

Introduction

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Over recent decades, scholars studying Byzantine archaeology and material culture have made considerable progress. Recent work has demonstrated that interest in the Byzantine world is strong among professional academics, and the volume of research from archaeologists, art historians, historians, and other scholarly specialists working in the Balkans, Aegean, and Anatolia indicates that the period 300–1500 AD is not forgotten. Certainly the academic disciplines which comprise Byzantine studies have picked up considerable steam since the start of the twentieth century and Byzantine archaeology has advanced a great deal since its origins in the mid-nineteenth century.¹ A book that aims to provide an introduction to current scholarship on medieval Byzantine material culture is therefore long overdue.

The aims of the contributors to the current project are to review the state of fields of Byzantine archaeology and material culture, examine new scholarly trends, and signal the paths forward for future research. A material cultural approach not only emphasizes the physical reality of objects, but invites engagement beyond corporeality, into the psychological and social worlds of space, power, and mentalities. Of course, not all these aspects can be explored here, but it is hoped that our introduction to a wide range of topics and their fundamental treatment will generate significant discussion and further investigation. While every effort has been made to be comprehensive, with sections devoted to a range of specializations not often given parity within Byzantine studies, one volume cannot be truly exhaustive. Regrettably, chapters promised by some authors did not appear and the decision was made to advance the project without them rather than delay it further; among those lost were sections devoted to monasticism, conflict archaeology, the book in material culture, and a handful of others for which I can only express my regret on behalf of readers. In the future I hope the respective authors will make these works known via other avenues. Nonetheless, many key issues have been treated within this work, and from these we can prospect not only existing frameworks of inquiry

¹ Effenberger 2006a; Ousterhout 2011b.

within Byzantine archaeology and material culture but also glimpse of future horizons.

The tremendous chronological expanse of Byzantium likewise requires a broader treatment than possible in one work. From the initiation of this project, I decided that it would focus not on late antiquity but on the medieval Byzantium of the seventh through fifteenth centuries. The intention is not to remove Byzantium from late antiquity (although I feel late antique studies is increasingly doing this), but to fix academic attention on the nine centuries of Byzantine civilization which have tended to be less well known than the earlier era of the empire. This focus also helps one to survey major questions of the emergence of medieval Byzantine culture and its flourishing, and in doing so, hopefully remove discussion of these rich centuries from the annex of late antiquity and the attic of decline and fall. Nonetheless, the momentous changes and their critical effects remain visible, often through the sharp void of their absence. In an effort to reorient scholars interested in medieval Byzantium, I think it necessary to embrace new perspectives and engage to some extent in purposeful forgetting. Among the perspectives we need to purge from scholarship are imagined classical pasts, where constructions, often Romantic in nature, of the aesthetics and ideals of classical Greece and Rome are the yardstick by which we measure Byzantium. The inhabitants of the empire neither wholly shared nor attempted to recreate these aesthetic forms, and lived very different lives from citizens of the classical *poleis*, even if they did consciously and unconsciously use, reuse, and adapt classical Greek and Roman forms throughout their existence in nearly every area of life.

Part I of this volume comprises an overview of major methods and objective types of evidence within Byzantine material cultural studies. Underpinning advances in Byzantine archaeology are a better understanding of primary materials and methods, beginning with Richard Hodges, whose discussion of excavation opens the work. While increasingly rare, archaeology remains one of the few ways scholars of Byzantium can access new primary data. Of course, in any one book it is impossible to cover all possible types of physical evidence. Starting with chapters by Richard Hodges and Ufuk Serin, who deal with archaeological excavation and survey, respectively, we examine the ways in which data are brought to scholarly attention and how these continue to develop. Materials like bone, treated by Anthousa Papagiannaki (see Chapter 9) are handled not only with an eye on elite objects, such as luxury ivories, and their production, but also via items of daily use, such as simple tools. Textiles, examined by Petra Linscheid (see Chapter 12), apart from items of silk, only rarely

receive attention within surveys of this kind.² Pamela Armstrong (in Chapter 3) traces developments in the tradition of Byzantine pottery and notes that in recent decades scholarship has made considerable advances. Much work remains to be done: the identification of local and regional coarse wares of all periods, fuller study of utilitarian types of storage- and work-vessels, and the identification of kilns, as well as a full classification of medieval amphoras. Metal objects, traditionally approached through silver and other precious items, are examined via material and technical, as well as artisanal, perspectives by Brigitte Pitarakis (Chapter 8). Coins, an object of study in their own right by numismatists who examine stylistic elements and monetary history, are, of course, also important economic markers; both Julian Baker (see Chapter 5) and Cécile Morrisson (Chapter 25 in Part II) treat these complexions of the evidence. Too frequently, scholars have overlooked the reuse and recycling of built environments in Byzantium. In Part II, Cecily Hennessy (Chapter 28) examines architecture and spolia (reused material) as categories of evidence and recent shifts in scholarly attitudes toward these, while Joanita Vroom's chapter (Chapter 35) deals with multiple aspects of pottery; the chapter also challenges us to see the last centuries of the empire through pots, when considerable innovation and diversity are detectable, offering a sharp contrast with the traditional historical narrative of decline. In this way it is hoped that material studies can help remove our focus from frameworks of conventional approaches, which stress political history and the "great man," and lead us to more expansive and deeper approaches to understanding the lives of ordinary Byzantines.

In recent years, Hodges has conducted one of the most important and successful excavations at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Butrint, in Albania. The work of the Butrint team demonstrates what a group of dedicated researchers can accomplish when sufficient human and financial resources are available. However, excavations of medieval Byzantine sites by Byzantine specialist scholars are exceedingly rare. In nearly every case, Byzantinists have benefited from the data generated by archaeologists careful enough to record a site's material elements, as at Sinope and Caesarea in Israel. In many instances, though, a number of prime questions of Byzantine urbanism remain elusive, despite the attention we have afforded them. Among the large issues that still require much consideration, I include the transition from the ancient to the medieval world in general, especially its regional dimensions. Moreover, we require a great

² See Jeffreys et al. 2008b.

deal more knowledge of the management and ordering of urban space; intramural population densities; the organization of space as expression of public and private, sacred and profane; material expressions of power and those under its influence; hybridity of urban-like spaces; and Byzantine cityscapes. This list is not exhaustive, of course.

For decades, the Amorium Excavation Project was the only long-term excavation of a medieval Byzantine urban center. One hopes that the transfer of the site to Zeliha Demirel Gökalp signals another period of successful research and publication after decades of careful work and dissemination by Chris Lightfoot and others. The case of Amorium serves to illustrate two key concerns for those interested in the Byzantine past: the paucity of excavations of medieval urban sites and the loss of cultural heritage (on the latter, see below). Unfortunately, the case of Amorium is exceptional: there are no other, and probably never will be again, large-scale systematic investigations of medieval Byzantine cities. So much deeper, then, is our regret of the loss of vast quantities of medieval materials from Troy, Ephesus, Athens, and Antioch, among many sites where romanticism, antiquarianism, and nationalism converged and led to the cleansing of such spaces of their medieval and modern “detritus.”³ It is facile to cast aspersions on the Zeitgeist of a particular past and thus divert ourselves from learning valuable lessons which will hopefully inform a better understanding. What is clear is that, in no small part due to our narrow scope of access, much of the essence of Byzantine cities has thus far eluded our grasp. This is most obvious in the case of Constantinople, which was by turns majestic and haggard (and probably both at the same time, as we can surmise from texts and what is known from other medieval cities). As Albrecht Berger notes in Chapter 13, the archaeological cloth of the former capital is rather threadbare, and one has to make do with a patchwork approach utilizing texts and an impoverished material record which has (understandably) been approached predominantly through an antiquarian, architectural lens. How much can students of Byzantium hope to learn of the city from Istanbul, a pulsing, seemingly perpetually expanding city of at least 14.5 million that has engulfed the whole of its predecessor and its suburbs? Precious little, it turns out, as demonstrated by recent efforts, and we await the release of a database of Turkish rescue archaeology, and hopefully normative archaeological data as well, in order to construct more knowledge of Byzantine Constantinople. What about the “second” and “third” cities of Thessaloniki, Adrianople, Smyrna, Nicaea, Nicomedia, Ankara – to name

³ Athanassopoulos 2002.

but a few – which preserve precious little from the millennial matrix of the Byzantine past; cities like these are unlikely to yield anything more than the barest of salvage work. It is therefore regrettable that the archaeological database (www.istanbulkulturenvanteri.gov.tr) created for the “Istanbul City of Culture” in celebration of the naming in 2010 of the city as the European Capital of Culture is apparently permanently offline.⁴

Publication has expanded dramatically in the past fifty years, but this is not a sign of robust programs or individual scholars with an interest in Byzantine studies. It is rather the happy byproduct of the expansion of multiperiod studies whose investigators are in the main practitioners of theories and methods that derive predominantly from archaeologies of pre-history and the Bronze Age, or classical archaeology. Unfortunately, in spite of efforts by academic practitioners to cover the classical world, we have fallen short, despite numerous strenuous efforts of dedicated colleagues. Nonetheless, we have learned a great deal, and, as chapters by Serin (Chapter 2), Decker (Chapter 33), and Zavagno (Chapter 32) indicate, there are many developments to consider, from the perspective not only of landscape and settlement, but numerous others as well. And as the authors in this volume have indicated, despite the challenges, there are opportunities available to students of Byzantine material culture through survey evidence and numerous subsets of specialist inquiry. Disciplinary borderlands of traditional, specialist pursuits, including pure fields like epigraphy, as treated by Lauritzen in this volume (see Chapter 6), remain, in many senses, quite open to further advances. As Lauritzen notes, there is no universal published corpus of Byzantine inscriptions, something which today could be accomplished digitally in a way inconceivable mere decades ago. The same is true of a subfield which relies heavily on epigraphic and onomastic knowledge, namely sigillography, treated here by Karagiorgou (see Chapter 7). No unified database of Byzantine lead seals exists and such a dataset should be a priority to be completed this century. None of these tasks is easy, but they are certainly achievable.

Part II deals with major themes within the study of Byzantine archaeology and material culture. Albrecht Berger examines the archaeological history, known monuments, and spaces of Constantinople (Chapter 13), while James Crow offers a detailed study of the current state of scholarship, major sites, and issues within the archaeology of Byzantium in the Balkans (Chapter 14). Paul Arthur (Chapter 15) perlustrates work over the past century in the former western lands of Byzantium, from Spain to North Africa

⁴ Many thanks to Ken Dark for the reference.

and Italy. While much research has been done in Italy, Arthur's work makes it clear that there remain considerable gaps to be filled. Turning once again to the east, in Chapter 16 Philipp Niewöhner offers a current prospection of work in Anatolia. There, despite his deft handling of the material and fine overview, as well as his recently edited work on the subject, it is clear that we nonetheless still face major scholarly blind spots and large swathes of territory remain largely underexplored.⁵ Recent work, such as the survey by Haldon, Elton and their colleagues around Avkat (medieval Euchaita), stands alongside that of scores of Turkish archaeologists and foreign teams toiling around the countryside – impressive in its scope, for certain. Yet, as important and impressive as are the reports published annually in the *Arastırma Sonuçları Toplantısı* (AST), there is generally a lack of final publication, and of detailed ceramic and coin studies. Egypt, Byzantine until the sixth century, is absent from our analysis due to unforeseen circumstances on the part of the proposed author, while the Levant is treated in two chapters which examine multiple facets of archaeology at the end of Byzantine rule and into the early centuries of Islamic rule (see Taxel (Chapter 17) and Avni (Chapter 34)).

To date, Byzantine archaeology and the study of material culture has been generally undertheorized and thus certain perspectives and avenues of research have been limited. Many authors in the present volume examine the implications of past and current practices and their potential to enrich Byzantine studies. In his work on the use of Byzantium in scholarly and public discourse and the role of archaeologists, art historians, and other specialists in these discourses, Kostis Kourelis (Chapter 23) provides a provocative point of departure for discussing the “point” of Byzantium today. This is, of course, a subject recently dealt with in detail by Averil Cameron, whose thoughts have challenged us to ponder the place of Byzantium in what we nowadays call public culture, or the popular imagination. Apart from in the Balkans and among certain Orthodox Christian communities, Byzantium has little role in the identity formation of most people who live within its former borders, and less still in the world beyond. While Vladimir Putin may find the image of the Byzantines useful, breathing new life into czarist propaganda of Moscow as the Third Rome and the Byzantines/Russians as defenders of civilization against barbarity in his simple rhetoric intended for mass appeal, there is no such image existing in the west. Instead, one is more likely to find more placid notions of Byzantium as a cultural repository, a hollow vessel of Hellenism, or a

⁵ Niewöhner 2017.

gilded reliquary of Orthodoxy (on this see more below). While such images may inspire a broader public engagement, they are in many ways deeply misleading, even damaging, as Cameron has already noted.⁶ One of the many challenges facing us is to generate interest in the more humble strata of Byzantine society, as well as in the varieties of belief and ways of being in the middle and later centuries of the empire. Archaeology and the interpretation of material objects has much to add to these discussions, and it is on topics like these that Marica Cassis, Richard Hodges, and Myrto Veikou, among others in this volume, make persuasive cases through a number of studies showing that the field has indeed made great advances, or, as Hodges notes, lost some of its innocence.⁷

It seems more than fair to say that conceptions of space, identity, and gender have been slow to permeate Byzantine studies, despite the work of a number of dedicated scholars.⁸ These areas of study are no doubt challenging to explore and heavily reliant on sometimes controversial theoretical models, but their inclusion here marks a welcome addition to enlarging debates within Byzantine studies and to fostering an outward-looking scholarship, which seeks comparisons and companions in medieval studies to east and west alike.

In this way, I hope this present volume shifts discussion toward the majority of the people in the empire, in their interactions with the physical and built environment, as examined by Nicolas Bakirtzis (Chapter 30) and through the chapter of Cecily Hennessey (Chapter 28), in which she examines the multiple ways in which Byzantine citizens interacted with their environment and their past via spolia. While these studies bring approaches to bear anchored in disciplines such as architecture, history, urban planning, art history, and aesthetics, other components of environments within the empire are treated via scientific methods by Chryssa Bourbou (Chapter 21), who is the first scholar to apply a bioarchaeological approach to multiple sites in medieval Greece; using these methods, areas of research that are entirely underdeveloped in Byzantine studies are opened to prospection.

Students of Byzantium have often concentrated on treasures and elite artifacts of Byzantine art, most notably in the spectacularly successful three-part Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibitions which drew hundreds of thousands of visitors who beheld masterpieces from around Byzantium

⁶ Cameron 2014. ⁷ See Clarke 1973.

⁸ Ringrose 2013; Brubaker and Tougher 2013; Baker 2002; McClanan 2002; Bjørnholt and James 2007.

and the Orthodox world. Such displays are crucial if Byzantinists are to appeal to a large audience whose interest in sumptuous objects and expert craftsmanship is quite natural, part of our cultural conditioning and perhaps even biological at its core.⁹ The advantages of such exhibitions are many, the most obvious being the ability to draw and interest a broad audience with the consequent increase in public awareness and engagement with Byzantine culture, but any categorization means making choices and limiting options as a consequence, and so there are significant disadvantages as well. Among these is what we might call the “Empire of Gold” syndrome, a kind of gilded cage into which Byzantine studies has been fixed.¹⁰ The Empire of Gold is an empire of elites, of sumptuous (mostly religious) objects, and masterpieces of art and architecture. Even as art historians and historians have rightfully appealed to lay and scholarly audiences’ fascination with exotic, singular works, the focus on the richest treasures has overshadowed more workaday objects. Consequently we lose a good deal of insight into how many people in the empire experienced and expressed life. As the study of Byzantine archaeology and material culture engages with broader trends in archaeology that stress anthropological methods and engagement with past populations beyond elites, this is slowly changing. In this present volume, both Chris Lightfoot (Chapter 10) and Anthousa Papagiannaki (Chapter 9) devote attention to more common objects in glass and bone, respectively. Similarly, while textiles only rarely form a component of the conversation around material culture, Petra Linscheid (Chapter 12) catalogues Byzantine techniques and not only objects from the treasuries of Europe’s greatest museums and churches, but also textiles and garments which belonged to people of all classes.

No less challenging is the conception of Byzantium as the “Empire of Faith.”¹¹ In the present work, Vincenzo Ruggieri (Chapter 31) examines sacred space through the lenses of legal, liturgical, and architectural articulation of the sacred in Christian sanctuaries. Alas, the planned companion chapters examining the monastic environment and monastic economy never came to fruition, something we can only hope can be rectified in a future edition. Nonetheless, there are other critical gaps which material culture could help fill via combined material cultural approaches. Byzantinists have, with rare exceptions, dealt rather perfunctorily with popular religion – a devilish term usually taken within competing dichotomies of rural versus urban or “official” versus “illicit,” or which may be as simple as the notion

⁹ Meert et al. 2014. ¹⁰ Cameron 2014, pp. 68–86.

¹¹ E.g. Sarris 2011; Evans 2004; cf. Cameron 2014, pp. 887–111.

of the veneration of saints and hagiography, these being assumed to have been the objects of attention of people from all walks of life. In any case, numerous facets of the study of Byzantine religion stand to benefit from the collaboration of specialists from a range of fields.

It is a testament, though, to the health of the fields which comprise Byzantine material culture studies that such a diversity of scholars provide such range and depth to numerous questions of wider significance in Byzantine studies. From their work and that of many colleagues on whose expertise we relied in the crafting of this volume, it is clear that the study of Byzantine material culture is thriving. Of course, many challenges remain, which we can here raise only briefly.

While the academy as a whole is flourishing, the growth in new student numbers has trended sharply toward Asia. Can Byzantium become a real part of scholarly discourse in institutions outside the west and Russia? There are a few academicians interested in Byzantium in places like China, India, or Japan, where scholars like the founder of Byzantine studies in Japan, Kin-ichi Watanabe, are rare.¹² A more forceful argument is therefore to be made to bring Byzantium to the fore as an important part of global history and thus part of a shared cultural heritage, study of which transcends parochial concerns and base nationalism. Among the obstacles to achieving this, however, is the prominent place that classical studies have in shaping both the audience of Byzantine studies and its discourses. It is difficult to escape the role of “blood and belonging”¹³ in the object of scholarly pursuits – the strong feelings which kindle one’s emotions and, for some, ultimately lead to devoting a life to the study of a largely forgotten era and people. As one whose research fund was endowed by a Greek American whose interest in Byzantium was a result of the role of the empire in negotiating Orthodox Christianity and, more remotely, its “Greekness,” in this simple schema the fact that my own background is remote from Greece or the Balkans supports the view that the Byzantine past has allure beyond those who consider themselves its direct heirs. The stress scholars have traditionally placed on Christianity as central to imperial history and identity is also a potential obstacle, though with its claims to universalism and in light of the fact that it counts the largest number of practitioners presently, not apparently a serious one. In this effort, discussions of material culture have the potential to add greatly to public awareness, especially in China, within the borders of which Byzantine objects are

¹² Otsuki 2012. ¹³ Ignatieff 2010.

found in some number and Chinese scholars have expressed at least some interest in the subject.¹⁴

As the present volume indicates, Byzantine material culture studies are thriving in a number of countries, partly due to the integration of new theories and new methods which enliven new perspectives. Thus, while the forecast for some branches of traditional study, namely archaeological excavation, look grim, other areas such as archaeological survey, epigraphy, and the study of Byzantine objects seem to have a bright future, in no small part owing to the rich collections housed in museums throughout Europe and North America. It is hoped that the next generation of students and academics will draw their inspiration from the durable cultural achievements of Byzantium as expressed through this tangible heritage, and that some of the questions raised herein will be embraced by an ever growing and even more open group of scholars.

¹⁴ Zhang 2012; Chen 2006; Lieu 2000.