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978-0-521-07167-3 - Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium: The  
Birkbeck Lectures, 1977

Donald M. Nicol

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CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN THE LAST  
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Byzantium*

THE BIRKBECK LECTURES, 1977

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## PREFACE

In 1977 I had the honour to deliver the Birkbeck Lectures at Cambridge. A singular honour it was since, as Professor Walter Ullmann observed when introducing me to my audience, the lectures had not been devoted to a Byzantine theme since the late Fr Francis Dvornik gave them in 1948. Byzantine studies have not received much encouragement from the University of Cambridge for all the precedent set by J. B. Bury and Sir Steven Runciman. I am therefore all the more grateful to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College for honouring me by their invitation to be their Birkbeck Lecturer and for their kindness to me in making the ordeal as painless as possible.

The chapters of this book are substantially the texts of those lectures with certain modifications, additions and amendments. In 1972 I published a book entitled *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*. It was intended to serve as a textbook for students of a period of history which is notoriously complicated and which was not covered by any similar work in the English language. As a bare narrative of the political, ecclesiastical and military events of the declining years of the Byzantine Empire that book may have its uses. But I had always hoped to delve deeper into the nature of a society which had at the same time such a tragic propensity for collapse and such a remarkable talent for cultural and spiritual regeneration. The Birkbeck Lectures gave me the opportunity to arrange some of my thoughts on the matter. My debt to greater scholars in this field is, I hope, amply expressed in the bibliography and notes to the text. But it is a field which is still only partially

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ploughed by modern historians; and I have tried to draw most of my material direct from the original sources. Those sources which I have consulted (and the list is of necessity selective) may also be found in the bibliography.

The Byzantine Empire ended in 1453. Its inhabitants were therefore denied the experiences of material change and technological advance which were to transform western European society in the following century. They had no printing presses; they never knew of the existence of America; they had no Reformation; and their first and last bitter taste of heavy artillery warfare was at the final siege of their City by the Turks. They were the survivors and upholders of the last of the great pre-technological civilisations. They would probably have been out of sympathy with most of the developments, innovations and inventions of later years. The Byzantines of the last centuries were the nearest of their kind in time to our own age. They were nearer still to the Italians of the Renaissance; and they were uncomfortably near to the emerging civilisation of the Ottomans which was in the end to engulf them. Yet they retained an identity which kept them apart in religion, culture, language and outlook. This book may be described as an attempt to explore that identity, a series of reflexions on the Byzantine character.

In the transliteration of Greek words consistency is almost impossible without pedantry. English gentlemen of a bygone age, bred on the Classics, liked to refer to Cicero as Tully and Pompeius as Pompey because it gave them a pleasing illusion that the great men of antiquity had belonged to the same club as themselves. They fostered a similar conceit of familiarity with the ancient Hellenes by turning their names into Latin form. I have never felt inclined to perpetuate this practice of pretending to some familiarity with people who were so different from our English-speaking selves. It is moreover a practice particularly insulting to the memory of the last Byzantines, most of whom were proud to be distinct from the Latins or Franks of the western world. I would not go so far in the

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matter of literal transliteration of Greek names and words as the late Arnold Toynbee; but I prefer to render them in the form nearest to their Greek sound and spelling, except in cases where there is a generally accepted English equivalent.

My thanks are due to Dr Philip Sherrard, who read and made valuable comments on a first draft of this book while it was still in lecture form, and to Miss Catherine Blade, who patiently typed and retyped parts of a well-worked manuscript. Finally I must express my gratitude to the Cambridge University Press.

*King's College, London*  
*July 1978*

D. M. N.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used for periodicals, collections of sources and reference works:

- AB* *Analecta Bollandiana*  
*B* *Byzantion*  
*BHG*<sup>3</sup> *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 3rd edn  
*BNJ* *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher*  
*BS* *Byzantinoslavica*  
*BZ* *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*  
*CFHB* *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*  
*CSHB* *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*  
*DHGE* *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*  
*DIEE* *Δελτίον τῆς ἱστορικῆς καὶ ἐθνολογικῆς ἐταιρείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*  
*DOP* *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*  
*DR* Dölger, F., *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*  
*DTC* *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*  
*EEBS* Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν  
*EO* *Echos d'Orient*  
*JÖBG* *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft*  
*JÖB* *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*  
*MM* Miklosich, F. and Müller, J., *Acta et Diplomata graeca mediae aevi sacra et profana*  
*MPG* Migne, J. P., *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeco-latina*  
*NH* *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων*  
*OCA* *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*  
*OCP* *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*  
*REB* *Revue des études byzantines*  
*SBN* *Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*  
*VV* *Vizantijskij Vremennik*  
*ZRVI* *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*