GENERAL INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION – PART i

APPROACHING BYZANTIUM

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Many roads lead to Byzantium, 'the New Rome', and guidance comes from dozens of disciplines, including art history and archaeology, theology and expertise in stone inscriptions, coins or handwriting. Indeed, those general historians who act as guides have themselves often majored in other fields, such as ancient Greece and Rome, the medieval west, the Slav or Mediterranean worlds, and even the Italian renaissance. The surest fact about the elusive 'New Rome' is that it lasted over a thousand years, albeit with a fifty-seven-year dislocation from 1204. Across this millennium, the questions of how, why and where the empire survived, receded and (most importantly) revived as a more or less functioning organism – and as an idea – underlie this book.

We take a narrower road than the one chosen by this volume's predecessor, *The Cambridge medieval history* IV,[1] whose first part recounted political, military and ecclesiastical history in detail from 717 until the end of the empire, and devoted several authoritative chapters to neighbouring peoples and powers; its second part contained thematic chapters, on for example law, government, the church, music, the visual arts and literature. No such comprehensive treatment of Byzantium's culture will be attempted here. Our chapters follow the fortunes of the empire, as shifting politico-military organisation and as abiding ideal and state of mind, but do not attempt portrayal of Byzantium and its civilisation from every angle; however, some important alternative approaches to its history are sketched in the third section of this introduction (see below, pp. 53–75).

Our narrative picks out those occurrences salient to the political organism, with an eye for the many problems, external and internal, facing the upholders of imperial order from their capital in the New Rome. Unfashionable weight is given to individual emperors' characters, and to the statecraft of such giants as Justinian (527–65), Leo III (717–41), Basil I (867–86) and Basil II (976–1025), Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) and Manuel I Komnenos (1143–80). Their diverse, often successful, solutions to problems

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[1] Hussey (ed.) (1966–7).

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of governance are outlined, and a recurring theme is the pragmatism of Byzantium's rulers in coping with plague, financial straits and the inroads of 'barbarians', and also with unexpected problems of success. The dynamics of these improvisations, abrupt overhauls and longer-term shifts are traced through the course of events rather than through detailed analysis of institutions as such, a justifiable approach given that the precise workings of so many of Byzantium's institutions – from the army to provincial administration – are so hard to determine and highly controversial.

Topics of relevance to Byzantine political culture are brought into the narrative, from religious devotions to patronage of the visual arts, and the broader, provincial society revolving around that of the metropolis is outlined. Thematic chapters look at the economy and Christian missions, and there is treatment of several societies, elites and powers that had long-term dealings with Byzantium. Here, too, coverage is less than comprehensive: for example, no chapter is dedicated to ties between the empire and the lands of the Rus. But enough is provided to demonstrate the impact of Byzantium on various cultures of world significance: the world of Islam, the Eurasian and the Slav worlds, and the Christian west. The aim is to outline and analyse interaction rather than to recount every known detail of relations with a particular state. The importance of Byzantium to neighbouring or newly forming societies and powers emerges more clearly when their individual situations and needs are taken into account. This is particularly true of the tortuous interrelationship with the Christian west across the centuries, and the vitality of the exchanges, cultural as well as ecclesiastical and political, between 'Latins' and 'Greeks' is brought out in full here.

The chronological range of our chapters spans from just after the formal termination of the western half of the Roman empire (476) to the fifteenth century, when the Christian west was viewed by some Byzantines as a potential saviour from the Turks. This broad yet careful sweep takes in the numerous communities and towns of Greek-speakers who came under new rulers after the empire's collapse in 1204, sometimes Venetians or French-speakers, sometimes Bulgarian or Serbs. The ebb and flow of the imperial dominions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is presented in more detail than is usual with this kind of survey, and it shows up qualities of the Byzantine body politic too easily overlooked: its 'variable geometry', a capacity to function quite effectively even without the use of apparently vital members; and resilience, its constituent parts realigning themselves with imperial dominion more or less of their own accord, without much prompting from the top.

The conspectus offered here, at once authoritative and unusually wide-ranging, should yield some fresh insights to specialists in, and postgraduate

students of, the Byzantine world. But it also has something to offer new-comers to the enigma variations of Byzantium. No prior knowledge of the subject, or indeed of pre-modern history, is presupposed, and every effort has been made to provide guidelines for readers whose mother tongue or first foreign language is English. Translations of primary texts are cited in the footnotes where available, and a guide to sources in English trans-lation is offered in the fourth section of this introduction (see below, pp. 76–90).

Our introduction is divided into four sections, The first – this one – looks at Byzantine notions of empire, their tenacity in the face of adversity and the significance of religious rites for believers at grass-roots, consti-tuting Byzantium's special blend of faith and power. It concludes with a discussion of the nature of the interrelationships between outsiders and insiders, and of their bearing on the broader question of the Byzantine identity.

The second section addresses the book's time-frame and considers pos-sible alternatives. It is followed by a survey of the book's three main parts, which run from *c.* 500 to *c.* 700, *c.* 700 to 1204 and 1204 to 1492. Themes running through chapters that may, at first sight, seem rather disparate are picked out, part by part. The chapters are not surveyed in strict order of their sequence in the book: thus the topic- or region-specific chapters of Part II are considered *en bloc*, after the chapters forming the main narrative spine. Part III's contents, lacking a single fixed point, and encompassing a wide variety of populations and polities, receive fairly lengthy treatment without close adherence to the order of the chapters.

The third section outlines other possible approaches to those taken in this book, which mostly follow the course of recorded events of political, ecclesiastical or military significance for the empire. The outline draws attention to some more or less recent introductions to art, institutions and the human condition among the Byzantines. It is nonetheless slanted towards topics germane to the idea or substance of empire, whether political imagery, size of armies, or castration.

The fourth and final section of the introduction addresses some of the problems of approaching Byzantium without benefit of Greek and offers short-cuts that may help towards the study – and teaching – of the empire's story: historical atlases covering Byzantium and neighbouring peoples, chronologies, art-historical lexicons and whole dictionaries devoted to the subject. Far more works penned by the Byzantines or about the Byzantines by contemporary outsiders are available in English translation than is gen-erally realised and further translations are underway. These make aspects of Byzantium readily accessible to newcomers from the English-speaking world, and this section of the introduction points to some of the online guides to English-language translations now available.

notions of empire, resilience and religion

The phenomenon of Byzantium has multiple connotations and even the name which its rulers used of their polity, 'Roman', was controversial.[2] 'Greeks' was the name by which they and their subjects were known to many of their neighbours. This was a reflection of the language in everyday use in Constantinople and provincial towns and in which most imperial business was done from the sixth century onwards. To Goths fanning Italians' prejudices, 'Greeks' carried intimations of frippery and rapaciousness (see below, pp. 214–15). Yet a certain readiness to accept the empire's claim to be 'Roman' surfaces spasmodically among Frankish courtiers, for all their fulminations to the contrary (see below, p. 397). And while some Arabic writers in the Abbasid era stressed the Byzantines' cultural inferiority to the ancient Greeks or Romans,[3] Rum ('Romans') was the name by which Muslims called the Byzantines, and the Turkish potentates who made themselves masters of south-central Anatolia from the late eleventh century became known as sultans of Rum.[4]

The very terms Rome and Roman had overtones of unimpeachably legitimate sovereign authority, evoking the greatest empire the world had yet seen. Fantastic as popular notions might be concerning the imagery of classical monuments in Constantinople,[5] Byzantine rulers still acted out triumphal parades through its streets and enlisted the citizens' support in staging them, manifesting the classical Roman concept of 'eternal victory'.[6] Less flamboyantly, the City's water-supply kept flowing through an intricate network of pipes and cisterns established in the sixth century, to standards set by Roman engineers. The workings of this system, ensuring the pure water vital to Constantinople's survival, were seldom if ever set down in writing,[7] and in fact the importance of this state secret features in a late thirteenth-century treatise on Byzantine political thought.[8]

In contrast to mundane matters of pipelines, the supernatural protection enjoyed by the 'God-protected City' of Constantinople was a leitmotif of imperial pronouncements from the seventh century onwards,[9]

[2] The term 'Byzantium' only came into use in the sixteenth century, when it was introduced to distinguish the medieval eastern Mediterranean state from the 'Roman' empire of antiquity. Byzantium is a Latinised form of the name of the city chosen by Constantine the Great (306–37) to be his residence, Byzantion, renamed Constantinople after him.

[3] El-Cheikh (2004a), pp. 103–11.

[4] See below, p. 708; *EI*, VIII, s.v. Saldjuks, pp. 948–50 (C. E. Bosworth).

[5] *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, ed. Preger; tr. Cameron and Herrin; Dagron (1984b).

[6] McCormick (1990), pp. 3, 21–31, 205–8; Morris (2003).

[7] Greek fire's workings are likewise ill-documented: see below, pp. 233–4; Haldon and Byrne (1977); Haldon (2006a); Pryor and Jeffreys (2006), pp. 607–31.

[8] Crow *et al.* (2001); Crow and Bayliss (2005); Angelov, D. G. (2004), p. 520; below, pp. 114, 471, 485.

[9] Fenster (1968), pp. 97–8, 104 and n. 2.

becoming engrained in the consciousness of Christians in the eastern Mediterranean world. The dedication of the new City by Constantine the Great in AD 330 symbolised his conversion to Christianity and was commemorated each year on 11 May.[10] Constantine's espousal of Christianity marked a new beginning not just for the emperor but for all mankind, whose spiritual salvation now became his avowed concern. Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine's counsellor and biographer, interpreted the turning-point thus, laying the foundations for an ideology that would treat the history of the church as being coterminous with the bounds of the Roman empire.[11]

The emperor thus became a pivotal figure in God's grand design for believers and unbelievers alike, and the conception gained monumental expression in stone from Justinian's building of St Sophia in Constantinople (see below, pp. 111–12, 114). Justinian's building-works were undertaken when, for all the pressures from external enemies on several fronts, military feats could still bring confirmation that the Christian God conferred victory, and churchmen ranged far and wide on missions to bring remaining groups of pagans within the emperor's fold (see below, pp. 307–12).

The association of the empire of the Christians with the future of mankind remained vital even when the tide abruptly turned and, following a Persian occupation, the empire's eastern provinces were overrun by bands of Arab warriors in the mid-seventh century. Formerly deemed poor, divided and readily manipulable by the Romans, these Arabs now acted in concert, united in responding to their own revealed truth, as conveyed by God to the prophet Muhammad (see below, pp. 173–95, 365–9). Little more than a generation later, Pseudo-Methodius[12] explained 'the Ishmaelites'' extraordinary victories as God's punishment on the Christians for their sins. He prophesied that 'the Ishmaelites' would carry all before them until the emperor awoke 'like a man from sleep after drinking much wine', arose and put them to flight; the emperor would subsequently make for Jerusalem, and his arrival there would lead to the appearance of the anti-Christ and Christ's second coming.[13] The text was soon translated from Syriac into Greek and the surviving version contains an interpolation alluding to actual Arab expeditions against Constantinople of the late seventh or early eighth century.

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[10] *DC*, I.79 (70), ed. Reiske, I, pp. 340–9; ed. and French tr. Vogt, II, pp. 143–50; Dagron (2000), pp. 60–71.

[11] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*, II.3–5, II.44–61, IV.74–5, ed. Winkelmann, pp. 48–50, 66–72, 150–1; tr. Cameron and Hall, pp. 95–7, 110–15, 182; Dvornik (1966), II, pp. 614–22; Brock (1994), p. 70.

[12] A seventh-century Syriac author, who wrote in the name of the fourth-century bishop of Patara.

[13] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, [13], 11, ed. Aerts and Kortekaas, I, p. 174; below, p. 247. See also Psalms 78: 65.

It also represents the Ishmaelites as momentarily entering the City before the emperor's resurgence.[14]

The Arabs never did penetrate the walls of Constantinople and so these events were not, strictly speaking, relevant to Pseudo-Methodius' prophecy. But the interpolation reflects widely held Byzantine beliefs: that they were acting out events foretold in sacred writings, and empire and capital were closely bound up with the fate of mankind.[15] Sudden strikes against the City by barbarians such as the Rus in 860 were interpreted as divine punishment for its sins,[16] and after Constantinople's fall to the Crusaders in 1204, many believed this was God's warning that the Byzantines should mend their ways before He showed His displeasure terminally (see below, p. 735).

Faith and empire could no longer be held to be indissoluble to the same extent after 1204, yet eastern orthodox emperors remained at large and upon seizing control of Constantinople in 1261, Michael VIII Palaiologos (1258–82) presented himself as a new Constantine: his success in occupying the City was in itself a mark of God's favour towards him and of God's mercy for His people. Apocalyptic writings and sayings, some deriving from Pseudo-Methodius, circulated widely among orthodox Greek- and Slavonic-speakers alike. The Byzantine emperors' predicament in the face of Ottoman Turk advances from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, the collapse of other orthodox polities and then, in 1453, the City's fall to these Ishmaelites, appeared to bear out the prophecies.

These developments could be aligned with other computations that earthly time would cease upon expiry of the seventh millennium from the creation, a date corresponding with the year 1492.[17] Such computations were commonplace in the higher echelons of the church, and Patriarch Gennadios II Scholarios (1454–6, 1463, 1464–5) foretold doomsday on 1 September 1492. He thus assumed the City's occupation by infidels could only be provisional, now that the empire was no more. Meanwhile, at grass-roots, orthodox Christian faith was integral to Roman identity; even today, a villager in north-eastern Turkey can explain that 'this was Roman country; they spoke Christian here' (see below, pp. 852, 853).

Thus Byzantium is best viewed as an amalgam of communities of religious ritual and faith in the power of God, and of administrative institutions and defence works, some kept to a high degree of efficiency.[18] True

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[14] Pseudo-Methodius, *Apocalypse*, [13], 9–10, ed. Aerts and Kortekaas, I, p. 172 (text); II, p. 49 (commentary). Already in 654, a large Arab fleet may have advanced far towards Constantinople before being destroyed by a storm: O'Sullivan (2004). See also below, p. 372, n. 17; Magdalino (2005), p. 42.

[15] Alexander (1962), pp. 341–55.

[16] Photios, *Homilies*, ed. Laourdas, pp. 29–52; tr. Mango, pp. 82–110.

[17] Nicol (1979); Magdalino (1993b), pp. 27–8; Polyviannyi (2000), pp. 207–8, 218–23.

[18] On 'political orthodoxy' among the Byzantines as well as orthodoxy's doctrinal and ritual mould, see Beck (1978), pp. 87–108.

believers, however far removed from the material protection of the imperial authorities, could hope for spiritual salvation and perhaps physical protection through prayer, regular celebration of the eucharist and access to the holy. As with the bread and wine bringing the body and blood of Christ to mankind, other rites of worship and also the decor and layout of the structure within which they were celebrated symbolised higher things, the medley standing for an infinitely superior, harmonious whole. Willingness to see providential design in the domed interior of a Byzantine church was articulated by Maximus the Confessor, and it was further elaborated upon by Patriarch Germanos I (715–30) in his influential treatise on the liturgy. Theological meaning was assigned to even the humblest example of ecclesiastical architecture and its interior furnishings: proceedings inside the church building mirrored those in heaven.[19]

The 'corporate consciousness' generated by rites revolving round the liturgy could hold communities of Christians together, so long as priests could be mustered to perform the church services. In a sense, therefore, imperial governmental apparatus was superfluous, and orthodox communities could carry on even under barbarian occupation. This was the case in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the populations under Frankish or Italian rule were still, in their hearts, 'turned towards Greek matters'. Such 'Greek matters', which did not distinguish very sharply between this world and the next, gave Marino Sanudo, a fourteenth-century Venetian observer, grounds for unease (see below, p. 778). In similar spirit the eminent holy man, Neophytos, ignored the Latins' occupation of his island of Cyprus, and as Catia Galatariotou has remarked, judging by his writings alone, one 'would be forgiven for believing that Cyprus never ceased to be a province of Byzantium'.[20]

Byzantine writings about the apocalypse offer little coverage of rebounds of imperial power before the final awakening from drunken sleep, but individual emperors showed resilience, sometimes recovering territories after generations of barbarian occupation. An emperor's expectations of acceptance and collaboration from the orthodox under outsiders' rule could be misplaced, as in the case of Manuel I Komnenos (see below, pp. 716–17). But after the Latin occupation of Constantinople and the emergence of rival orthodox emperors, widely scattered populations still proved receptive to the idea of belonging to the original Christian Roman empire. Not even the well-organised, culturally accommodating regime of the Villehardouin lords of the Peloponnese could counteract this magnetism, and Marino

[19] Germanos I, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. and tr. Meyendorff; Taft (1984), p. 111–26; see below, pp. 111–12, 244. On the (sometimes varying) interpretations of Maximus and Germanos, see Mathews (1971), pp. 113–15, 121–2, 140–4, 150, 159–60. See also Déroche (2002), pp. 177–80 and, for later developments, Ševčenko, N. P. (2006).
[20] Galatariotou (1991), p. 218.

Sanudo's apprehensions were voiced at a time when the Palaiologoi were gaining ground on the peninsula (see below, pp. 803–33, 860). Only outsiders with overwhelming military might, bonded together by distinctive religious beliefs and able to count on numerous like-minded enthusiasts, had fair prospects of implanting themselves lastingly in the 'God-protected City'. This conjuncture did not come about swiftly or inevitably: the subtle, tentative quality of Mehmet II's (1444–6, 1451–81) measures even after his capture of Constantinople in 1453, suggests as much (see below, pp. 858, 865–72).

This is not to claim that the amalgam of faith-zone, imperial idea and state apparatus which the Byzantine empire represented was an unqualified asset, or that it was sustainable indefinitely. The bonds were coming apart as Athonite monks and some senior churchmen and officeholders denounced the overtures to the Roman papacy which beleaguered emperors, pressured by *raisons d'état*, were constrained to make. The implacable opponents of ecclesiastical subordination to the Latins accused John VIII Palaiologos (1425–48) of betraying orthodoxy when he accepted a form of union with Rome at the Council of Florence in 1439 (see below, pp. 862–3). Perhaps other, un-imperial socio-political structures could better have served the earthly needs of Greek-speaking orthodox in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, allowing for the development of their burgeoning urban centres, trading enterprises and *littérateurs*.[21] But the plasticity, even virulence, of the orthodox Roman order during its protracted decomposition goes some way to answering the question of why the empire lasted so long.

INSIDE OUT: EMPERORS, OUTSIDERS AND ROMAN ORTHODOX IDENTITY

The relations of Byzantium with the Christian west loom large through the chapters that follow, tracing political, military and ecclesiastical encounters and exchanges. This does not necessarily mark over-simplification of the issues for the sake of narrative formatting. To recount Byzantium's relationship with all the peoples and areas around it in equal measure would not be feasible, given the kaleidoscopic movement of the peoples and, in many cases, the dearth of source-materials for their relations with the empire. The only institution whose dealings with Byzantium can be tracked continuously across a thousand years is the papacy, offering an alternative universalist scheme of things. The minutiae of this relationship are not analysed or recounted here, but Byzantino-papal relations form a baseline

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[21] See below, pp. 43–4, 45, 49–50, 824–5, 830–3. The flurry of late Byzantine writings on political economy signals interest in alternative constitutions, as well as reinforcement of the imperial order: Angelov, D. G. (2007); Gaul (forthcoming); see below, p. 862.

for Byzantium's relations with the Christian west, a story offering extensive windows on, if not a key to, the empire's longevity. Time and again, they also show how 'Old Rome' and its adherents impinged on the empire's domestic affairs.

There was an epic turning of the tables in the balance of power and wealth between Byzantium and the west from the sixth century, when Justinian's armies restored most of Italy to his dominion, through to the eleventh century, when emperors could still harness western martial and commercial resources on their own terms, and up to the thirteenth and fourteenth century, when westerners often, but not invariably, had the upper hand. By the late Byzantine era, the empire was in many ways an economic colony of the west, the Genoese and Venetians controlling the islands and other strategically important vantage-points in the Aegean, backed up by formidable naval resources and exchanging manufactured goods for primary produce. The renown of western arms was such that Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425) spent years touring the west in hopes of military aid.[22] Yet by this time much of the Peloponnese had been restored to imperial dominion after decades of Frankish rule in the thirteenth century, and – against the Turkish odds – 'hot-spots' such as Thessaloniki still aligned themselves with the emperor in Constantinople under the encouragement of their church leaders (see below, pp. 857–9).

In tracing these shifts in power one glimpses the silhouette, if little more, of that 'silent majority' of orthodox Greek-speaking country-dwellers whose customs and beliefs stood in the way of occupiers' maximal exaction of resources and consolidation of their regimes. In its way, the imperviousness of 'Greek matters' to land-based Latin warlords and churchmen offers as strong a clue as any to the reasons for the resilience of the Byzantine empire (see above and below, pp. 777–8). Yet it also stood in the way of Palaiologan emperors seeking some form of union with Rome (see below, pp. 829, 863–4).

This work pays pronounced attention to emperors' dealings with non-members of their empire, those considered not quite 'Romans' for one reason or another, laying it open to the charge of undue attention to 'Byzantium's foreign relations with little regard for its internal history'.[23] This plaint cited the then-published volumes of the *New Cambridge medieval history* and is pertinent, seeing that over half our chapters derive from contributions made to that series; the series' framing of the middle ages is maintained in this work.[24] Moreover our chapters, in line with the *New Cambridge medieval history*, aim to present the interplay between

[22] See below, p. 829; Barker (1969), pp. 171–99; Nicol (1974); Mergiali-Sahas (2001b), pp. 56–7.
[23] Treadgold (2003), pp. 1002–3.
[24] Chapters 1, 3 and 4 were published in substantially similar form in *NCMH*, I; chapters 10 and 11 in *NCMH*, II; chapters 13, 14 and 15 in *NCMH*, III; chapters 16 and 17 in *NCMH*, IV; chapters 20a,