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COMMENT

Edwin Freshfield and Byzantine Ephesos: Railway, Faith and Archaeology

Jessica Varsallona

University of Edinburgh, UK
Email: jessica.varsallona@ed.ac.uk

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Abstract

The British solicitor Edwin Freshfield was a wealthy collector with a passion for Byzantine antiquities. Among the Byzantine capitals that he acquired from the 1870s onwards are three originally from the church of St John in Ephesos. By examining the means by which these objects were acquired, this article sheds light on Freshfield's interest in Asia Minor. Unpublished archival material suggests his pioneering role in the archaeological rediscovery of the church of St John, which scholarship on Late Antiquity and Byzantium has so far entirely forgotten. In the context of the British interest in the eastern Mediterranean, Freshfield's activity illustrates how economic and collecting impulses were not exclusive motives. His collection mirrors his religious identity and his desire to connect the Anglican Church to the origins of the Christian faith, through the 'preservation' of the Byzantine past.

Keywords: Ephesos; Edwin Freshfield; Ottoman Railway Company; Byzantium; archaeology

Although he is famous for those acquainted with Byzantine heritage, Edwin Freshfield (1832–1918) was not an archaeologist but, rather, a solicitor with antiquarian interests – particularly in Byzantium. As we shall see, he had the economic means, the right connections and specific reasons to cultivate these interests. Leaving aside his activity as a solicitor for his family firm,[1] among experts in Byzantine Studies Freshfield's name is most commonly associated with an album of drawings dated to 1574 containing representations of some monuments of Constantinople, which he purchased in the 1870s or 1880s, and which his son (Edwin Hanson Freshfield) later donated to Trinity College, Cambridge.[2] In turn, Freshfield's son

[1] J. Slinn, *A History of Freshfields* (1984), 129–33.

[2] E. H. Freshfield, 'Some Sketches Made in Constantinople in 1574', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 30 (1929), 519–22. On the album, see N. Westbrook, 'The Freshfield Folio View of the Hippodrome in Istanbul and the Church of St. John Diippion', in *Basileia: Essays on Imperium and Culture. In Honour of E. M. Jeffreys and M. J. Jeffreys*, ed. G. Nathan and L. Garland (Leiden, 2011), 231–62.

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is very well known among Byzantinists for his translation of *The Book of the Eparch*.[3]

The elder Freshfield published several short articles on Byzantine topics, such as monuments in Turkey and Italy.[4] His interest in Byzantine religious buildings was part of a broader passion for Church history in general, which included medieval Britain, London in particular.[5] Freshfield's membership in learned societies such as the Cambridge Camden Society (from 1845, the Ecclesiological Society), the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Society of Biblical Archaeology demonstrates his ongoing intellectual commitment.

Freshfield was also a church patron. In 1891, with Sir Henry Cosmo Bonsor (1848–1929), he commissioned the architect Sidney Barnsley (1865–1926) to construct the church of the Wisdom of God in Lower Kingswood (Surrey) in a neo-Byzantine style.[6] After the death of his wife, Zoe Charlotte Hanson, in 1902, he donated his collection of Byzantine capitals, which were initially intended for the garden of their house, to the church. Three pieces from this collection are the focus of the present

[3]*Roman Law in the Later Roman Empire: Byzantine Guilds, Professional and Commercial; Ordinances of Leo VI, c. 895 from the Book of the Eparch,* trans. E. H. Freshfield (Cambridge, 1938).

[4]E. Freshfield, 'On Byzantine Churches and the Modifications Made in Their Arrangements Owing to the Necessities of the Greek Ritual', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, 44 (1874) 383–92; E. Freshfield, 'On the Byzantine Origin of the Church of St. Vitalis in Ravenna, with Remarks on Other Churches in That City', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, 45 (1880), 417–26; E. Freshfield, 'The Little Mosque of Santa Sophia', *Athenaeum*, 3016 (1885), 217; E. Freshfield, 'The Palace of the Greek Emperors of Nicea at Nymphio', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, 49 (1886), 382–90; E. Freshfield, 'On Certain Churches on the Eastern Coast of Italy', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, 50 (1887), 407–20; E. Freshfield, 'Notes on the Church Now Called the Mosque of the Kalenders at Constantinople', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, 55 (1897), 431–8 and E. Freshfield, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Alderham upon the Subject of a Byzantine Evangelion* (1900).

[5]E. Freshfield, *The Vestry Minute Book of the Parish of St. Margaret Lothbury in the City of London*, 1571–1677 (1877); E. Freshfield, 'On the Parish Books of St. Margaret-Lothbury, St. Christopher-le-Stocks and St. Bartholomew-by-the-Exchange, in the City of London', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* 45.2 (1880–1), 57–123; E. Freshfield, *Accomptes of the Churchwardens of the Parish of St. Christopher's in London* (1885); E. Freshfield, *Minutes of the Vestry Meetings and Other Records of the Parish of St. Christopher le Stocks, in the City of London* (1886); E. Freshfield, 'Some Remarks upon the Book of records and History of the Parish of St Stephen, Coleman Street, in the City of London', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous tracts relating to antiquity* 50 (1887), 17–57; E. Freshfield, 'Masons' Marks at Westminster Hall', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous tracts relating to antiquity*, 50 (1887), 1–4; E. Freshfield, *The Communion Plate of the Parish Churches in the County of London* (1895) and E. Freshfield, *Archaeology in London as a Pastime for a Busy Man': Being a Lecture Delivered at the London Institution on Monday February 17, 1902* (1902).

[6]B. Bullen, *Byzantium Rediscovered* (2003), 165–85; M. Greensted, 'The Arts and Crafts Movement: exchanges between Greece and Britain 1876–1930' (M.Phil. thesis, University of Birmingham 2010), 71–2. Barnsley's direct knowledge of Byzantine models relates to his journeys to Greece funded by the Byzantine Research and Publication Fund at the British School of Athens, for which Freshfield was the president and one of the main sponsors, together with John Crichton-Stuart, Marquess of Bute. A. G. Kakissis, 'The Byzantine Research Fund Archive: Encounters of Arts and Crafts Architects in Byzantium', *British School at Athens Studies*, 17 (2009), 125–44. On the Marquess of Bute, see R. Macrides, '"What I want is to locate my dome": the Byzantinism of the Third Marquess of Bute', in A. G. Kakissis, *Byzantium and British Heritage: Byzantine Influences on the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Abingdon, 2023), 81–109. For a discussion on the reception of Byzantine models in Victorian Britain, see N. Karydis, 'Discovering the Byzantine Art of Building: Lectures at the RIBA, the Royal Academy and the London Architectural Society, 1843–1858', *Architectural History*, 63 (2020), 171–90.

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study. Most of Freshfield's sculptures came from Constantinople, but the circumstances of their journey from the eastern Mediterranean to England are often unclear in existing accounts. Unravelling the dynamics behind their acquisition reveals Freshfield's antiquarian network, his role in the development of Byzantine Studies in the United Kingdom and the significance of Byzantium for a portion of Victorian society.

As part of a broader phenomenon of acquisition of antiquities from the eastern Mediterranean, Freshfield's goals and practices overlapped in many aspects with those of his contemporaries. However, his adherence to the ideals of High Church Anglicanism enhances the 'devotional' meanings of his acquisition of Byzantine carved stones. As Freshfield's writings and work demonstrate, for Anglo-Catholics Byzantium was a source of Christian legitimacy. While much of his collection had its origins in Constantinople,[7] what follows focuses on the significance of the site of Ephesos, on the west coast of Asia Minor. Ephesos was Freshfield's starting point in the acquisition and interpretation of Byzantine materials.

From Ephesos to Surrey

Among the more than twenty sculptural elements at Lower Kingswood, three capitals come from Ephesos. Freshfield described most of his capitals in a catalogue that he published in 1903, after he donated his collection to the Wisdom of God church. His aim was to provide information about the materials' provenance, history and style of ornament.[8] Even though most of the pieces in the catalogue are from Constantinople, Ephesos is emphasised. Indeed, the catalogue begins with the Ephesos capitals. Three of seven pages are devoted to them, and two of the four plates represent the three capitals and illustrate their archaeological context with details not provided for the other objects in the catalogue (Figures 1–2).[9] The first picture in the catalogue is entitled 'The gate of the enclosure of the church of S. John at Ephesus', followed by 'A ruined pendentive from the church of S. John at Ephesus', 'General view of the Ayasalook hill, upon which the ruins of the church of S. John at Ephesus are' and seven pictures of the three capitals.

Such prominent positioning emphasised that the site of Ephesos and the church of St John had particular relevance for Freshfield. The church was renowned in the Byzantine period, as it was the architectural counterpart of the famous church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople and one of the pre-eminent pilgrimage sites in the Christian Mediterranean.[10] However, over the centuries, memory of the church's

[7]F. Vanni and J. Varsallona, 'Seeing Byzantium Through Edwin Freshfield's Eyes: Arts and Crafts, Antiquarianism, and Learned Societies at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 48 (2024), 120–47.

[8]E. Freshfield, *A Memorandum Giving a Short Account of the Byzantine Capitals Placed in the Church of the Wisdom of God* (1903).

[9]*Ibid.*, 1–3, pls. 1–2.

[10]On early Christian and Byzantine Ephesos, see C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine, and Turkish City* (Cambridge, 1979); R. Pillinger, O. Kresten, F. Krinzinger and E. Russo, *Efeso Paleocristiana e Bizantina/ Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos* (Vienna, 1999); A. Pulz, 'Ephesos als christliches Pilgerzentrum', *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie*, 16 (2010), 71–102; F. Daim and S. Ladstätter, *Ephesos in byzantinischer Zeit* (Mainz, 2011). On the church of St John, see H. Hörmann, *Die Johanneskirche* (Vienna,

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Figure 1. Plate 1 of E. Freshfield, *A Memorandum Giving a Short Account of the Byzantine Capitals Placed in the Church of the Wisdom of God* (1903).

1951); P. Verzone, 'S. Giovanni e S. Maria di Efeso e la ricostruzione della città nell'VIII secolo', *Corso di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina*, 12 (1965), 603–12; P. Verzone, 'Le fasi costruttive della basilica di S. Giovanni di Efeso', *Rendiconti. Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, 51/52 (1979/1980), 213–35; M. Büyükkolancı, 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *Istanbul Mitteilungen*, 32 (1982), 236–57; A. Thiel, *Die Johannes Kirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden, 2005); E. Russo, *Sulla cronologia del S. Giovanni e di altri monumenti paleocristiani di Efeso* (Vienna,

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Figure 2. Plate 2 of E. Freshfield, *A Memorandum Giving a Short Account of the Byzantine Capitals Placed in the Church of the Wisdom of God* (1903).

2010); N. Karydis, 'Different Approaches to an Early Byzantine Monument: Procopius and Ibn Battuta on the Church of St John at Ephesos', in *Experiencing Byzantium: Papers from the 44th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Newcastle and Durham*, ed. C. Nesbitt and M. Jackson (Farnham, 2013), 89–110; N. Karydis, 'The Evolution of the Church of St. John at Ephesos during the Early Byzantine Period', *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien*, 84 (2016), 97–112; E. Russo, 'Lo studio del complesso di S.

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location had been lost or confused, only revived thanks to the excavation of 1921–2 during the brief Greek occupation of the coast.[11] This article aims to show why this complex was pivotal for Freshfield even before the beginning of these authorised excavations. Analysing the passages of Freshfield's acquisition of antiquities from Ephesos in the 1870s also helps reconstruct the chronology of the excavation of the area, and it sheds light on the ideological use of Byzantium in the context of nineteenth-century British interest in Asia Minor. I argue that a religious understanding of the Byzantine legacy is key to contextualising the origins and development of Byzantine Studies in the United Kingdom.

The catalogue of Freshfield's Byzantine sculptures records his own artistic and historical interpretations. Concerning the three Ephesos capitals,[12] Freshfield stated that they came from Ayasuluk (now Selçuk), which is the north-eastern area of the ancient site of Ephesos. This is where the famous Temple of Artemis (Diana) – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world – had been located. In this vicinity, on one of the slopes of the Ayasuluk hill, below the Byzantine castle and within the fortress walls, the church of St John was built. According to Freshfield, the first phases of this church were undertaken at the time of the emperors Constantine I (r. 306–37) and Theodosios I (r. 379–92). It was allegedly built on the site of the tomb of St John the Evangelist and was originally a basilica. Subsequent earthquakes damaged the building, Freshfield continued, and Justinian I (r. 527–65) rebuilt it in the shape of a cross surmounted by domes; for this, Freshfield referred to Prokopios of Caesarea and his description of the site in *De aedificiis*.

According to Freshfield, his two larger Corinthian capitals from Ephesos came from the first church, dating to the fourth century, as they are 'fairly classical' (Figures 3–4).[13] Freshfield suggested that they were part of a screen, perhaps located in the narthex or at the east end of the church. Their more precise provenance and its significance are discussed below.

By contrast, Freshfield explained in the catalogue that the third capital from Ephesos (Figure 5) must have come from the Justinianic church, as its decoration recalls that of the capitals of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Justinian's other great church restoration. He was not sure about its original location and suggested it was a stoup, probably related to a water source.

Literature on these three capitals is rather extensive, as they are relatively well known among scholars of Byzantine sculpture and architecture. Kautzsch's influential publication dated the group of Corinthian capitals from Ephesos that includes Freshfield's to the end of the fifth/beginning of the sixth century, thus to a period before Justinian's reconstruction.[14] Loverance repeated the dating to the fifth century

Giovanni e della Cattedrale di S. Maria a Efeso', *Bizantinistica*, 17 (2016), 255–350; and M. Büyükkolancı, *St. John Church and Castle of Ayasuluk* (İstanbul, 2023).

[11]G. A. Sotiriou, 'Ανασκαφαί τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ ναοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου', *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον*, 7 (1924), 89–220. See the identification of the location and publication of photos in G. D. Lampakis, *Οι επτά αστέρες της Αποκαλύψεως* (Athens, 1909), 39–132.

[12]Freshfield, *A Memorandum*, 1–3, pls. 1–2.

[13]*Ibid.*, 2. On one of them there is a mason's mark, a topic that Freshfield had already investigated in a different context, see Freshfield, 'Masons' Marks'.

[14]R. Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien. Beiträge zu einer Geschichte des spätantiken Kapitells in Osten vom vierten bis ins siebente Jahrhundert* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1936), 90–3, pl. 18, n. 266a, is a similar capital, now at the Archaeological Museum of Izmir, from the atrium of St John in Ephesos.

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Figure 3. Church of the Wisdom of God in Lower Kingswood (Surrey), Corinthian capital from Ephesos, south aisle.

for the two large capitals at Lower Kingswood.[15] It is now known that these two capitals come from the atrium of the church of St John, which according to Russo was part of the Justinianic reconstruction.[16] More importantly, these two capitals come from

[15]R. Loverance, '42 – Marble Capital', in *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, ed. D. Buckton (1994), 56.

[16]E. Russo, 'I capitelli del quadriportico di S. Giovanni a Efeso', *Bizantinistica*, 13 (2011), 23–60, 43–6. See also A. Thiel, 'Das Atrium der Johanneskirche in Ephesos', in *100 Jahre Österreichische Forschungen in Ephesos*, ed. H. Friesinger and F. Krinzinger (Vienna, 1999), 485–90.

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Figure 4. Church of the Wisdom of God in Lower Kingswood (Surrey), Corinthian capital from Ephesos, north aisle.

an area of the site that was not uncovered at the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century. As noted above, the official excavation of the church started in the 1920s, but it was terminated and then published by the Austrian team (excavating in Ephesos since 1895) only in 1951.[17] Following Freshfield's preliminary analysis and Kautzsch's classification, Loverance dated the smallest of the three capitals to the sixth century.[18] Slightly later, Dennert proposed the Middle Byzantine period instead.[19] Its former location in the complex of St John is uncertain.

Thus, at the time of Freshfield's catalogue, the site of the church was mostly unexplored. Except for some random material and ruins, massive fragments of vaults were

[17]Sotiriou, 'Ανασκαφαί'; Hörmann, *Die Johanneskirche*.

[18]R. Loverance, '92 – Marble Capital', in *Byzantium*, ed. Buckton, 91.

[19]M. Dennert, *Mittelbyzantinische Kapitelle: Studien zu Typologie und Chronologie* (Bonn, 1997), 107, 206, pl. 40, n. 218b. On the Evolution of Sculpture in Ephesos, see E. Russo, 'La scultura bizantina a Efeso in età paleocristiana e bizantina: Primi lineamenti', in Pillinger et al., *Efeso paleocristiana*, 26–53.

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Figure 5. Church of the Wisdom of God in Lower Kingswood (Surrey), capital from Ephesos (counter facade).

the only traces of the church that remained standing on-site.[20] Freshfield saw these ruins, as is clear from the second picture in the catalogue. He commented on the fallen pendentives of one of the domes and claimed to have picked up mosaic tesserae that once decorated these surfaces.[21] He wrote that 'no doubt excavations would disclose the form of it, and very probably the traditional site of St. John's tomb'.[22] Freshfield's account of Ephesos and its material remains has now been superseded, but his knowledge of the site and its history was both first-hand and detailed for an amateur of his time.

The British and Ephesos

How did Freshfield know Ephesos so well? How did he manage to gain access to the still-unexplored site of the church of St John? His connection with the Smyrna (now Izmir) region was established long before the publication of the catalogue of sculptures. He first travelled there in 1854 and then married Zoe Charlotte Hanson in Smyrna in 1861; Zoe was the daughter of a certain James Frederick Hanson (a representative of the Levant Company in Smyrna), who upon his death left Freshfield properties in Asia Minor that he visited every year.[23]

Moreover, in 1871, among the international clients of Freshfield's legal firm was the Ottoman Railway Company (ORC), also known as Smyrna–Aidin Railway (Izmir

[20]Unfortunately, these massive vaults fragments were partially destroyed during the excavations to facilitate exploration of the site. N. Karydis, 'The Vaults of St. John the Theologian at Ephesos. Visualizing Justinian's Church', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 71 (2012), 524–51.

[21]There is no reason to mistrust him, as demonstrated by the surviving mosaic revetments of one of the collapsed vaults still visible in Karydis, 'The Vaults of St. John', 532, fig. 11.

[22]Freshfield, *A Memorandum*, 2.

[23]Slinn, *A History*, 131–2.

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to Aydın).[24] The ORC line was built by a British company between 1856 and 1935 to facilitate the transportation of goods.[25] It officially promoted economic development while unofficially embodying imperial means of controlling local economies. The links between the ORC and archaeology, particularly at Ephesos, have been widely discussed, as one of the uses of this line was to transport finds from Ephesos to Smyrna, from which the materials were then shipped to England. Therefore, excavations at Ephesos must be seen as a sort of extension of the railway construction project.[26] This was part of the long-established trend of British imperial officials taking on the role of archaeologist.

In Ephesos, the well-studied case of the architect John Turtle Wood is a prominent example of the connection between the railway and archaeology.[27] In 1858, Wood received a commission to design railway stations for the ORC. He then became interested in the ancient city of Ephesos, especially the remains of the Temple of Artemis. Through the British Embassy and the British Museum, he obtained a permit to excavate the site thanks to a small allowance for expenses provided in return for antiquities. From 1863 to 1874, Wood oversaw the excavations. Corporal J. Trotman's photographs of 1872–3 show this link between the railway and the archaeological site explicitly (Figures 6–7).[28]

Wood's excavations were focused on the ancient city. He certainly took into consideration the Christian antiquities, as he was aware of the importance of Ephesos for Christians and its associations with St Paul's preaching (Acts of the Apostles, 19), the alleged tomb of St Luke in the Odeon, the House of the Virgin and the church of St John. He even correctly located the church of St John on the slope of the Ayasuluk hill.[29] However, identifying the Christian remains of the city was not the main goal of his excavation. Wood published two reports on his work, in 1876 and 1890;[30] the Christian finds were briefly discussed in the first volume and expanded upon in the second, where an entire chapter was devoted to the Christian antiquities.

[24]*Ibid.*, but also the website of the still-active firm proudly shows the presence of ORC among its clients (1871): https://zltd.uk/our-history.php (accessed 12 Aug. 2025).

[25]E. Cobb, 'Railway Crossing: Encounters in Ottoman Lands' (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 2018); E. Cobb, 'Mixing Time: Ancient–modern Intersections along the Western Anatolian Railways', in *Producing Non-Simultaneity: Construction Sites as Places of Progressiveness and Continuity*, ed. E. C. Heine and C. Rauhut (New York, 2018), 185–201.

[26]Cobb, 'Railway Crossing', 199.

[27]D. Challis, *From the Harpy Tomb to the Wonders of Ephesus: British Archaeologists in the Ottoman Empire 1840–1880* (2008), 114–39.

[28]Trotman was a sapper sent to Ephesos to work with Wood from 1872 to 1874. D. Harlan, 'J. T. Wood's Ephesus through the lens of Corporal J. Trotman: Archive Images in the BSA SPHS Collection', https://www.bsa.ac.uk/2019/11/04/j-t-woods-ephesus-through-the-lens-corporal-j-trotman-archive-images-in-the-bsa-sphs-collection/ (accessed 12 Aug. 2025).

[29]Concerning St. Paul at Ephesos, in B. P. Pask, *The Apostles of the Gentiles: A Handbook on the Life of St. Paul. With notes, critical and illustrative* (1877), 267–82, Wood wrote a special section on the site of Ephesos.

[30]J. T. Wood, *Discoveries at Ephesus Including the Site and Remains of the Great Temple of Diana* (1876) and J. T. Wood, *Modern Discoveries on the Site of Ancient Ephesus* (1890). The latter was published posthumously in the series By-paths of Bible Knowledge for the Religious Tract Society.

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Figure 6. Ayasuluk from the north, 1872–3 (BSA SPHS 01/1193.3108).



Figure 7. Ayasuluk from the east, 1872–3 (BSA SPHS 01/1194.3109).

Because Wood's excavation was sponsored by the British Museum, Charles Thomas Newton, the curator responsible for the acquisition of classical antiquities, visited the

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site many times.[31] Yet in 1874 the British Museum cut the funds, officially because the findings were not deemed significant enough, but more likely because Ottoman laws regarding antiquities had become more restrictive.[32]

Freshfield was undoubtedly aware of Wood's work in Ephesos, and not only because of his own familiarity with the area. Like Freshfield, Wood was a member of the Society of Antiquaries of London.[33] Wood returned to London on many occasions and shared updates on his work,[34] such as the paper he presented on 5 February 1878 to the Society of Biblical Archaeology ('On the Antiquities of Ephesus having Relation to Christianity, &c').[35] The Ephesos excavation had considerable resonance with the British press and it received official visits from members of the royal family and other notable people. In the 1860s, for example, the sons of Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901) – the future Edward VII (1862) and Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught and Strathearn (1865) – visited the archaeological and ORC working sites.[36] Newspapers like the *Illustrated London News* covered these events, as did *The Times* when the Ottoman sultan Abdulaziz (r. 1861–76) visited Ephesos in 1863.

Wood's excavation ended in 1874, and the location of the church of St John was explicitly suggested in his Society of Biblical Archaeology lecture of 1878.[37] Feeling confident about his knowledge of the site and possessing relationships with influential local personalities, Freshfield might have thought that this was the right moment to excavate the church of St John.

Packing Freshfield's capitals

Although entirely forgotten, Freshfield's position in the history of the excavations of Ephesos reveals a pioneering figure. At the time of his catalogue (1903), he projected a clear synthesis of the evolution of St John and above all its historical relevance, which in his eyes was no less important than the Temple of Artemis. This knowledge might have been magnified by the many publications available at that point, but in the 1870s, when he first began his work and during which time he acquired the three capitals, there was little scholarship on the church. Russo argued that it was J. P. Richter who securely identified for the first time the location of St John, commenting on it in a

[31]Challis, *From the Harpy Tomb*, 115–16.

[32]*Ibid*., 135, and in general, on the development of Ottoman law concerning archaeology, see A. Papatheodorou, 'Ottoman Policy-Making in an Age of Reforms: Unearthing Ottoman Archaeology in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2017), esp. ch. 4.

[33]In the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London* (28 Nov. 1889–18 June 1891), second series, xiii, 135, Wood appears in the list of late members. Freshfield was a member of the council, treasurer and president of this society for many years. See Vanni and Varsallona, 'Seeing Byzantium', 126.

[34]In 1871, Wood discussed his discoveries at the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts: Challis, *From the Harpy Tomb*, 130.

[35]J. T. Wood, 'On the Antiquities of Ephesus Having Relation to Christianity, &c.', *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 6 (1878), 327–33. At the end of the volume, within the list of members, at page vi, it is possible to read the name of E. Freshfield, as well as that of W. E. Gladstone.

[36]This is why Wood dedicated his publication of 1868 to Prince Arthur: Challis, *From the Harpy Tomb*, 119, 123, 131. Cobb, 'Railway Crossing', 279–97. For the Prince of Wales's trips to Egypt, see A. Kelley's article in this special issue.

[37]Wood, 'On the Antiquities', esp. 332.

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publication in 1878 after visiting the site in 1876,[38] but Freshfield's acquisition of the capitals and request to excavate the church demonstrate that he had already reached the same conclusion in 1876–8.

On 17 June 1878, 'desiring to find the location as well as other details of an ancient structure at Ephesos', Freshfield officially requested from the Ottoman sultan permission to excavate the area of the church of St John.[39] A simple sketch that accompanied the request provides important details about Freshfield's aims and ideas. At the centre of the drawing, we find the fortified hill of Ayasuluk. The area of the castle is evident at the top of the drawing, while the rest of the hill is covered by ruins and a Greek church. The latter is the closest one to the main access to this hill, the so-called Gate of the Persecution,[40] which is directly connected by a dotted path to the railway station. Therefore, despite the unelaborated nature of the sketch, it is clear that Freshfield's focus was the area of the ruins between the castle and the modern Greek church (built at the time of the railway work). The sketch shows the proximity of the railway, and as discussed below, its staff was of utmost importance for the evolution of the excavation project.

An analysis of Freshfield's network clarifies the chronology of his involvement with the site of St John in Ephesos. The intermediary who signed the 1878 request was 'I. S. John D'Alessio'. Based on the list of names found on the book donated in 1901 to the retiring Edward Purser, who worked for ORC from 1859 as supervisor, chief engineer and eventually General Manager, Isaac Samuel John D'Alessio was one of the members of the traffic department.[41] But for Purser, D'Alessio was more than that. From Purser's diaries we learn that D'Alessio was one of the multilingual agents who managed the bureaucracy and relationships with the Ottoman authorities in Constantinople on behalf of Purser and ORC.[42]

To a certain extent, Freshfield's request through D'Alessio was part of Purser's official administration. Purser was also interested in archaeology,[43] as is demonstrated by his presence in the list of donors to the British Museum, to which he gifted a Greek inscription from Roman Ephesos in 1870.[44] Freshfield's legal dealings with ORC meant he would have known Purser well. The latter's diaries indicate contacts between him and Freshfield from 1876 to 1892, with more frequent entries until 1880. From the

[38]J. P. Richter, 'The Monuments of Christian Art at Ephesus', *Academy*, 14 (1878), 97–8; Russo, *Sulla cronologia*, 22.

[39]BOA.HR.TO (464/37), 17 June 1878, Istanbul, Ottoman State Archive; Papatheodorou, 'Ottoman Policy-Making', 116–17.

[40]This is the subject of the first picture of Freshfield's catalogue. Part of the re-employed third-century frieze which decorated the top of the gate was removed and reached England in the early nineteenth century. It is now in the collection of Woburn Abbey (Bedfordshire). L. Bevilacqua, 'Recycling Myths in Byzantine Art: *Spolia* on the Gate of Persecution in Ephesos', in *Revisitar o Mito/Myths Revisited*, ed. A. do N. Pena, M. de J. C. Relvas, R. C. Fonseca and T. Casal (Ribeirão, 2015), 331–41.

[41]http://www.levantineheritage.com/aidin1-personnel.html (accessed 12 Aug. 2025).

[42]Chris Horner, Purser's great-great-grandson, made me aware of his ancestor's thirty-five-volume diary in his personal archive, now in Salt Lake City (Utah).

[43]Cobb's work indicates that he was more restrictive towards Wood compared to the previous manager: 'Railway Crossing', 203–4.

[44]Catalogue number 1870,0715.26, see https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG143053 (accessed 12 Aug. 2025).

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beginning, references to Freshfield increasingly focused on the project to excavate the church of St John. On 13 November 1876, Freshfield and Purser visited the Ayasuluk hill and inspected the gateway and the fragments of vaults and domes. Purser stated that they 'made it pretty clear to ourselves that the building was a great church and little doubt it was St. John'.[45] Purser recorded a donation of £50 from Freshfield to cover the expenses for some work at the church.[46] In May 1877, an attempt to draw a preliminary plan of the church was made based on the positioning of the piers.[47] The religious authorities of the area, including the bishop of Aydın and the patriarch of Constantinople, became involved in the excavation project.[48] Finally, in a diary entry for 13 June 1877, Purser laconically wrote 'Packing Freshfield's capitals',[49] leaving no doubt about his intermediary role in the acquisition and shipping of these objects to Surrey. The bill of lading for the three capitals was 160 piastres.[50]

Apparently, the 'unofficial' preliminary excavation work at Ayasuluk continued in November 1877.[51] Freshfield officially asked permission to excavate at Ephesos in 1878, through D'Alessio. In Purser's notes, we find the latter always in Constantinople receiving reports about the excavation plans.[52] Purser visited London on several occasions, and he often met or had exchanges with Freshfield.[53] He continued to send Freshfield constant updates about the permit,[54] and the works on the site at Ayasuluk continued from January to March 1879, with measurements, preparation of plans and further negotiations.[55] In London in 1880,[56] Purser's conversations with Freshfield, in addition to ORC affairs, still concerned Ephesos, its plans and Freshfield's ability to read Prokopios in the original Greek.[57] During the summer of 1880, discussions about the excavation continued, with a major intervention from the bishop and the patriarch to push the issue further.[58] Freshfield returned to Smyrna that autumn, and he and Purser

[45]Purser's diary, 13 Nov. 1876, Horner Archive, Salt Lake City. Purser recorded another visit to the site on the 28 Nov. 1876.

[46]*Ibid.*, 23 Nov. 1876.

[47]*Ibid.*, 2 May 1877; 3 May 1877; 4 May 1877; and 7 May 1877.

[48]*Ibid.*, 12 June 1877; 22 Aug. 1877; 25 Aug. 1877 (with D'Alessio's involvement in Constantinople); 15 Nov. 1877; 9 Jan. 1978; 23 Jan. 1879 (involvement of the bishop of Heliopolis); 18 Feb. 1879.

[49]*Ibid.*, 13 June 1877. Purser shipped the 'stones' through the cargo screw steamship Imbat (built in 1876): *ibid.*, 18 June 1877.

[50]*Ibid.*, 22 June 1877; June 1877 expenses.

[51]There is a mention of an official Ottoman document which gave the right only to build a new church: *ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1877.

[52]*Ibid.*, 18 May 1878; 21 May 1878.

[53]*Ibid.*, 1 June 1878; 4 June 1878; and then again 18 Sep. 1879; 19 Sep. 1879; 8 Nov. 1879; 14 Nov. 1879; 26 Nov. 1879 (with D'Alessio); 4 Dec. 1879; 9 Dec. 1879; 10 Dec. 1879; 17 Dec. 1879; 19 Dec. 1879; 20 Dec. 1879; and again 12 May 1880; 25 May 1880; 26 May 1880; 27 May 1880; 11 Jun 1880 (about Gladstone); 14 June 1880; 23 June 1880; 2 Jul. 1880; 3 Jul. 1880.

[54]*Ibid.*, 18 July 1878; 19 Sep. 1878 (opposition from the village of Kirkintzes recorded); 20 Sep. 1878; 16 Dec 1878.

[55]*Ibid.*, 7 Jan. 1879; 9 Jan. 1879; 10 Jan. 1879; 17 Jan. 1879; 23 Jan. 1879; 25 Jan. 1879; 26 Jan. 1879; 28 Jan. 1879; 16 Feb. 1879; 18 Feb. 1879; 20 Mar. 1879.

[56]See n. 54.

[57]The first English translation of Prokopios's *De aedificiis* dates to 1886. Procopius, *Of the Buildings of Justinian*, trans. A. Stewart (1886).

[58]Purser's diary, 18 Jul. 1880; 19 Jul. 1880; 23 Aug. 1880, Horner Archive, Salt Lake City.

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surveyed the site together in October,[59] but Purser stated that he 'did not see so much of E. Freshfield this time as I wished as both much occupied on respective affairs'.[60] Mentions of Freshfield and the Ayasuluk excavations gradually disappear from Purser's diary.[61] Freshfield's excavation request must have been rejected, though Purser's diary does not say this explicitly. In 1885, Freshfield wished 'to renew Ayasoluk digging',[62] but his antiquarian interests had already shifted elsewhere: to Constantinople.

His familiarity with the area of Ephesos based on personal interest, private assets and involvement with the legal business and personnel of ORC (Wood, D'Alessio and above all Purser) stimulated Freshfield's knowledge of and interest in the site.[63] Yet the relative lack of attention devoted to the church, compared to the buildings of the ancient city, might have encouraged his 'unofficial' excavation and the removal of artefacts, such as the capitals, in the 1870s. It is unlikely that the shipping of the latter passed unnoticed, but evidently it did not cause any problems. Based on what has been possible to reconstruct so far,[64] the acquisition of these capitals in 1877 was one of the first steps in the formation of Freshfield's collection. The catalogue, which opens with the Ephesos capitals, mirrors the chronological development of his antiquarian interests.

The nature of the documents discussed above allows us to reconstruct the acquisition of the Ephesos capitals and Freshfield's plan to excavate the church of St John which, in the end, remained unfulfilled. Through Purser's brief notes we see a wealthy British amateur exploiting a network of Levantine associates, thanks to his means and personal charm. It is almost impossible to reconstruct the voices of the official Ottoman partners, since these are rarely recorded. Nonetheless, silence can be louder than words. Purser does not specifically mention the rejection of Freshfield's request by the Ottoman authorities, but references to Freshfield begin to disappear from his diaries, and we are left with the impression that the 'unofficial' works at the site of St John were 'officially' suspended at some point. Behind this one must see the increasing control of the Ottoman state over its antiquities, and particularly the effects of new regulations in 1874.[65]

Politics and faith

We need to ask what motivated Freshfield's focus on the church of St John and Ephesos. At first glance, Freshfield's case might recall that of other wealthy London-based collectors, such as the artist Frederic Leighton (1830–96):[66] both purchased pieces from

[59] *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1880.

[60] *Ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1880.

[61] *Ibid.*, 24 Oct. 1880; 24 Oct. 1880; 10 Dec. 1880.

[62] *Ibid.*, 20 Mar. 1885. The last record of Freshfield in Purser's diary is dated 13 Sep. 1892, but it refers to the shipping of Weber's publication, perhaps G. Weber, *Guide du voyageur à Ephèse* (Smyrna, 1891).

[63] The connections among this circle of foreigners living in Smyrna are further demonstrated by the fact that Freshfield's parents-in-law, Purser and his family, and some of D'Alessio's children were all buried in the same cemetery in Buca. Listing of the Buca cemetery, https://www.levantineheritage.com/pdf/bu.pdf (accessed 12 Aug. 2025).

[64] Vanni and Varsallona, 'Seeing Byzantium'.

[65] Papatheodorou, 'Ottoman Policy-Making', 110–24.

[66] S. Jones, C. Newall, L. Ormond, R. Ormond and B. Read, *Frederic, Lord Leighton: Eminent Victorian Artist* (1996); M. T. Brandlhuber, M. Buhrs and C. Newall, *Frederic, Lord Leighton, 1830–1896: Painter and Sculptor of the*

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the eastern Mediterranean for their houses, devoted time to their study and were in the circles of artists associated with the Arts and Crafts or Pre-Raphaelite movements. But even though Freshfield's collection can be studied through the lens of aesthetic fascination for the 'Orient', there was a strong religious component that requires further contextualisation. It is specifically the ideological use of Byzantine spirituality in the context of nineteenth-century British interests in Asia Minor that makes Freshfield's relatively niche collection interesting.

Sidney Barnsley, the architect of Freshfield's church in Surrey, belonged to the Arts and Crafts movement,[67] and there are analogies between its founder, William Morris (1834–96), and Freshfield. In Byzantium, Morris found a source of inspiration in terms of ornaments and aesthetic. Like Freshfield, Morris was close to the circles of wealthy Anglo-Greek families who sponsored the construction of the new Greek Orthodox cathedral of Divine Wisdom in London (Bayswater) from 1874 to 1879.[68] For this project, the architecture of which recalls that of Hagia Sophia and other Byzantine buildings, Freshfield acted as legal adviser.[69] The connections among Morris, Freshfield and the Greek community in Britain would benefit from further research.[70] For now, it is worth noting that Morris's interest in Byzantium went hand in hand with his polemical attitude towards the Ottoman Empire and the British government's support of it under Benjamin Disraeli (Prime Minister in 1868 and 1874–80).[71] This was Freshfield's attitude too.

As a devout Christian, Freshfield was critical of the treatment of Christian minorities within the Ottoman Empire, in agreement with the well-known anti-Ottoman sentiment of William Eward Gladstone (Prime Minister in office intermittently from 1868 to 1894). In the context of the British–Ottoman relationship, among Gladstone's main concerns were the civil rights and religious liberty of the Christian minorities and the fate of the Church in general.[72] He expressed these concerns, with a strong emphasis on religious and moral aspects, in the famous pamphlet *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* in 1876.[73]

Victorian Age (Munich, Berlin, and New York, 2009) and T. J. Barringer and E. Prettejohn, *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity* (New Haven, 1999).

[67]D. Kotoula, 'Arts and Crafts and the Byzantine; The Greek Connection', in *Byzantium/Modernism: The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*, ed. R. Betancourt and M. Taroutina (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2015), 75–101.

[68]R. S. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia, 1850–1950: Holy Wisdom, Modern Monument* (Chicago, 2004), 105–28, in particular 106–8.

[69]Greensted, 'The Arts and Crafts Movement', 49.

[70]This is an aspect that Morris's biographers only briefly touched, mostly in relation to Morris's special friendship with Aglaia (Ionides) Coronio. See F. MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (New York, 1995), esp. 270–1.

[71]Nelson, *Hagia Sophia*, 105–28.

[72]For context and connections between British political Liberalism, Christianity and the attitude towards the Ottoman Empire, see J. Parry, *Promised Lands: The British and the Ottoman Middle East* (Princeton, 2022), esp. 356–72, and J. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2009), esp. ch. 7, 'The Eastern Question and Its Consequences, 1875–1886', 323–86.

[73]W. E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (1876), and then W. E. Gladstone, *Lessons in Massacre; or The Conduct of the Turkish Government in and about Bulgaria since May 1876* (1877). On this topic, see R. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876* (New York, 1963), esp. 147–201 for the role of religion. For a general overview of Gladstone's attitude towards the Roman and Orthodox churches, see

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Gladstone knew Freshfield personally, and his family trusted Freshfield's firm.[74] In 1871, Freshfield asked Gladstone to write introductions for him before one of his two-month journeys to Smyrna.[75] After visiting Bulgaria and Greece in 1871, Freshfield reported on the state of the churches in those countries, together with plans for railways in Greece.[76] Thus, concerns about the Christians in eastern Europe, together with the importance of building railways for the development of the British imperial project, were topics that Gladstone and Freshfield discussed in most of their correspondence between 1870 and 1875,[77] immediately before the publication of the *Bulgarian Horrors*.

Because of its emphasis on rites and traditions, supporters of the High Church such as Gladstone and Freshfield were genuinely fascinated by the Eastern Orthodox Church. The involvement of the latter with Greek and Levantine personalities in London, the Smyrna area and Constantinople must have further stimulated his philhellenism and interest in Byzantium. For Freshfield, the Byzantine religious past was part of a common Christian root. From his writings, including the catalogue of sculptures and the manuscript he left to the Society of Antiquaries in London – a sort of guide to the Byzantine monuments of Constantinople – we understand the significance of the buildings from which his capitals were taken.[78] Some capitals now at Lower Kingswood came from the complex of St John of Stoudios in Constantinople,[79] which Freshfield considered special because it was the monastery where Byzantine monks had written hymns still in use in the Church of England. Moreover, one of his stones came from a building in Istanbul now known as Boğdan Sarayı, which Freshfield believed to be the church built by an Anglo-Saxon nobleman of the eleventh century. Freshfield took the opportunity to analyse the 'English' history in Byzantine writings, such as that of Neophytos of Cyprus (1134–*c*. 1214) recording the conquest of Cyprus by King Richard I (r. 1189–99).[80] These cases demonstrate that what made Freshfield's stones special was the interpretation of his own identity in their connection to English history. Freshfield wanted Byzantium to be part of the latter, and particularly the history of the Anglican Church. What pushed Freshfield to collect Byzantine materials was the identitarian process that he shaped in the form of religious and political beliefs: these were

H. C. G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, Vaticanism, and the Question of the East', *Studies in Church History*, 15 (1978), 417–42.

[74]F. B. Yildizeli, 'W. E. Gladstone and British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter 2016), 109–11, and F. B. Yildizeli, 'William Gladstone's Attitude towards Islam' *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 30 (2025), 48–66, with reference to Gladstone to C. Musurus, 2 Jan. 1872, London, British Library, GP Add MS 44541, fo. 27.

[75]Slinn, *A History*, 131.

[76]A preliminary analysis of most of the letters that Freshfield sent to Gladstone in the 1870s now held at the British Library, London, suggests a specific focus on the condition of the Greek and Bulgarian churches under the Ottomans. More thorough analysis of this material exceeds the limits and goals of this article.

[77]Yildizeli, 'W. E. Gladstone', 109–10; Slinn, *A History*, 131. Both contain a partial reference to a letter from Gladstone to Freshfield, 13 Nov. 1871, London, British Library, GP Add MS 44540, fo. 162.

[78]For this manuscript (Society of Antiquaries of London, FRC formerly MS 829, *Lists and papers rel to Christian churches and other building in Constantinople*), see Vanni and Varsallona 'Seeing Byzantium', 126–8.

[79]Loverance, '93 – Marble Capital', in *Byzantium*, ed. Buckton, 91.

[80]E. Freshfield, 'On the "Description of Cyprus" by Neophytus, and the Condition of the Island in his Time', *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous tracts relating to antiquity*, 47 (1882), 37–40.

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witnesses to the Christian past that needed to be preserved. He believed them safer in his garden than in Ottoman hands.

Thanks to people such as Freshfield and Morris, the appeal of Byzantium spread in Britain, but it peaked at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that point, artists and intellectuals, politicians and members of the ecclesiastic sphere showed strong interest in its art and especially its capital city, Constantinople.[81] Although they approached it from different angles, they all ended up being concerned about the city and its iconic monument, Hagia Sophia, which was then a mosque (since 1453). Artists found in Byzantine mosaics elements of modernity.[82] Politicians cared about the fate of the city, which was under joint Allied occupation from 1918 to 1923. The Anglican clergy, long concerned about the reconversion of Hagia Sophia to a church, founded the 'St. Sophia Redemption Committee' in 1919.[83] Freshfield was among those whose Byzantine interests were directed to Constantinople, which became the main object of his intellectual and archaeological attention from the 1880s onward.[84]

Purser's notes, however, demonstrate that among Freshfield's capitals, those from Ephesos were acquired before those from Constantinople. Ephesos, where he initially had major connections, was Freshfield's first destination in his journey towards Byzantine art and spirituality. It is worth noting that in terms of Christian devotion, Ephesos was at that time one of the principal destinations of pilgrimage to Asia Minor and its 'seven churches of Revelation'. Like famous sites in the Holy Land, these became the objectives of this type of mass tourism.[85] These faith journeys can also be understood as unofficially reinforcing Britain's links to the areas under its economic and cultural influence. Tourist guides to the region of Ephesos from the second half of the nineteenth century gradually show more attention to facilities and accessibility, details addressed to less aristocratic ways of travelling, which centred on the railway stations.[86] Possessing materials from one of those sacred shrines allowed Freshfield to bring home part of that Christian past which he believed to be in danger.

In this broader sense, collecting Byzantine Christian antiquities was not only an aesthetic diversion or a pleasure for Freshfield; it was a mission. The connection of Ephesos with the Bible, St John and the Virgin spurred Freshfield's desire to link Anglicanism and the Christian East. Like owning relics, owning sculptures from holy sites in the eastern Mediterranean, such as Ephesos and Constantinople, allowed

[81]Nelson, *Hagia Sophia*, esp. from 120.

[82]On the topic, see G. Gasbarri, '"A Harmonious Conglomerate of Particles": Abstraction, Visual Meditation, and the Reception of Byzantine Art in the Age of Modernism', in *A Byzantine Century: Political, Colonial, and National Uses of Neo-Byzantine Architecture, 1820s–1920s, Convivium Supplementum 2005/1*, ed. A. Palladino (Brno, 2025), 83–96.

[83]E. Goldstein, 'Holy Wisdom and British Foreign Policy, 1918–1922: The St. Sophia Redemption Agitation', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 15 (1991), 36–65.

[84]Vanni and Varsallona 'Seeing Byzantium'.

[85]Cobb, 'Railway Crossing', 179, 183. On modern pilgrimages in Palestine, see D. Bar and K. Cohen-Hattab, 'A New Kind of Pilgrimage: The Modern Tourist Pilgrim of Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Palestine', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39 (2013), 131–48; C. Emmott, '"No Wonder That on This Spot God Spoke to Us": The Intersection of Anglican Tourist-Pilgrims and Archaeology in British Mandate Palestine', *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies*, 10 (2023), 42–66. See also Introduction and D. Reynolds's article in this special issue.

[86]Cobb, 'Railway Crossing', 183.

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him to enact the role of Byzantine worshipper. This identitarian process intertwined with economic and political realities, especially his closeness to Gladstone's agenda. Reconstructing the circumstances of Freshfield's relationship with the antiquities of Ephesos reveals that his familiarity with the region through the acquisition of his father-in-law's properties and the involvement of his firm with ORC allowed Freshfield to build a network of contacts and tailor a special set of unofficial privileges to his own ends. Even though these were not enough to obtain the official permit to excavate St John, Freshfield was the first unofficial archaeologist of the site. In sum, in Freshfield's system of values, his sculpture collection contributed to the preservation of the threatened heritage of the Orthodox Church in Ottoman hands. The publication and discussion of these materials, together with the study of Byzantine culture which he passionately cultivated and above all generously sponsored in different ways demonstrate that his main aim was to promote knowledge of Byzantium in Victorian Britain. Embedded within the frame of British colonialism and the attempt to locate the origin of Anglicanism in the Near East – while expanding imperial interests in the same area – Freshfield's work decisively contributed to the development of Byzantine Studies in the United Kingdom.

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