Introduction

Defining Europe and "the West" more generally has become a difficult and contentious project, as political as it is theoretical and as pressing as it is unlikely to result in a broad consensus. Now that boundaries are being tested and former certainties are becoming obsolete in both theory and practice, to define anything at this level of abstraction, with so much at stake for so many, is to enter a debate where theory is immediately translated into politics (or vice versa). For example, one recent trend of thought looks to the Roman tradition as the basis of European identity, but given how it understands "Rome" this position inevitably reflects a Latin bias. Are the Slavic, Germanic, and Greek traditions and contributions – to name only a few – so marginal? In a more sophisticated version, the Roman basis is perceived as fundamentally engaged with the Greek and Hebrew pasts and so both defined by them and in a self-conscious, secondary relation to them. Yet this ignores the degree to which ancient Hellenism and Judaism were themselves also defined through constructed oppositions, and it also tends to conflate "Roman" with "Latin" and even "Catholic," choices that, as we will see, are anything but ideologically neutral.[1] Others insist that Christendom is the true crucible of the modern West. But this too imposes discomforting exclusions, and challenges the secular enterprise of modernity. How *much* of Christendom anyway? In drawing battle lines for the next century, one foreign-policy theorist placed the orthodox world outside the West. Many Greeks, on the other hand, believe that their small country was included in the EEC at such an early stage largely (or only) because of the centrality of Hellas to "western civilization," and are frustrated when that tradition is excluded from proposed definitions.

Definitions have unintended and even ironic consequences. We could, for instance, define the West as including all nations that share in the

[1] Brague (2002); see Gourgouris (1996) 155 for recent debates.

following three patrimonies: all believe (or did until recently) that their cultures and ideals have been shaped by Greek literature and philosophy; by Roman law and systems of governance; and by Christianity. Lawyers in these countries study Roman jurisprudence regardless of whether their laws stem directly from the Roman tradition; their Academies include departments devoted to the study of classical antiquity; and their towns are full of Christian churches, regardless of whether they are attended. Certainly, these institutions are waning, and it is unclear what, if anything, will take their place. Moreover, other nations such as Turkey may (or may not) "join the club," but when they do it will be in awareness of the fact that their histories have been shaped by a different set of cultural coordinates.

Is this, then, the "essence" of the West? Perhaps it is, as long as we heed the lesson of the past century of scholarship: such essences are not immutable entities but rather sites of contestation. The reception of the Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions has unfolded in different circumstances and diverse cultures, resulting in a wide array of values and priorities. More importantly, Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem themselves stand for ideals whose essences are always contested and often at variance. Wars and philosophical battles have been fought over the true meaning of Christianity and over the mantle of Rome in Europe. So, on the one hand, the relationship between the Church and classical culture has always been tense, but, on the other, it is now impossible to speak of "authentic" Hellenism or Christianity. There is little fixity to be found here: the West is rather a basic set of problems followed by a multitude of answers. Still, there is something to be said for the fact that at least the fundamental problems of authority have remained recognizably the same, that passions can still be aroused over ancient things. If that ceases, the basic questions themselves will have become obsolete.

This study will complicate matters considerably by identifying something in the margins that has traditionally been excluded from the debate through a combination of ignorance and prejudice, and setting it squarely in the middle. In the process it will uncover forgotten alternatives and challenge familiar ones. After all, an unintended consequence of our definition of the basic cultural parameters of "the West" is that Byzantium emerges as the quintessentially western civilization. This is not how Byzantium is usually understood – far from it – but there is the irony too.

Without intending to contribute to these wider debates, modern historians of Byzantium have defined its civilization as the convergence of

"Roman political concepts, Greek culture, and Christian faith."[2] These are not modern categories; they reflect how some Byzantine thinkers perceived the composite nature of their culture. For example, in an oration on the Crucifixion, the orator and philosopher Michael Psellos of the eleventh century commented on the trilingual inscription placed on the Cross. Latin, he explains, stands for practical excellence and political strength, as the Romans were the most energetic and powerful people; Greek stands for the study of nature, as the Greeks surpassed all with regard to knowledge of the nature of beings; and Hebrew stands for infallible theology, as the Jews were the first to understand God.[3] In another cultural sphere, it was the confluence of Greek medicine, Christian charity, and the Roman welfare state that led in Byzantium to the invention of the hospital as we know it today.[4] This heuristic model can help us understand the dynamics of Byzantine culture in many of its expressions. Synesios of Kyrene (ca. AD 400) was at once a Platonist philosopher, Christian bishop, and orator-statesman in his local province and Constantinople. Consider his statement to Anysios that "I have not chosen an apolitical philosophy . . . given that the most philanthropic religion leads us to a character that cares for the polity." It has been noted that "his praise of Anysios as a soldier is typically Roman, while his ethical and political statements imply the possibility of achieving harmony between the values of Greek philosophy and the Christian religion."[5]

This book will trace the Byzantines' attempts to come to terms with these competing elements and chart their evolving reflections on the relative worth of each in the complex patrimony that they inherited from late antiquity. It was in fact the only time in history when these three cultural components ever fused together so powerfully and so clearly. It is ironic in light of this that Byzantium has not been studied with more sympathy in the West but has been dismissed as a fundamentally non-western, oriental, "other." How has this been done? First, its Roman identity has been denied or suppressed, and claimed as an exclusive possession of the West; second, Orthodoxy has been cast as oriental based on its unfamiliar (because more ancient) practices and cruel fate under the Ottomans, which shaped the biases of western travelers and early modern scholars; and, third, when it has

[2] Ostrogorksy (1969) 27. Cf. Zambelios (1857) 30–35, 490, 650, 683–691, who anticipated the attempt by modern Greek historiography to Hellenize Byzantium by downplaying its Roman component (see pp. 111–114 below). For the evolution of his thought, see Matalas (2002) 149–159.

[3] Psellos, *Oration on the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ* 359–378 (*Or. Hag.* 3). This cultural genealogy has nothing to do with the western medieval notion of the three sacred languages.

[4] Miller (1997).

[5] Synesios, *Katastasis* 1.305a–b; Bregman (1982) 168; cf. Lauxtermann (2003) 246.

not been appropriated and distorted by modern nationalism, Byzantine Hellenism has been reduced to a matter of manuscripts and Atticizing prose, which no one *wants* to read (or so we are told) and which few can anyway. In fact, many of the texts that will be studied here had not yet been published when formative views about Byzantium were put in place. But this fact does not excuse the level of the bias. For the past 500 years the West has imagined its relation to ancient Greece as a dynamic and vitally intellectual one, but even recent work continues to cast Byzantium not as a genuine participant but only as the caretaker of the classical tradition for the ultimate benefit of the West, its "true" heir.[6] So the history of *manuscripts* passes through Byzantium and the Arabs, but the history of *ideas* and *literature* routinely jumps from St. Augustine to the Renaissance. This is forgetfulness in the service of ideology.

In one sense, then, this study aims to fill in that huge gap for the benefit of all who are interested. The classical tradition was never lost in Byzantium, which is why it could not be rediscovered. There were periodic revivals, but there could be no Byzantine Renaissance, at least not in the western sense. In another sense, this study aims to correct an injustice. Byzantium has so far been represented through modern and western ideologies. That will here be reversed: cultural aspects and practices that are taken as definitively western will here be presented as basically Byzantine.

The first part of this book aims to define the cultural space occupied by Hellenism within the constitutive elements of Byzantine civilization. Specifically, the first chapter surveys the Hellenic legacies that the Byzantines inherited from antiquity, with attention to ideals and original social contexts. The emphasis is on notions of Hellenism embedded in canonical texts. Commentary and in-depth analysis have been kept to a minimum here, as this ground has been covered by others. The second and third chapters define the increasingly limited cultural space occupied by notions of Hellenism in relation especially to the Roman and Christian components of Byzantine identity. It is only against that background that we can understand the Hellenic "revivals" that occurred later, starting in the eleventh century, which were, in turn, philosophical, literary, and protonational. Specifically, the second chapter takes a new and close look at the Roman identity of Byzantium, which has amazingly been bypassed in the scholarship. Why did the Byzantines, the majority of whose ancestors

[6] One should compare here the Arabic reception of Greek thought, which is only now receiving serious and sympathetic attention in scholarship written for general audiences; see Gutas (1998), who, however, is hostile to Byzantium.

had been Greek, call and firmly believe themselves to be Romans? A new thesis will be advocated: Byzantium was not "a universal, Christian, multi-ethnic empire," as all think today, but a nation-state like most modern nation-states, in this case the nation-state of the Romans. The ancient Greeks, along with many other peoples and cultures, were assimilated to it and kept its identity, in various forms, for almost two thousand years.

The third chapter will examine the tensions between Christianity and the dominant Hellenic culture of late antiquity (in ca. AD 100–400). The identification of Hellenes and pagans was less accidental than it might seem at first: the Fathers of the Church knew that classical culture was contaminated not only by the gods and theology of the Greeks but also by their "worldly" values. It will be argued here that they never satisfactorily resolved those tensions which, moreover, were not primarily theological (as is usually assumed) but ethical.

The revivals of Hellenism in the middle period will be the subject of the second part of the book, a narrative of intellectual and cultural history that explores the gradual transformations of Byzantine identity that took place after the eleventh century, with emphasis on the role played in them by the reception of the classical tradition. The rise of independent philosophical thought and the aggression of the western (Latin) "Romans" challenged the Christian faith and the Roman identity of the empire. For some, philosophical Hellenism spurred the displacement of traditional Orthodoxy, in both metaphysics and ethics (Chapter 4); for others, classicizing performance (understood broadly) was energized as a cultural and existential ideal that pushed against the boundaries of its former confinement (Chapter 5); while in the thirteenth century Hellenism acquired the weight of national discourse and complemented the rhetoric of New Rome (Chapter 6). Throughout this period, the advancement of learning made high culture (*paideia*) a prominent pursuit for many, including emperors, bishops, scholars, philosophers, and high officials. The classical Greek legacy converted many to a cultural vision of Hellenism through the intense personal involvement and even enthusiasm it has always been able to generate. Through their cultivation of Attic Greek, Byzantine Hellenists had closer access and a greater stylistic affinity to the classics than has been possible ever since.

The two parts of the book are, therefore, separated by what appears to be a quite substantial gap, which stretches from the end of late antiquity to the mid-eleventh century. Hellenism was a burning question in late antiquity and became a preoccupation after the eleventh century. But between AD 400 and 1050 there was little interest in Greek identity, despite the

flourishing of scholarship and classicism in the years 400–640 and their revival after the late eighth century. On the question of what it could mean to be Greek in a more personal or collective sense, thinkers of the later period had to rediscover what had lain dormant in their texts and come to terms with it anew. As they picked up where late antiquity had left off, the two parts of the book are joined in a kind of counterpoint. The intermediate period is surveyed in a brief Interlude.

"Hellenism" is, of course, a huge and, in its totality, an unmanageable historical category. Depending on how we define it – linguistically, ethnically, nationally, culturally, or whether in terms of manuscripts, ideas, and identities – it encompasses such a vast body of evidence that no book will ever do it justice. Preliminary studies of its history in Byzantium lump together speech, literature, *paideia*, rhetoric, philosophy, art, and heresy.[7] Some methodological comments are therefore in order. This book is a study of Hellenic identity and will examine what it meant to be Greek at different times in Byzantium and why and how those ideas and their social context changed. It focuses on identity as discursively constructed and therefore on writers and intellectuals, who were admittedly a minority among the Byzantines, though an effort will also be made to determine the social scope of these ideas, especially in the thirteenth century. Studies of this specific problem to date consist of articles in which detailed theoretical analysis and the close reading of texts have not been feasible, as well as one dated, short, and inaccessible German dissertation that sweeps through the centuries.[8]

For reasons that will become clear, before the thirteenth century Hellenic identity in Byzantium was largely derived from one's stance toward the classical tradition, whose many aspects were not always harmonious, for example poetic, philosophical, or rhetorical. These, in turn, could be valorized and integrated into social and literary life in different and even contradictory ways. This explains the subtitle of this book, in which the conjunction "and" should be understood as limiting the second term: the reception of the classical tradition is studied only to the degree that it was implicated in the transformations of Hellenic identity. My aim has not been to compile catalogues of manuscripts, commentaries, lexika, or necessarily to determine who read what and how, or evaluate Byzantine

[7] E.g., Garzya (1985).
[8] Lechner (1954), limited to historical and patristic sources; cf. Jüthner (1923), a solid summary of the ancient evidence; more recently Garzya (1985) and (1992); Magdalino (1991a); Gounaridis (1996); Koder (2003); Dagron (2005b), all brief articles.

classical scholarship, though these were the basic modes and instruments of the reception of the classical tradition in Byzantium.[9]

Other topics of historical inquiry are more rigorously excluded by my focus. The reader will not find here an objective history of the "Greek-speakers," which would have to cope with many more "Hellenisms" than are studied here (e.g., the demography and languages of medieval southern Italy and Asia Minor after the Turkish inroads).[10] Nor will I discuss here the fascinating question of how Byzantines interpreted and reused the physical monuments of ancient Greece. This is the subject of a complementary and forthcoming book on *The Christian Parthenon: Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens* (to appear in 2008), where I demonstrate how those monuments claimed a prominent place in the landscape and local identities of Byzantium, albeit a place that is not always discursively defined in our sources.

Therefore, for all that it testifies to the vitality of the Hellenic tradition, this book is not concerned primarily with the question of Greek continuity, which involves diverse areas of research such as linguistics, settlement patterns, and folklore. These are valuable fields of study, but land demarcations, grammar, patterns of myth and metaphor in folklore, and customs such as bull sacrifices and ritual laments that have survived from antiquity to the present, were not understood by the Byzantines to be essentially Hellenic. Even animal sacrifices could be rededicated to saints and thereby take on an anti-pagan significance, which in the mind of some Byzantines would have made them anti-Hellenic by definition. We must "differentiate between ancient evidence of certain social and textual practices and ancient evidence that explicitly attests those practices as constitutive or expressive of a collective identity."[11] In other words, continuity of practice – which separate research leads me to believe was in fact considerable – is not the same as continuity of identity. Still, the history presented here, much of it for the first time, and the conclusions drawn from it, will surely be of interest to those who do study the more general questions of Greek continuity.

Many studies give the impression that Hellenism is an immutable entity that must be discovered behind the changing appearances of history, a

[9] Wilson (1983); Lemerle (1986); and Lauxtermann (2003), esp. ch. 3, for poetry.
[10] Cf. the titles of Vryonis (1971) and Martin (2005).
[11] McCoskey (2003) 98. Myth and metaphor: Alexiou (2002), also revisiting her study of the ritual lament. Folklore – both the discipline and its subject – was not recruited into the construction of Greek identity prior to the nineteenth century: ibid. 33; Herzfeld (1986); Skopetea (1988) 173, 194–196. Sacrifices: Kaldellis (2002) 179–181. For similar survivals, see Constantelos (1998) ch.3.

quasi-metaphysical assumption that has affected a variety of fields. For example, in the past historians tried to ascertain whether certain theological positions were more "Hellenic" in their "essence," say, whether the Iconophiles were more Hellenic compared to the "oriental" Iconoclasts, and so on. Such readings, now largely discredited, have had a long career but there now seems to be little prospect for their revival. They have no basis in the sources. This is a more delicate issue when it comes to the arguments advanced by modern Greek nationalism, which have not always respected the theoretical distinctions among biological continuity, cultural profiles, and national identity. Some Greek scholars cite later Byzantine claims of Hellenic identity as proof of the empire's underlying Hellenic "essence" throughout its history.[12] This methodology should be resisted, for those claims were the products of specific historical circumstances and need to be examined on their own terms; they presuppose the developments that are studied in this book. It is not our job (or right) as historians to tell our subjects whether they "really were" Greeks, but to understand *what* they may have meant by it when they said it and, if possible, *why* they said it. Besides, many Greek intellectuals and historians are now less interested in ethnic continuity, however strong the arguments in its favor may appear to be, than in the diverse historical forms of their national culture; and national pride has more to gain anyway from recognizing the adaptability of the Greek tradition and the power of its canonical literature to seduce even the most unreceptive of cultures.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible in this book to trace the history of Byzantine Hellenism all the way to the end of the empire's existence. Three main movements have been identified: Hellenism as philosophy in the eleventh century; as elite culture (*paideia*) and rhetorical performance in the twelfth; and as protonationalism in the thirteenth. The effort to describe these developments, along with the conflicts and transformations of late antiquity, has resulted in a long monograph already, and even there coverage has been too dense in places. Much remains to be done. Most of the authors discussed in the second part of this study have not been translated and so have not generated much secondary bibliography. There is often none to cite at all. Along with the limitations of my own expertise, these are some reasons why 1261 was chosen as a terminal date, though many exciting chapters in the history of Byzantine Hellenism occurred afterwards. In particular, two major figures stand at either end of that later period,

[12] E.g., Vryonis (1999); Missiou (2000). See pp. 111–112 below.

Theodoros Metochites and Georgios Gemistos "Plethon," who require separate monographs. I have no claim on them.

By the late thirteenth century the labels and reception of Hellenism had experienced such transformations (and ironies) as to make the period covered here conceptually satisfying. The Hellenic nationalism of the emperor Theodoros II Laskaris (d. 1258), with which I conclude, stands philosophically between the anti-barbarian Hellenism of the Persian Wars described by Herodotos and the Romanticism of the Greek Revolution.

PART I

Greeks, Romans, and Christians in late antiquity