Introduction

In 1935 the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, who coined the celebrated formula *Byzance après Byzance* in order to capture the centuries-old 'survivals' of Byzantine culture and institutions in southeastern Europe, declared the outbreak of the Greek war of independence in 1821 as the endpoint of this legacy – of *l'immuable pérennité byzantine* that had outlived the collapse of the empire by more than four centuries.[1] In many respects, however, the emergence of the modern Balkan nations and sovereign states in the nineteenth century signalled not the endpoint but the birth of Byzantium as a subject of these nations' history. The interest in Byzantium and its legacy in this part of Europe emerged simultaneously and was closely linked with the interest in the medieval precursors of the Balkan nation-states – an interest itself bolstered by the projects of national awakening and modern state-building.[2] This convergence had several momentous consequences. Since the medieval history of the Balkan societies and states was largely shaped in and by their relations with Byzantium, the question about the empire's role and impact became, and remained, a central theme in their national-historical self-narratives and identity politics. Byzantium came to be implicated heavily in issues such as ethnogenesis and collective identity, historical 'rights', national patrimony, culture and 'mentality'. As such, it was exposed to political and ideological deployment. At the same time, Byzantium – and Byzantine studies generally – long remained subsidiary to or subsumed under these countries' national medieval histories. Since the nineteenth century, Byzantine history has constituted, methodologically if not always

[1] Iorga 2000 [1935]. As is known, the term 'Byzantine', used to describe a political phenomenon beginning in the fourth century, is both a retronym, being coined in the sixteenth century, and an exonym, naming an entity in a different way from how its members themselves did.

[2] While this author is fully aware of the conceptual distinction often made between southeastern Europe and the Balkans (see Mishkova 2019), for the purposes of this study and its geographical purview, the two terms are used interchangeably.

institutionally, an essential part of the Balkan national historiographies, and Byzantium and its legacy were, and still are, interpreted from discrete national points of view.

This book explores the national interpretations of the impact of the Byzantine empire and the Byzantine legacy in the historiographies of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Turkey – countries which once belonged to the Byzantine political and cultural orbit and whose modern history, it is often held, bears, to a greater or lesser extent, the hallmark of these political and cultural entanglements. Dimitri Obolensky's famously couched idea of Byzantine Commonwealth – a community cutting across linguistic and ethnic boundaries and united by Byzantine traditions and Orthodoxy – easily comes to mind. In the perspective of Byzantium's 'afterlife' in the historiographies of southeastern Europe, however, it is this notion's ironic retraction that stands out. Variously appropriated and instrumentalised, and subject to often conflicting interpretations, Byzantine culture and legacy subverted rather than asserted the idea of a shared past.

The question of Byzantium's multifarious *survivances* – their continuity and metamorphoses – after the collapse of the Byzantine polity in 1453 is an old one for students of the empire and for those concerned with the national manifestations of these survivals.[3] The object of this survey is different, namely to show the ways in which the Byzantine impact and legacy were perceived, interpreted and constructed by the historiographies of the modern Balkan 'successor states'. For, as sociologist Johann Arnason notes, 'if it makes sense to speak of the path-dependency of nation-formation, in a cultural as well as a political sense, the post-Byzantine constellation is an exceptionally complex and interesting one: no other historical empire has had a similar variety of national claimants to or depositories of its legacy'.[4] The modern representations of Byzantium by the national claimants do not, however, constitute monolithic wholes reflecting some overarching consensual narratives about the past. Instead, we are faced with internal contestations, tensions and dialogue between different interpretations, which unfurl in transnational communication

[3] Nicolae Iorga (2000 [1935]) is considered the great initiator in this area. Obolensky 1982 is an important reference in discussions of the Byzantine Commonwealth's afterlife. Clucas 1988, Ševčenko 1991 and Yiannias 1991 are devoted primarily to the Byzantine heritage in Russia and Greece. Stamatopoulos 2009 examines late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives of Byzantium by selecting a confined number of authors and ordering them in contrasting pairs representative of the 'canonical' and 'deviating' versions of these narratives. A recent collection devoted specifically to southeastern Europe is Delouis, Couderc and Guran 2013.

[4] Arnason 2000: 56–7.

within regional and extra-regional academic currents amid the backdrop of and in conjunction with changing political, geopolitical and intellectual contexts. Therefore, while elaborating on the individual national cases, this study seeks to juxtapose and compare the narratives stemming from various modern cultural contexts.

Non-Balkan, Western and Russian historiographies of Byzantium are being factored into the analysis insofar as they have demonstrably influenced the construction or modification of the local narratives. Central to the discussion, and a main argument of the book, is the gravity of the interplay between Western conceptions of ancient Greece and Byzantium and the claims of scholars based in the region; the series of interactions – and, in the political sense, 'reactions' – between persons writing from outside and those working within (and speaking on behalf of) a given polity. Consequently, writings of both émigré or expat scholars and Western scholars, who lack any personal connection with the region but whose works effectively entered the bloodstream of political thinking and historiography there, are integral to our story. A recently proposed cultural semiotic reading of the meanings and functions of Byzantium in modern and post-modern European culture suggests the existence of two different semiotic spheres – a Byzantine one with its cultural centre in Constantinople and a Western one with its normative cultural centre in Paris. The negative meanings of Byzantium – itself a term that originated from within the Western semiosphere – are said to be characteristic of the Western and not of the Byzantine semiosphere; the same features that are valued negatively within the Western semiosphere are turned into their opposites when related to the Byzantine cultural centre.[5] Normative cultural orientations have no doubt been important in fathoming Byzantium as 'ours' or 'theirs' – the Balkan 'modernisers', for example, were as a rule extremely critical of everything Byzantine in their own semiosphere. But as this study will try to demonstrate, in order to be understood, the 'fundamentally different meanings, functions and values' attributed to the notion of Byzantium are in need of painstaking historicisation. Thereby a 'semantic situation' in both Western and Balkan historiographies will emerge, which is more complex and protean than divergence or appropriation between the two semiospheres might lead us to expect.

Several caveats ought to be made clear from the outset. The purpose of this book is not the examination of the Balkan traditions, or the 'Balkan' history, of Byzantine studies in each of the nations under investigation,

[5] Bodin 2016: 11–42.

which is an interesting and worthy but secondary task here. Nor can it serve as a comprehensive catalogue of those regional historians who dealt with Byzantine themes. While accounting for the gradual institutionalisation and the directions Byzantine studies took, the intention here is to explore the various projections or appropriations of Byzantium – the assessments of its role and effects by the national historiographies in the region – but also how Byzantium was deployed in the service of weaving, or contesting, the master historical narratives of these societies. It is, therefore, a study of the mirrored reflections of Byzantium, not the historical actuality. These reflections are also historical facts but they belong less to the history of the Byzantine empire than to that of modern historiography. The present book should rather be seen as an exploration of the *politics* of Byzantine studies – of the images, perceptions and understandings this field has cultivated during the last two and a half centuries – and a critical interrogation of 'Byzantium' as a historiographical construct with considerable ideological potential in shaping national history and national identity.

The elusiveness of the Byzantine phenomenon itself has made it unusually easy for scholars, intellectuals and politicians to 'pick and mix' what they wanted from it. Byzantium meant different things to different people inside and outside the imperial frontiers at the same time, and was marked by significant variety and mutability, its sphere of radiation far from congruent with its areas of direct politico-military control at any one moment. The will-o'-the-wisp quality peculiar to this 'variable-geometry empire', as one of this book's anonymous reviewers shrewdly observed, does not lend itself to tidy definitions and this lies behind the interminable debate over the proper signifiers for denoting the phenomenon of Byzantium. Taking a stance on which signifier is 'correct', and which is not, has not been among the pursuits of this author, who prefers to retain the status of a 'neutral observer' of the ongoing debate among specialists over the nature of Byzantium. Admittedly, the pliancy of the concept of 'Byzantium' to vastly different classifications and uses is to a great extent a reflection of Byzantium's mercurial qualities.

Reception studies, a burgeoning field of late, tends to foreground the substantial role of popular culture – particularly historical fiction, movies and popular magazines – and political discourses in the dissemination of historical imageries. Exploring the uses of Byzantium in Balkan literature and popular culture and of the perceptions they cultivate falls outside the remit of this study.[6] Up to a point, it is geared towards elucidating the way

[6] See on this Marciniak and Smythe 2016 and Auzépy 2003.

the historiography on Byzantium was, and is, contributing to these perceptions – a question that has not been tackled. The discourses that made use of Byzantium permeated a number of other disciplines: literary studies, philology, theology, law, architecture, the visual arts, music. All of these subjects draw cognitive validity from history, which puts historiography in a 'strategic' position in the field. At the same time, the national schools of medieval and Byzantine studies were often suffused with meta-political messages, thus blurring the boundary between public (or political-ideological) and academic discourses.

The field thus charted is vast, encompassing five national historiographies across more than two and a half centuries of development. Although varying in degree, the presence of the 'Byzantine factor' in all national histories – either of the medieval period or in historical syntheses – and the frequent 'national references' in the specialised literature on Byzantium proper call for rigorous selection of the sources. No single study can claim to represent an exhaustive survey of the historiographic emplotments of Byzantium across such an ambit; the present one attempts instead to identify and discuss in some depth a representative sample of scholars, mostly historians, whose writings can help us capture the dynamics and connotations of Byzantium's 'presence' in the histories of the empire's heirs. Methodologically speaking, the least cogent choice this author had to make was to leave out scrutinising the way Byzantine art and architecture has been treated in art-historical literature. This was a difficult choice considering how important these interpretations are in academic discussions of Byzantium. However, the vastness of the literature on Byzantine art and architecture and exigencies of depth made it unavoidable. Partly mitigating the lacuna is the fact that, compared to other sub-fields, critical history of Byzantine art and architectural history, occasionally subsumed under 'heritage studies', has benefited most during the last years from closer engagement with ongoing theoretical debates, and in several Balkan countries there have been promising breakthroughs.[7]

To allow the major patterns to emerge, the chronological purview of the analysis is kept wide, emphasising transformative trends and main schools of thought. The historiographical 'eras' around which the book is organised – pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment perspectives; the Romantic era; the late-nineteenth-century turn towards critical ('scientific') historiography and the institutionalisation of Byzantine studies; the interwar period; the post-World War II and post-1989 narrations – should not be

[7] Laurențiu 2001; Popescu 2004; Yıldız 2011; Ćurčić 2013; Ignjatović 2016.

taken to imply neatly ordered entities and clearly separated cultural/ideological formations. For one thing, none of these divisions, not even the typically taxonomic like the Enlightenment or Romanticism, represent coherent bodies of thought. Moreover, there has been much overlapping and criss-crossing between epochs. The late-nineteenth-century Turkish narrative, for instance, signalled the appearance of Byzantium as a historical referent in a framework blending Enlightenment, Romantic and 'modernist' registers. The complexity of the evolution often contravenes common historical sensibility to transformative change, itself sometimes conceptualised as such at a much later date. Hence in historical evolution the line of demarcation between historical periods can never be but arbitrary. Such epochs in historiography serve to mark (often gradual) semantic and discursive shifts, or 'crises of representation', where old and new representations co-exist and where the rate of change across the different historiographic traditions may vary.

It is at the same time undisputable that certain sets of cultural/ideological formations came to prominence during particular historical epochs, reminiscent of 'paradigm shifts', typically in contestation with alternative formations and amid ideological struggles. Moreover, apart from diachronic conceptual transformation and cleavages, there are synchronic divergences across the given traditions. Obviously, the salience of Byzantium with respect to national symbolism and representation was not evenly distributed over time in the different countries. Whereas the Romantic era was decisive in devising the master narratives of Byzantium in the Greek and Bulgarian narratives, it was far less crucial for the Romanian and Serbian interpretations and least so for the Turkish, where 'critical' historiography made much greater contributions; the positivist turn at the beginning of the twentieth century was more important for the crystallisation of the Romanian historical canon than of the Greek, and so on. The incidence of competing narratives also varied from one national case to another: whereas the Greek and Turkish interwar historiographies failed to produce rival interpretations, this was not the case in the Bulgarian and especially the Romanian during the same period, or the Serbian in the preceding one. As expected, for all these historiographies the post-World War II period proved most fecund and variegated, whereas the higher degree of professionalisation of Byzantine research dampened (or at least posed as eschewing) overt ideologisation and politicisation. Hence in the analysis that follows different weight (and space) is assigned to the discrete periods in the respective national historiographic traditions.

From such premises, adopting chronologically circumscribed chapters operates as a tool for bringing order to the change and difference of the responses given to the question under investigation. In doing so, the author has given preference to conveying the actual 'voices' of the protagonists and heeding the readers' 'feel' for the arguments put forward rather than to a chronologically exhaustive but necessarily succinct recording of the various interpretations. An attempt has thus been made to strike a middle ground between a broad overview, covering the formative phase, institutionalisation and thriving of historical and Byzantine studies, and an in-depth case study of the main actors in an effort to unravel the actual motivating forces and stakes of the debate within a broader transnational framework.

PART I

On the Road to the Grand Narrative

CHAPTER I

Precursors
The Historiography of the Enlightenment

The Eastern Roman empire, named 'Byzantine' a century after its demise, is a latecomer to European historiography. Following its fall to the Ottomans in 1453, its history evoked scant interest in the Latin West and among the humanists of the Renaissance. Émigré Byzantine intellectuals such as Manuel Chrysoloras, John Argyropoulos and Bessarion inaugurated the study of Greek philology in Italy, but what motivated their work and that of their pupils was an interest not in the history of the 'Greek empire' but in classical learning. 'Byzantium', George Ostrogorski observed about this period, 'was regarded as the store house in which the treasures of the classical world were to be found, while there was little interest in the schismatic Byzantine Empire itself.'[1]

The very idea of a 'Byzantine empire' as a cultural-political concept radically different from the Roman empire was slow to take root before the nineteenth century as power politics kept sustaining the terminological obscurity surrounding the notion of Byzantine. On the one hand, following the institution of the self-professed Holy Roman empire towards the end of the eighth century, the Latin West had sought to deny the Romanity of the Byzantines, branding their empire as 'Greek', 'Orthodox', 'Lower' or 'empire of Constantinople' and laying exclusive claim to the prestige, legacy and power of Rome. Byzantium in this sense functioned as an exonym of Western European coinage intended to convey its 'otherness' to Rome and, by extension, 'Europe'. At the same time, however, when Louis XIV laid bare his aspirations to the imperial dignity of the emperors of Constantinople, he did so not because he wanted to show himself as a Byzantine emperor but because he saw himself as the successor of the Roman emperors. In his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734), Montesquieu also acknowledged, for strategic polemical reasons, the idea of a continuous Roman empire.[2]

[1] Ostrogorsky 1980: 2.
[2] On the abiding effects of the 'rhetorical violence of Latin propaganda' that painted the Byzantines as not really Romans but something else (typically Greeks and/or Orthodox), see Kaldellis 2019: 3–37.

Western interest, philological and historical, in the 'East Rome' and its heritage originated in the sixteenth century, initially in Italy. Its stimuli were primarily political (the threat from the expanding Ottoman state that served to arouse interest not only in the Ottoman Turks themselves but in the Eastern Roman imperial past as well), humanistic (the discovery of the Greek and Byzantine worlds) and religious (the attention to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine aroused by the denominational struggles between reformers and counter-reformers).[3] In Germany, it was an interest in German unity in the face of the Turkish danger and considerable stakes in oriental trade that inspired the powerful business-house of the Fuggers in Augsburg to finance, and its librarian Hieronymus Wolf to undertake, work on the edition and translation of Byzantine authors' *Corpus historiae byzantinae* in 1562 – an enterprise that Wolf's pupil, David Hoeschel, continued with philological skill and 'scrupulous dealing with historical criticism'.[4]

The flourishing of Byzantine studies and Byzantine history in seventeenth-century France, on the other hand, was directly connected with the development of French absolutist and imperial ideology and France's particularly strong diplomatic and economic relations with the Ottoman empire.[5] Hellenist and religious *érudits* were called upon to explain the history of Byzantium in such a way as to legitimise the rights of the king of France over the imperial title at the expense of the Ottoman sultans and Habsburg emperors. Closely linked with this political historical interest was the study of the Greek language in its various forms and historical evolution – a preoccupation 'tied in with the very immediate demands of the cultural politics of the period which produced it'.[6] The crowning achievement of the French school, financed by the royal court, was the corpus of the Byzantine historians, the so-called *Byzantine du Louvre* (or *Corpus Parisiense*), published in twenty-four volumes between 1645 and 1711. These bilingual editions, in Greek and Latin, were executed by learned Jesuits, Benedictines and Dominicans, notably Philippe Labbé, Pierre Poussines, Charles du Fresne du Cange, François Combefis, Jean Mabillon and Bernard de Montfaucon, who combined imperial visions

On Byzantium as an 'avatar' of the Roman Empire in seventeenth-century French imperial ideology, see Spieser 2016: 199–210.

[3] A standard reference for the historiography of Byzantine history in the sixteenth and seventeenth century is Pertusi 1967. Characteristically, this erudite work draws a distinction between the intellectual work done by scholars and the use made of it by the powerful – a dichotomy that is no longer acceptable from an epistemological point of view. See Reinsch 2010: 435–44.

[4] Reinsch 2016: 43–54. [5] Bréhier 1901: 1–36; Auzépy and Grélois 2001.

[6] Jeffreys, Haldon and Cormack 2008: 7.