero and real heir to Roman values. 'Barbarians' here are the true guardians and continuators of Rome, while the Byzantine emperor based in Constantinople is an invader and occupier. Put another way, Rome (that is, America) has declined and fallen, and the east is trying to assert itself. This is Rome's story; Byzantium does not fit.

There does seem to be a problem about where Byzantium is placed in the broad spectrum of historical thinking. One problem lies with the boundary between the classical past and the Byzantine world, the former, that is the classical world, usually being preferred, and certainly having a generally higher status in western scholarship. As Edward Luttwak observes, Byzantium has not only been neglected by western European scholars brought up on the classical tradition; it has been denigrated.[14] The very term 'Byzantine' was originally (and still is) pejorative. After all, during nearly all their long history the Byzantines called themselves

[12] Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 418.

[13] Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome? The End of an Empire and the Fate of America* (Boston, MA, 2007); cf. *idem*, *The New Rome: The End of an Empire and the Fate of America* (Thriplow, 2007); cf. also Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Fall of the West: The Slow Death of the Roman Superpower* (2009); James J. O'Donnell, *The Ruin of the Roman Empire* (2009).

[14] Luttwak, *Virtual American Empire*, 154.

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Romans. This was so even though a high-level form of Greek remained their language of culture, government and religion throughout; only latterly did Byzantine writers begin to recognise their Greek past under the term 'Hellene'.[15] So why do we call them Byzantines, if not to deny their own claims? As an undergraduate studying classics I was taught to despise the 'Byzantine' scholars who made bold conjectures in classical texts, instead of appreciating the revival of editorial and textual scholarship in later Byzantium.[16] In traditional scholarship on Byzantium, the reception of the classical tradition has always been a privileged theme, as though Byzantium had nothing of its own and only preserved the classical past. *Mimesis*, or imitation, a term applied to the Byzantine appropriation of classical literary language, style, motifs and genres, has been a key theme in secondary literature,[17] and scholars of Byzantine literature have only recently begun to work towards an evaluation not based on the assumption of inferior imitation of the classical past.[18] That attitude is still with us, and Byzantinists still struggle with it. The deeper question of how Byzantines viewed their own past does not permit of a simple answer, given the changes in Byzantine culture over the long history of Byzantium, and clearly Byzantines themselves approached the issue in different ways; this too is a subject which has often been impeded by modern negative assumptions.[19]

Now that the later Roman empire has been re-invented as 'late antiquity', Byzantinists also struggle with encroachment into their subject by the far more numerous band of late antique specialists, many of whom now carry their subject well into the Islamic period and as late in time as the eighth century or even later.[20] Some Byzantinists have reacted by

[15] See Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007); Claudia Rapp, 'Hellenic Identity, *Romanitas* and Christianity in Byzantium', in *Hellenism, Culture and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia (Aldershot, 2008), 127–47; Gillian Page, *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity before the Ottomans* (Cambridge, 2008). The Greek term 'Hellene' referred to pagans in most Byzantine literature and was only gradually used for 'Greek', mainly from the eleventh century AD onwards.

[16] For the Byzantine approach see Michael Jeffreys, 'Textual Criticism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Jeffreys, 86–94, who points out that the standard manuals of textual criticism are designed for and written by classicists.

[17] See on this H. Hunger, 'On the Imitation (Mimesis) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 23–4 (1969–70), 17–38; Margaret Mullett and Roger Scott, eds., *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham, 1981).

[18] See P. Agapitos, 'Literary Criticism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Jeffreys, 77–85.

[19] See Anthony Kaldellis, 'Historicism in Byzantine Thought and Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 61 (2007), 1–24.

[20] See G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999). The first issue of the new *Journal of Late Antiquity* in 2008 carried three papers discussing this periodisation from the point of view of late

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making 'Byzantium' begin only in the seventh century with the aftermath of the Arab conquest.[21] But with a huge outpouring of handbooks, companions and histories of both late antiquity and Byzantium also appearing, there is in effect a culture war going on between Byzantinists and the much more numerous students of late antiquity over claims to these early centuries. This is further complicated by the fact that in some national or academic traditions, for instance among Israeli archaeologists, the term 'Byzantine' is simply the standard usage for the period from Constantine to the Arab conquest.[22]

Two other themes in current scholarship also both raise problems for the historiography of Byzantium. The first is the question of Byzantium and the Mediterranean, or of 'Mediterraneanism', as it has been termed. The other is the question of how Byzantium might fit into the much broader conception of Eurasian history, and the east/west axis which sets Europe on the one side and (typically) Asia, or specifically China, on the other. From an even broader perspective, how might Byzantium fit into a conception of 'global history', or 'the global Middle Ages'?

I will start with the second, the Eurasian model, according to which Byzantium, and indeed Rome, should be seen in the context of the whole of Eurasia, not just of Europe and the Mediterranean. This is of course a reaction against what has been seen by Jack Goody and many others as an excessive Eurocentrism.[23] On the other hand, a growing concentration on the history of Europe, in the sense of western Europe, also poses problems about the inclusion of Byzantium.

As we will see, comparative history is integral to the project of presenting Rome and Byzantium within a Eurasian perspective, but it is also integral in Christopher Wickham's important book, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.[24] Its sub-title invites us to think about Europe and

antiquity (not Byzantium). Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, covers the period AD 150–750 and has as its sub-title *From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*.

[21] See Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (1996); Jonathan Shepard, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492* (Cambridge, 2008) begins *c.* 500; for discussion of this choice of date see *ibid.*, 21–6.

[22] French scholarship is also readier to make Byzantium start with Constantine, and the majority of publications on Byzantine art in English also start there: see Cameron, *The Byzantines*, ch. 1; the first volume of *Le monde byzantin*, ed. Cécile Morrisson (Paris, 2004), is entitled *L'Empire romain d'Orient 330–641*, that is, from the dedication of Constantinople to the end of the reign of Heraclius.

[23] See e.g. *The Theft of History* (Cambridge, 2006); *The Eurasian Miracle* (Cambridge, 2010); *Renaissances – The One or the Many?* (Cambridge, 2010); see also J. M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge, 2004), and for the current valency of 'Eurasia': also J. P. Arnason and B. Wittrock, eds., *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries: Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances* (Leiden, 2004).

[24] Christopher Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford, 2006).

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the Mediterranean in the fifth to eighth centuries, rather than Eurasia, and it was followed by another large book, in the Penguin History of Europe series, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*.[25] *Framing the Early Middle Ages* is highly unusual in bringing an explicitly comparative approach to the period and dealing with both east and west, Byzantium and western Europe. It explicitly refuses to tell a story or provide a narrative. Most of the book is specific and comparativist, but the conclusion tentatively identifies seven tendencies or 'trends' which Wickham finds happening across both western Europe and the Byzantine world and which 'together mark the distinctiveness of the period 400–800'.[26] These trends or tendencies are: (1) a simplification of fiscal structures; (2) a period of relative aristocratic weakness; (3) greater peasant autonomy; (4) a shift among the aristocracy from birth to military identity; (5) greater regional diversity; (6) social fluidity; and finally (7) the end of Roman imperial unity, in the west in the fifth century, in the east in the seventh.

The breadth of coverage and the inclusion of Byzantium in such a way in the history of Europe is, as I have said, highly unusual. Nevertheless one reviewer[27] took Wickham to task for being too narrow, for writing, in fact, about a 'Roman Mediterranean system', or MWS ('Mediterranean World System') which, he believed, was already being reconfigured before the end of Wickham's chosen period, in 'a great geo-political shift', while the MWS itself entered a period of fragmentation. In fact *Framing the Early Middle Ages* is a remarkable feat of comparative history. One could reasonably say that it rests on the conception of an east and west linked in certain ways by trade, economic exchange and social ties, even if those ties were weakening towards the end of the period covered. The 'east' here is the world of the early Byzantine empire, and indeed that world shrank very dramatically in the seventh century with the loss of its eastern provinces and part of Anatolia to the Arabs – following on from an occupation of most of the same area by the Persians and a hard-fought even if ultimately successful war against them.[28] Other historians, including some historians of late antiquity, already think in terms of a separated western Europe, and vigorously reemphasise the traditional

[25] *Idem*, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (2009). The first volume in the same series, with a telling title, is by Simon Price and Peter Thonemann, *The Birth of Classical Europe: A History from Troy to Augustine* (2009), and ends in AD 425; what does this imply for Byzantium?

[26] Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 827–31.

[27] Brent D. Shaw, 'After Rome: Transformations of the Early Mediterranean World', *New Left Review*, 51 (May/June 2008), 89–114, cf. 112.

[28] For the latter see James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Histories and Historians of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford, 2010), with a robust defence of the reliability of the Arabic sources.

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'fall' of the western empire in the fifth century.[29] This is a return to western European history without Byzantium, and stands in sharp contrast to the inclusiveness of Wickham.

One can point to many other western medieval histories, or books on the origins of Europe, which have dealt with the west more or less to the exclusion of Byzantium, so much so indeed that this has in the past been the default situation. The late Evelyne Patlagean, a Byzantinist whose work was marked by its unusual breadth and the connections it made between Byzantium and the west, pointed in an article of 2005 to a famous saying of the great medievalist Georges Duby, according to which 'Il n'y a pas de Moyen Âge byzantin',[30] that is, Byzantium had nothing to do with the western Middle Ages – it was simply itself, and, perhaps, it is implied, fossilised. More recently, I would contend, a renewed focus on 'Europe' has intensified the trend,[31] and it is interesting to note that Niall Ferguson's book *Colossus*, on the decline of the American empire, actually has a chapter called 'Europe between Brussels and Byzantium'.[32] Against this, Patlagean argued powerfully against Duby in her controversial last book that Byzantium was not to be separated from the 'medieval west', but on the contrary to be seen as integrally connected with it.[33] How far these issues are politically sensitive can be seen from the reserve with which this book was received in France, as well as from the fact that when I myself argued in a Greek monthly for the integration of Byzantium into discussions of the development of Europe, the paper immediately elicited a range of responses from other scholars, mainly Greek, published in subsequent issues.[34]

The now notorious Samuel Huntington also had a view: Byzantium (and 'modern Slavic states') represented a third, middle ground between west and the far east – 'Orthodox civilisation'. The characteristics of this so-called 'Orthodox civilisation' are, according to Huntington, the *absence* of the following defining 'western' characteristics: the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and overseas colonialism rather than contiguous expansion. The west – in contrast to 'modern Slavic states' is,

[29] See Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians* (Oxford, 2009); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2005); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005).

[30] Evelyne Patlagean, 'Byzance dans le millenaire médiéval', *Annales HSS*, 60.4 (2005), 721–9, at 723.

[31] See Averil Cameron, 'The Absence of Byzantium', *Nea Hestia* (Jan. 2008), 4–59, at 42–3.

[32] Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (2004).

[33] Evelyne Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec* (Paris, 2007); the interpretation of changes in Byzantium in the eleventh century is crucial, and has undergone major revision in the last decades; current excavations at Sagalassos and Euchaita (Avkat) in Anatolia focusing on the relation of urban sites and their hinterlands are providing more relevant information.

[34] Cf. Cameron, 'The Absence of Byzantium'.

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according to him, characterised by the infusion of classical culture through Rome rather than mediated by the Byzantine empire.[35] Thus Byzantium seems to be characterised by negatives – the absence of 'western' characteristics like Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. In this scenario, the 'Orthodox civilisation' of Byzantium and its successors was centred on Russia and the Balkans. There are all too obvious contemporary issues about defining a 'culture' or a 'civilisation' by reference to a single religious label, and the analogy with similar characterisations of Islam is obvious[36] – except of course that Orthodoxy has always featured as such a defining characteristic of Byzantium. It is interesting to find that the Eurasianist or neo-Eurasianist agenda means something different in post-Soviet Russia than as used by the scholars referred to here, and that some Russian writers are also laying great stress on religion (i.e. Orthodoxy) as the foundation of civilisations.[37] In relation to Byzantium, one of the most urgent desiderata is surely an analysis of Byzantine society which applies some modern theoretical understanding of religion. This stands in sharp contrast to the huge amount of current writing about religion in the Roman empire, and especially late antiquity, where it is now very well realised that the religious situation was far more complex and contradictory than how it has so often seemed, and that it requires and repays a highly sophisticated analysis in terms of the history of religion.[38]

With these preliminaries, we can return to the tendency to recast the Roman empire and by extension Byzantium within a Eurasian framework. This thinking has shown itself in variety of places. It also appeared in Brent Shaw's review of Wickham's *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, already mentioned. Jack Goody's books on the subject can certainly be criticised in relation to their presentation of ancient history, not least

[35] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York, 1996); see Cameron, 'The Absence of Byzantium', 32. J. P. Arnason, 'Parallels and Divergences: Perspectives on the Early Second Millennium', in *Eurasian Transformations*, ed. Arnason and Wittrock, 13–40, writes of the 'Byzantine/Orthodox sphere' (21), and allows for a partial corrective of earlier negative views (30), while still stressing eventual failure (30–2).

[36] See for instance Jack Goody, *Islam in Europe* (Cambridge, 2004); Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, 3rd edn (2009).

[37] See Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Eng. trans. (Washington, DC, 2008), 100–1, on Aleksandr S. Panarin's concept of Orthodox civilisation; unlike Eurasianists or neo-Eurasianists who looked towards the east and Russia's Turkic Muslim heritage, Panarin focused on Christianity, even though not emphasising Kievan Rus with its strong Byzantine connection.

[38] See meanwhile Averil Cameron, 'Byzantium and the Limits of Orthodoxy', Raleigh Lecture in History, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 154 (2008), 139–52; see also *eadem*, 'Enforcing Orthodoxy in Byzantium', in *Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, Studies in Church History 43 (Woodbridge, 2007), 1–24.

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for relying on an outmoded, or at least not up-to-date, model. But the point is the prevalence of this kind of argument, and its evident attraction for Roman and medieval historians. The debate is partly about teleology, and specifically the desirability of avoiding the western European (and in a different sense also Marxist) notion of linear progress. In the view of Brent Shaw, the kind of material assembled through comparative history (eschewing narrative and chronology) demonstrates 'that the dominant Austro-German model of historical evolution is so fundamentally flawed and misleading that it must surely be abandoned'.[39] He goes on to argue that this teleology, which is not only Marxist but also embedded in a deeply rooted western historiographical and intellectual tradition, which envisages classical antiquity leading to the Middle Ages and then leading to modernity, must be replaced by considering 'what was actually happening', and 'what specific forces were involved in the transmutations of global systems'.[40] Wickham too is much exercised to avoid teleology – hence the 'trends' gently summarised at the end of his book – but the chronological frame of *Framing the Early Middle Ages* comes to an end before the crucial developments in the eleventh- and twelfth-century west. The question here is whether Byzantium can be accommodated to either of the two models I have discussed, namely the western European model or the Eurasian one. There are difficulties with both. In the case of Europe, Evelyne Patlagean has attempted to rescue the medieval model of Byzantium by reasserting a type of Byzantine feudalism, very different, it is true, from older models of feudalism in the west, but still of its nature controversial. Other Byzantinists have addressed themselves to questions of economic growth and the rise of towns, and to the intellectual stirrings in Byzantium and its contacts with western intellectuals in the early fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. But the ever-present consciousness of the fall of Constantinople in 1453 (not to mention the sack by the Fourth Crusade in 1204) has laid a dead hand on much modern Byzantine history-writing. If therefore it is difficult, and perhaps misguided, to fit Byzantium into the western European model, the question is whether it would fare any better with the newer Eurasianist approaches.

In fact, it is striking that the 'Eurasianists' focus primarily on China, not Byzantium or the Middle East. However, the comparison between the empires of Rome and China has its own history. It was pursued in the 1970s by Keith Hopkins, and it is a feature of an influential work of the 1980s, Michael Mann's *Sources of Social Power*.[41] It has been taken up more recently by ancient historians, especially through the Stanford Ancient Chinese

[39] Shaw, 'After Rome', 113.

[40] *Ibid.*, 113–14.

[41] Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, I: *A History of Power from the Beginning to* AD *1760* (Cambridge, 1986); Mann's Eurocentric approach has already been noted by others.

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and Mediterranean Empires comparative history project, now with two published books,[42] and with a 2007–8 Mellon–Sawyer seminar based at Stanford.[43] The project is focused on comparative methodology, using largely quantitative and demographic data, particularly in comparing western and eastern Eurasia. As its title implies, one of the volumes has a chapter on Byzantium by John Haldon, which is indeed very welcome. But the question of where Byzantium fits into the overall concept still needs to be asked.

For example, these books deal with comparison between empires, which raises the issue of Byzantium's own status as an empire. For parts of its history it would surely fit the requirement that an empire must have the ability to unify disparate elements; it also maintained, if with great difficulty at certain times, the capacity to raise taxes and support an army.[44] The Stanford project focuses also on state-formation and structures, and while Byzantium can certainly be compared with other examples, its state structures changed substantially over its long history, so that the timespan needs to be carefully defined.[45] It is difficult (though commonly done) to write about Byzantium as if this were not so, and indeed it can hardly claim the status of an empire in its last Palaeologan phase (which may be why Edward Luttwak does not extend his coverage later than 1204). Comparative history also poses special problems of its own. The Stanford project statement tellingly says of its wide Rome-China comparative approach that 'macro-causal analysis obviates the need to provide coherent narratives', and a stated objective of the related seminar was to find key variables between the comparanda, with a demographic emphasis and with plague and large-scale migrations to the fore. A primary interest is indeed on state formation and unification (certainly still a primary concern of the young Chinese graduate students I met when I visited a few years ago). Thus in general the emphasis is on structures, not narrative. But is it really possible to dissolve Byzantium, categorised so often as exotic and exceptional, not least by the visitors to the great exhibitions of recent years, into such a Eurasian model?

[42] Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel, eds., *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: From Assyria to Byzantium* (Stanford, 2009), and Walter Scheidel, ed., *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford, 2009).

[43] Entitled *The First Great Divergence: China and Europe, 500–800 CE*; the Stanford–Princeton Working Papers on the Classics (*PSUWP*), available on the web, include this material, as well as an earlier version of Shaw's review of Wickham.

[44] On the issues of definition see Jack A. Goldstone and John F. Haldon, 'Ancient States, Empires and Exploitation: Problems and Perspectives', in *Dynamics of Ancient Empires*, ed. Morris and Scheidel, 3–29; Thomas J. Barfield, 'The Shadow Empires: Imperial State Formation along the Chinese–Nomad Frontier', in *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. Susan E. Alcock *et al.* (Cambridge, 2001), 10–41, at 28–39.

[45] See also John F. Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (1993).

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It is time to turn my other theme, that of Byzantium and the Mediterranean. What does it mean to place Byzantium in the context of the Mediterranean? And what *period* of Byzantium? As we saw, Byzantium, or the 'Byzantine empire', was subject to dramatic geographical change during its long history. Yet although it was based, with only a short interlude from 1204 to 1261, on Constantinople (not a Mediterranean city), there is a sense in which it inherited the position of the Roman empire as a Mediterranean empire. Justinian tried to reestablish this Mediterranean unity in the sixth century, when the western provinces had already given way to the barbarian kingdoms of the early medieval west. The Byzantine armies easily recovered North Africa from the Vandals, and reimposed taxation, gaining control of a province which had previously supplied Rome with its food supply and was to impress the Arabs with its oil production in the seventh century; despite the defeat of a Byzantine army and exarch by the Arabs in the mid-seventh century and the foundation of an Arab settlement at Kairouan, Constantinople held on to Carthage and may even, as a coin hoard from Rougga may suggest, have put its own resources into North Africa in the second half of the seventh century. However, the cost of the arrangements needed for the imposition of Byzantine rule in both Africa and Italy was very high. The reconquest of Italy was more difficult, and only small parts of Italy and Spain were regained; Italy after the Byzantine 'reconquest' was reduced to a far poorer state.[46] It was not simply the Arab conquests that rendered the dream of restored Mediterranean unity impossible. There were also threats from the north and west: Avars, Slavs and Bulgars threatened Constantinople and Thessaloniki as well as Greece and the Balkans in the late sixth and seventh centuries. The Persians occupied Anatolia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt in the early seventh century and the success of the Emperor Heraclius in his desperate campaign against them was followed immediately by the Arab conquests, resulting in a catastrophic loss of territory in the east. The grain imports across the Mediterranean from Egypt, on which Constantinople depended for its food supply, stopped when Egypt came under Persian rule, and with the Arab conquests there was undoubtedly a falling off of the long-distance trade and exchange that had been the basis of the prosperity of the eastern Mediterranean provinces. The Mediterranean was no longer safe; with the sharp reduction of territory, damage to the water supply as a result of the great siege of Constantinople in 626, and loss of the grain from Egypt, the population of the capital dropped drastically, and Constantinople

[46] In 1981, Christopher Wickham wrote: 'The holocaust in Italy came in the great age of wars, 535–93: the shifts of balance under the German rulers, first Odoacer (476–93) and then the Ostrogothic kings (490–553) were trivial by contrast' (*Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400–1000* (1981), 15).

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reinvented itself by looking in a different direction, relying for its food supply on its own hinterland in Thrace and western Asia Minor,[47] while militarily and diplomatically it turned to the Balkans and the north.

In the next centuries, the Mediterranean was a dangerous place, frequented by pirates and Arab raiders. For all that, travel and trade did not stop; but tenth-century Byzantium looked for its boasted 'family of nations' to the Balkans, the Slavic world and the north, not across what David Abulafia has called 'the Classic Mediterranean'.[48] That changed with changes in the Arab world and the fragmentation that followed the end of the Abbasids. Byzantium had recovered eastern territory meanwhile, but by the eleventh century the stakes were different. Various western players impinged on Byzantium – Crusaders, traders, ambitious new city-states – and were usually greeted with ambivalence. Byzantium became home to Italian merchants from Venice, Genoa and Pisa, but in a fit of xenophobia the people of Constantinople turned on the Latins in the late twelfth century and the city, now a staging post on the way to the east, fell victim in a catastrophic manner in 1204 to the Fourth Crusade.[49] Palaeologan Byzantium was tiny and localised, certainly not Mediterranean, and squeezed between the Ottoman threat and the contemptuous west whose aid it desperately needed.

We need to be clear what we mean by 'Mediterranean'. Abulafia writes of 'sub-Mediterraneans', and 'multiple Mediterraneans'.[50] The first term, positing the existence of sub-Mediterraneans of the 'Classic Mediterranean', denotes for example the Adriatic and the Aegean; the latter, 'multiple Mediterraneans', something quite different – other seas edged by land, literally, seas 'between the lands'. Thus the North Sea and the Baltic, the 'northern Mediterranean', even the Atlantic;[51] but this is not much to do with Byzantium. In this global set of 'Mediterranean' seas, Byzantium fades from view. Nor indeed for much of its history does it have much purchase with the 'Classic Mediterranean' with which we are more familiar.

In this 'Mediterranean' way of thinking, focusing on the sea itself rather than the societies around it, the level of trans-Mediterranean trade and travel has been a fundamental marker since Henri Pirenne;

[47] See J. Durliat, 'L'approvisionnement de Constantinople, in *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron, with the assistance of Geoffrey Greatrex (Aldershot, 1995), 19–33.

[48] See especially David Abulafia, ed., *The Mediterranean in History* (2003).

[49] On which see Angeliki E. Laiou, ed., *Urbs Capta. The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences* (Paris, 2005).

[50] David Abulafia, 'Mediterraneans', in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. W. V. Harris (Oxford, 2005), 64–93.

[51] *Ibid.*, 76–80; cf. R. S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950–1350* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971).

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Pirenne placed the end of the ancient world, and thus of the unified Mediterranean, at the time of the Arab conquests – the end of late Roman long-distance trading systems – in his famous words, 'without Mahomed, no Charlemagne'.[52] Long-distance exchange, that is, trade and exchange across the Mediterranean, above all in grain, wine and olive oil, is still what preoccupies historians of late antiquity, though with many proponents of the 'long late antiquity' seeing Mediterranean unity as lasting for longer and the rise of Islam as less of a break than in Pirenne's model. But from the later seventh and eighth centuries, if not before, long-distance trade and exchange on the previous scale fell away,[53] and Byzantium was largely out of long-distance exchange for several centuries. The importance of this exchange across the Mediterranean in late antiquity is a key theme in Wickham's book, and has been so for the last generation of scholars of late antiquity, following the mass of evidence gathered by archaeologists since the 1970s, when Andrea Carandini and his school of Italian archaeologists were trailblazers.[54] While the extent and nature of this long-distance exchange is still much debated, and Horden and Purcell have made a case for continuing small-scale traffic at all periods, it was nevertheless fundamental to the prosperity of the east in late antiquity.[55] In a later period, while Shlomo Goitein's great work based on the documentary record of Jewish traders preserved in the Cairo Geniza reveals a connectedness in which Constantinople made a temporary reappearance,[56] this was not the kind of long-distance trade or exchange familiar from the late Roman world; the commodities changed, and the documents show that its geographical range was different too,

[52] Henri Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (Paris, 1937); see the review by Peter Brown, '*Mohammed and Charlemagne* by Henri Pirenne', in *idem*, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), 63–79. As Brown points out, though the book appeared only in 1937, Pirenne had expressed his ideas from as early as 1922.

[53] So also Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce* AD *300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), and see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000), 169–72, 365–76, with 153–60 (an 'early medieval depression'); Brent D. Shaw, 'Challenging Braudel: A New Vision of the Mediterranean', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, XIV (2001), 419–53.

[54] Cf. the memorable review by Christopher Wickham, 'Marx, Sherlock Holmes and Late Roman Commerce', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 78 (1988), 183–93.

[55] See Bryan Ward-Perkins, 'Specialisation, Trade and Prosperity. An Overview of the Economy of the Late Antique Eastern Mediterranean', in *Economy and Exchange in the Eastern Mediterranean during Late Antiquity*, ed. Sean Kingsley and Michael Decker (Oxford, 2001), 167–78; against excessive emphasis on 'shipping lanes', Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 153–60. See the other papers in Kingsley and Decker, eds., *Economy and Exchange*, for trade and exchange as factors in the prosperity of the eastern Mediterranean in late antiquity, and cf. also Sean A. Kingsley, ed., *Shipwreck Archaeology of the Holy Land: Processes and Parameters* (2004), and Marlia Mundell Mango, ed., *Byzantine Trade, 4th–12th Centuries* (Farnham, 2009).

[56] S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (6 vols., Berkeley, 1967–93).

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focused on a now Islamic Mediterranean. The entry of the Italian trading cities and the concessions they were granted in Constantinople changed the picture even more.[57]

In any case, there are, as is clear, problems with the 'Mediterranean' concept. Is it about the sea and the connections across it; or is it about the people and societies who lived around it? It is certainly fashionable: an article of 2005 counted up the extraordinary number of new journals and serials appearing especially since the 1980s which have Mediterranean in their title, and commented on the looseness with which the term is used.[58] That does not apply to the most important recent book on the subject, *The Corrupting Sea*, by Peregrine Hordern and Nicholas Purcell (2000), which eschews *histoire événementielle* for ecology, continuity and 'connectedness' on a small scale, and speaks of a 'Mediterranean society' based on enduring anthropological models of honour and shame. But again, while much discussion has taken place among Greek and Roman historians on the latter concept,[59] it does not seem to help much with Byzantium. The anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has indeed pointed out problems with this kind of analysis but also seen the 'Mediterranean' emphasis as a kind of 'Mediterraneanism'.[60] The concept of honour has been applied to the governing structures of the Roman empire,[61] but those structures were modified greatly under Diocletian and Constantine and the late Roman administrative system which then emerged did not survive the pressures of the seventh century. The question for Byzantium must be how far the anthropological concepts of honour and shame perceived in Greek

[57] See the survey by Angeliki E. Laiou, 'Exchange and Trade, Seventh–Twelfth Centuries', in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (3 vols., Washington, DC, 2002), II, 697–768; M. Balard, 'A Christian Mediterranean', in *The Mediterranean in History*, ed. Abulafia, 183–213. For Byzantium and the concept of a Mediterranean agrarian economy see P. Toubert, 'Byzantium and the Mediterranean Agrarian Economy', in *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. Laiou, I, 377–91 (with a section on 'Byzantine Specificities', 387–91).

[58] Susan E. Alcock, 'Alphabet Soup in the Mediterranean Basin: The Emergence of the Mediterranean Serial', in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. Harris, 314–36.

[59] Honour and shame: Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 487–523; J. K. Campbell, *Honour, Shame and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (Oxford, 1964); J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Mediterranean Family Structures* (Cambridge, 1976); J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (1965); D. D. Gilmore, ed., *Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, DC, 1987); cf. Seth Schwarz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton, 2010). See also V. Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia, 2008).

[60] M. Herzfeld, 'Practical Mediterraneanism: Excuses for Everything, from Epistemology to Eating', in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. Harris, 45–63; Herzfeld is noted as an 'anti-Mediterraneanist' by Horden and Purcell (*The Corrupting Sea*, 20, 486; see also M. Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking- Glass: Critical Ethnography on the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge, 1987)).

[61] J. E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford, 1997, 2001).

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mountain society and elsewhere also applied during the long centuries of Christian Byzantium;[62] there are obvious and major issues of continuity not merely with classical Greece but (even more acutely in the case of Byzantium) with modern Greece.[63]

There is indeed a particular problem in seeing Byzantium in the context of the *longue durée*, just because this is a culture which has suffered particularly badly from an excessive stress on continuity. There are also problems enough in seeing modern Mediterranean societies through the spectacles of ancient Greece, or in seeing too readily in the culture of the villages studied by anthropologists a set of ageless 'Mediterranean' values, and Byzantium has commonly been branded with the opposite, with the whole mental apparatus of decline and inferiority with which Greece itself was invested in the Ottoman period.[64] The intense controversy aroused by nineteenth-century assertions of Byzantine continuity in the history of the modern Greek state is well known. Yet Byzantium is evoked routinely in current discussions of modern Greece or Russia; for example a *Guardian* leader about Greece in late October 2010 was headed 'The Byzantine shroud' – the point being apparently that contemporary Greece has as many bureaucrats as Byzantium.

In fact Byzantium was constantly changing, and it especially changed its geographical and geopolitical footprint. If modern Istanbul does not exactly feel like a Mediterranean city, neither did medieval Constantinople, surrounded by water yet having to go to considerable lengths to secure its own water supply,[65] dependent on its Thracian and Macedonian hinterland and with its face set towards the Black Sea, the source of the fish on which it lived for much of its existence,[66] and outlet of the great rivers that provided a passage to the Vikings and connected Byzantium with the Slav lands of the north.

So Byzantium seems not to fit very well with either of these two models for understanding ancient and medieval society, the Eurasian model and

[62] The considered and detailed discussion of the issue in Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, ranges widely both chronologically and geographically, but without dealing with Byzantium, which gets no special treatment in the book.

[63] On this fraught subject see recently John Koliopoulos, 'Modern Greece: An Old Debate', in *Networks of Power in Modern Greece: Essays in Honour of John Campbell*, ed. Mark Mazower (2008), 129–35.

[64] Well brought out by Suzanne Saïd, 'The Mirage of Greek Continuity: On the Uses and Abuses of Analogy in Some Travel Narratives from the Seventeenth to the Eighteenth Century', in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. Harris, 268–93, at 276–9.

[65] See James Crow, Jonathan Bardill and Richard Bayliss, *The Water Supply of Byzantine Constantinople* (2008).

[66] See the brilliant paper by Gilbert Dagron on the arrangements made in the Middle Byzantine period to secure the supply of fish from the Black Sea, 'Poissons, pêcheurs et poissoniers de Constantinople', in *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. Mango and Dagron, 57–76.

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the Mediterranean model. It is not very easy to think with Byzantium when applying them.

It is not very easy to think with Byzantium either when in so many countries of the Balkans and eastern Europe the standard textbook is still George Ostrogorsky's *History of the Byzantine State*, originally published in 1940 by a Russian émigré who was a student in Germany and had moved to Belgrade in 1933, where he spent the rest of his career.[67] The book has a Slavist agenda and asserts Byzantine feudalism; despite numerous revised editions, it is obviously very out of date now and it does not of course reflect any of the archaeological and epigraphic work that is currently so immensely important. But it is still in every central European and Balkan bookshop, and it is hard to point to a comprehensive replacement.[68] The volume devoted to Byzantium in the first edition of the Cambridge Medieval History appeared only a decade after the English translation of Ostrogorsky's history, and was edited by its translator, the English Byzantinist Joan Hussey.[69] We now have substantial chapters devoted to Byzantium in the new edition (though not a dedicated volume as such), and a history of the Byzantine empire which draws on those chapters.[70] But we still have alive and well in many popular books and in the popular imagination the Byzantium of intrigue, exoticism and weakness.

You have to think *about* Byzantium before you can think *with* Byzantium. Some basic points need to be emphasized. First, change, a theme I have already stressed – the sheer amount of change that happened during the long period we call 'Byzantine'. It does not make sense to talk about Byzantium without specifying which part of this long period we mean – the early part, up to about the seventh century, when at first the eastern empire was just that, part of the whole Roman empire, and then after the 'fall of the western empire' in the fifth century, still had much of the organisation and administration of the later Roman empire; or the obscure time after the Arab conquests when Constantinople lost so much of its territory (and thus its taxpayers and its centres of education) and the city itself shrank to perhaps only a quarter or even less of its former

[67] G. Ostrogorski, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates* (Munich, 1940); Eng. trans. by Joan Hussey, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford, 1956); on Ostrogorsky see also Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, 49–51.

[68] Though see Warren T. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997); Timothy E. Gregory, *A History of Byzantium* (Malden, MA, 2005).

[69] J. M. Hussey, with the editorial assistance of D. M. Nicol and G. Cowan, *The Cambridge Medieval History*, IV: *The Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, 1966–7); here the starting point is AD 717.

[70] Shepard, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, including sixteen out of twenty-four chapters from various volumes of the *New Cambridge Medieval History* (as explained at ch. 10, n. 24). See also Michael Angold, ed., *Cambridge History of Christianity*, V: *Eastern Christianity* (Cambridge, 2006).

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size, with large parts deserted; or the revival that started in the ninth century and reached a peak, at least in its own publicity, in the tenth, when territory was regained in the east and Constantine Porphyrogenitus claimed Byzantium as heading a family of nations; or the eleventh century, which now seems a time of growth, not the decline and crisis of earlier narratives; or Byzantium in the time of the Crusades, culminating in the shock of the sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade 1204 and the fragmentation that followed; or finally the Paleologan period, after the Byzantine recovery of Constantinople in 1261, when the state had drastically shrunk, and the emperor became a vassal of the Ottomans, yet which also produced some of the best Byzantine art, notable buildings and intellectuals in the whole Byzantine period. The geographical changes in the extent of the empire were as dramatic as the economic and social ones.

I would also want to emphasise the question of identity – who were 'the Byzantines'? The term is wide. It is certainly not an ethnic term; it means only the inhabitants of the state, or empire, who might come from all kinds of different backgrounds or indeed different regions, bearing in mind the territorial changes. In some areas 'Byzantines' found themselves coming under Muslim rule, and vice versa. Populations were also transplanted from one part of the empire to another.[71] These are phenomena that have been as yet very little studied, but which have obvious resonances nowadays. Finally, civil war and usurpation were regular features of Byzantine life, and at almost every period, Byzantium was at war with itself.

One of the usually cited hallmarks of Byzantine culture is the life of the court, and its ceremonial, but these changed too. The emperors built on to the Great Palace, and later moved away from it altogether; new ceremonies were invented as well. Western travellers marvelled at the ceremonies of Palaeologan Constantinople, but these were not the same as they would have experienced earlier – new ones came into being. The aristocracy of the Comnenian period was also not the same as that of the tenth century, with its elaborate system of state-paid offices, and that of Palaeologan Byzantium was different again.

Finally, that other hallmark of Byzantium, its Orthodoxy. It is almost impossible to look at Byzantium without reading back the characteristics of Orthodoxy in the modern world. It is equally hard to think of any theme more likely to produce an essentialist response than that of Byzantium as an Orthodox society. After all, for much – though not all – of its history

[71] See M. Balard and A. Ducellier, eds., *Migrations et diasporas méditerranéennes (Xe–XVIe siècles)* (Paris, 2002); multi-ethnicity in the Byzantine empire: H. Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou, eds., *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC, 1998); for the period after 1204 see e.g. Benjamin Arbel, Bernard Hamilton and David Jacoby, eds., *Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204* (1989).

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it was indeed a Christian medieval society. It also famously exported Orthodox Christianity to the Slavs, and, especially crucially, to Russia, and bequeathed it – not without contention and fierce argument – to modern Greece. Even if the Byzantine 'missions' to the Slavs were not quite the official state initiatives they have usually been thought to be,[72] we are still living with that situation today. The Byzantine church also found a way to continue the Orthodox presence – even if in a very different form – during the Ottoman period, and today's situation with the ecumenical patriarchate in Istanbul, poised in an uneasy equilibrium with the Turkish state, is a reminder of that.

Byzantium does not fit easily into this diachronic Orthodox model either. It is not so easy to say when it became 'Orthodox', in the generally accepted sense. The emperor was never the head of the church, and often quarrelled with or was openly challenged by the patriarch. The year of the 'Great Schism' of 1054 was not the event it is often made out to be, and many later Byzantines were prepared to agree to union with Rome. Internal religious argument did not cease with the end of iconoclasm in 843, though that was represented as the 'Triumph of Orthodoxy'; and a vast amount of effort had to be expended at every period on the attempt to say what Orthodoxy was and to beat off rival formulations.[73] A variety of vested interests all laid claim to be 'orthodox'. In the face of this deluge of contemporary polemical and apologetic writing, it is becoming common to say that that was the preserve of only a few, and a concentration among some historians is now on the diversity of Byzantine religious practice, rather than the politics of doctrinal dispute;[74] in a parallel move, designed to avoid falling into the trap of appealing to Byzantine spirituality, religious practice is often presented as if it were reducible to the study of material culture. These developments alone underline what is surely true, namely that the subject of Byzantine religion desperately needs more theoretical and sociological analysis than it has had to date.

Why should anyone want to 'think with Byzantium'? I hope to have shown that thinking *without* Byzantium is a dangerous procedure; for all the awkwardness that might be involved in including Byzantium, not to include it leaves a gap that matters. But to think *with* Byzantium will be even more difficult than it is already if Byzantium itself is not normalised and brought fully within mainstream history.

[72] Cf. C. Raffensperger, 'Revisiting the Idea of the Byzantine Commonwealth', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 28 (2004), 159–74; S. Ivanov and V. Vavrínek, in Elizabeth Jeffreys, ed., *21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, II: *Abstracts of Panel Papers* (Aldershot, 2006), 32–3, 34–5.

[73] See Cameron, 'Enforcing Orthodoxy in Byzantium'.

[74] So for instance Derek Krueger, ed., *A People's History of Christianity*, III: *Byzantine Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN, 2006).

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