YILLIK

Annual of Istanbul Studies

2023

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Yannis Stouraitis, ed., *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World*. Edinburgh Byzantine Studies. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. 432 pages, 27 figures, 1 table. ISBN: 9781474493628

It is not only the identities and ideologies of the "medieval east Roman world" that need to be periodically reexamined, as this edited volume aims to do, but the identity of the field of Byzantine studies itself is currently undergoing a sea change as well, as indicated by the absence of "Byzantium" from the title of *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World*, edited by Yannis Stouraitis. This transition is variably reflected in the chapters themselves, some of which reach for a new framework, while others suggest that the process is still in progress. Either way, these chapters are written by leading experts in their fields and are addressed for the most part to other experts. This is not a book for beginners; a good prior knowledge of east Roman history is generally required to follow the arguments.

The volume consists of sixteen papers, divided evenly between two parts, the first of which addresses "Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches" and the second themes of "Centre and Periphery." We might also call them "vertical" and "horizontal," respectively. Overall, the structure works well to cover a range of issues elicited by identities and ideologies. The first part loosely focuses on issues of class, perspectives from above or below, and relations that reached across the socioeconomic hierarchy. The second part focuses more on the periphery than on Constantinople—one assumes that this is the "centre" in question—including the provinces, borders, foreigners, and states that looked sideways to the eastern Roman world, including Ravenna, Serbia, and Norman Sicily. The volume is therefore well designed to deliver a wide range of interesting papers that, in turn, pull in materials from various subfields, including gender studies, economics, political ideology, literature, and archaeology. Moreover, it demonstrates that no aspect of our research is free of entanglement with "identity and ideology," however hazy and analytically problematic those terms often are.

The drawback of such a wide-ranging approach is that, in the absence of a clear set of methodological guidelines, the papers approach identity or ideology in their own ways, at times failing to define it precisely or at all. Given the chaotic, or even laissez-faire, way our field approaches these topics, it would perhaps be difficult for any editor to enforce a consistent set of definitions or guidelines. In other words, the volume does not promote one approach or definition, nor does it seek to advance a new, coherent model, but rather reflects the diversity of current research. There are advantages and drawbacks either way, though the laissez-faire approach makes the volume harder to review, as each chapter has its own conceptual framework. All authors make solid and valuable contributions to their particular areas of study, as I will try to present. However, to maintain some kind of thematic consistency, I will focus on the higher-order categories that they deploy in order to frame the medieval east Roman world—specifically, ethnicity, Romanness, and imperial ideology. I take this review therefore as an opportunity to discuss these broader interpretive concepts that are of interest to the field at large and to diagnose where we are and where we seem to be headed.

Ethnicity

I begin with *ethnicity*. Until recently, this analytical concept was absent from Byzantine studies for mostly ideological reasons. As the Roman identity of "the Byzantines" had long been interdicted, they could appear in scholarship only as generic "subjects" of the emperor who had, at most, an "Orthodox" identity, but nothing more specific. A few minority groups could occasionally appear under guises that resemble ethnicity, usually as religious groups (e.g., Jews) or "splinters" in Byzantium of modern national groups (e.g., Armenians).[1] But now the field finally has to face the music and come to grips with not only the concept of ethnicity but its undeniable historical reality—namely, that it is pervasive in our sources. Thus stated, we may next ask: How does the concept of *ethnicity* fare in this volume?

One contributor who successfully handles this theme, in a tightly argued and persuasive chapter, is Dionysios Stathakopoulos (chap. 11). His topic is the nexus of violence and identity in the massacres of 1182 (Romans against Latins in Constantinople) and 1185 (Normans against Romans in Thessaloniki). While recognizing that these acts of violence had many causes, taking place in the context of civil strife in Constantinople and a war of conquest by the Normans, respectively, he shows that it took forms that deliberately highlighted ethnoreligious differences, and was understood by contemporaries as animated by ethnic prejudice. A drawback of the chapter is that it persists in its usage of the made-up term "the Byzantines" instead of calling the Romans by their name.

Another persuasive argument along these lines is contributed by Alicia Simpson, who examines the cases of breakaway provinces in the later twelfth century, focusing on the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire (1185), the rebel Isaakios Komnenos on Cyprus, and Theodoros Mangaphas in Philadelphia (chap. 10). In line with the primary sources, Simpson is right to stress that the Vlach-Bulgarian "rebellion" was motivated both by the distinct ethnic identity of its supporters and by dysfunctional economic relations between Constantinople and its provinces. While others have also argued this, there is a strong strain of ethnodenialism in much of the previous scholarship. However, Simpson is making a broader argument, as she wants to question the standard narrative of an empire falling into pieces through provincial *Roman* efforts to break away from the center. She successfully shows that Isaakios Komnenos on Cyprus was a traditional rebel who aspired to the throne in the capital, but whose rebellion resulted

in a de facto secession because Isaakios could not take Constantinople and Constantinople failed to suppress him, resulting in an impasse. Isaakios possibly did not enjoy much support from the Roman population of the island. Mangaphas is a more complicated case, but his story also does not indicate that the population of Philadelphia wanted to secede from the empire. To these cases, I would add Leon Sgouros in southern Greece, whose so-called rebellion appears to me in fact as a "loyalist" armed movement in favor of Alexios III, and I cannot find evidence that Sgouros made any moves before Alexios had fled the capital in 1203. Thus, the only case of actual separatism was that of the Vlach-Bulgarians, and here, as Simpson demonstrates, ethnic differences were in play.

Jean Claude Cheynet likewise offers a stimulating chapter on provincial rebellions as indicators of identity, and here ethnicity has made a real breakthrough (chap. 9). Cheynet correctly recognizes that ethnicity was only one factor among many others, yet it is still exhilarating to see it properly acknowledged after being denied for so long by the field. Even though ethnic perceptions are explicitly recorded in the sources, our imperative to deny Romanness meant that, not too long ago, they had to remain invisible in the scholarship. Yet Cheynet now rightly states that Vlachs, Armenians, Venetians, and other groups were not considered Romans, either by themselves or by the Romans (p. 238, 241), and that they were not motivated by the values of the common good of the Roman polity (p. 238–239), a topic discussed in the excellent chapter contributed by Kostis Smyrlis (chap. 3), presented below. However, throughout his chapter, Cheynet unfortunately muddies this picture by introducing two groups that are unattested in the sources, namely "the Byzantines" and "the Greeks." He asks, "What defined a provincial Byzantine?" (p. 244), even though his own analysis has shown that there was no such thing. If by these terms he just means "the Romans," then why confuse the issue? If not, then who were these groups? In the context of ethnicity, the notion of "the Byzantines" has historically done conceptual harm because it blurred the distinction between (a) all subjects of the emperor regardless of ethnicity and (b) the group called "the Romans" in the sources. This elision blurred the ethnic differences, affiliations, and hierarchies that were at play within "the polity of the Romans," which is what "Byzantium" really was. So why bring these terms back when the sources provide us with all that we need?

Although Cheynet recognizes the common Romanness of the majority of the population, he chooses to downplay the attachments that it may have created among them. Yet his claim that the concept of *patris* (fatherland) referred only to one's hometown or Constantinople (p. 232) is refuted by abundant textual evidence (e.g., in the military manuals, or Psellos' claim to be a "Roman patriot and lover of his *patris*").[2] The very source on whom Cheynet relies in his chapter, Kekaumenos, reflects a highly developed sense of pan-Roman patriotism, exhorting his reader to die on behalf of the *patris* and the emperor.[3] Cheynet asserts that Constantinople "was not a 'homeland' common to all the emperor's subjects" (p. 232), but that was precisely how it was regarded in legal sources, referring specifically to people from the provinces.[4] However, Cheynet's methods require further scrutiny. When he is looking at the particulars of the rebellion of the Vlachs that is recounted in Kekaumenos, Cheynet provides a rigorous analysis of the particulars. But when he extrapolates the ties that bound the entire polity together, he misses the mark by a wide margin, underestimating those ties to such a degree that the Roman polity comes across as a loose assemblage of unrelated people who did not know or care about each other at all.[5] It is simply not the case that "there existed no real solidarity between the provinces" (p. 235). All Romans were aware that their taxes went to support an army whose mission was to defend Romania as a whole; and imperial armed forces usually contained soldiers drawn from many provinces. In fact, Cheynet himself supposes that the garrison of Larissa was absent during the rebellion of the Vlachs because it had gone to the north to assist with the troubles there (p. 238, n. 19). In short, recognizing Roman identity has implications beyond just the name.

Finally, some chapters either minimize or dismiss ethnicity. In chapter 5, Leslie Brubaker offers a fine study of the attributes of identity that people highlighted in non-liturgical devotional practices directed at the Virgin; specifically, she studies images (with or without identifying inscriptions), texts (e.g., the signatories to the charter of the Theban Confraternity of Saint Maria of Naupaktos), and practices (especially processions, in Constantinople, Rome, and Jerusalem). Readers will find here a careful and helpful breakdown of identity-attributes, from gender and status (most common) to occupation and geographical origin (less common). However, Brubaker observes that "ethnicity—which so often exercises modern scholars—[appears] very rarely" (p. 138). The implication is that ethnicity is a modern preoccupation, and that looking for it in medieval contexts is perhaps a misplaced approach. Let us set aside the fact that Byzantine scholarship has never been exercised by ethnicity (quite the contrary), her statement also loses potency as it is made right after she has presented two images of Eudokia Doukaina from the fourteenth century. In both images, Eudokia appears in what can only be described as elite Roman clothing—in one, her cloak is adorned with imperial eagles, tying her to elite Roman culture—and both images have Greek inscriptions, which in context reinforce her performance of ethnicity.[6] Ethnicity, after all, does not always need explicit labels to be understood. Depictions of men in Greek chitons, Roman togas, Chinese hanfus, or Japanese kimonos make such claims without needing accompanying comment. Besides, gender, which Brubaker takes to be the most prominent attribute, is also never signaled explicitly (as "man" or "woman") but is inferred from appearance and grammar. The same is often true of ethnicity.

The Politics of Romanness

The second area of interest concerns the *politics of Romanness*, specifically

the way in which Roman identities were manipulated in texts for political reasons and not necessarily as reflections of social reality. In chapter 14, Francesco Borri offers a fascinating reading of a famous series of episodes in Agnellus of Ravenna's history of the bishops of Ravenna, written in the ninth century. These episodes include the attack on the city by agents of Justinian II, the city's decision to resist, and the battle on the Coriander Field where they prevail. Borri convincingly revives an older theory that Agnellus' reporting is based on a text with epic overtones, and he provides a close reading of its curious antiquarian and classical references. His interpretation casts it as an attempt by the Ravennates to reclaim some kind of crisis-based Romanness for themselves in the aftermath of the fall of the empire in their region (in their case of both the western and the eastern empires); at the same time, they cast the eastern Romans as "Greeks," a term that already included many negative characteristics.

In chapter 13, Dimitri Korobeinikov explores the paradoxes of "border identity" in connection with Michael VIII Palaiologos' sojourn at the sultanate of Rum before he assumed the throne in the Roman state of Nicaea. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to a prosopographical analysis of some of the ethnic Romans whom Michael encountered and then the men who subsequently held the office of *parakoimomenos* of the Great Seal under him. Korobeinikov is our foremost authority on the sources, people, and events of that period, and his reconstructions are convincing (if at times conjectural). However, his notion of "border identity" is left undefined and therefore vague in its intended meaning. In most contemporary scholarship, a term like that would point toward an "identity-fluidity" of some kind, but it seems that Korobeinikov is suggesting hard and fast definitions of identity, such that Michael VIII was willing to deny the Romanness of those who did not live in the Roman polity, even if they would generally be regarded as ethnic Romans—for example, as subjects of the sultan (e.g., p. 325). In other words, his border identities are structured around the rigid oppositions created by borders. However, the next page raises the issue of "situational identity" in connection with Michael but again this term is left undefined (p. 326). Likewise, the poem of Philes that is quoted does not clarify this idea of identity. Therefore, readers are left confused as to what "border identities" mean in this paper, though the core of the author's argument is prosopographical, and not about this issue. In my own experience reading the sources for this period, Michael VIII and his supporters (such as Akropolites) tended to deny the Romanness of people whom they knew to be ethnic Romans (and sometimes admitted as much) but who were not under Michael's rule.

The Imperial Idea

The third area of interest concerns *imperial ideology* or the *imperial idea*. This cluster of notions has long held tyrannical sway over the field, requiring every Byzantinist to swear fealty to it by ritually intoning it and putting it forward as a comprehensive model for both Byzantine political thought and practice. The imperial idea regards the emperor as God's vicegerent and (at least ideally) imbues him with all the major virtues, especially piety and justice. It emphasizes hierarchy, religion, and autocracy, and denies political standing to anyone outside the emperor-God relationship. Whether the east Roman polity actually functioned in accordance with this idea is a wholly different matter.

An admirably lucid presentation of the imperial idea occurs in the chapter by Theodora Antonopoulou, which surveys its appearance in homilies from the middle period (chap. 4). Antonopoulou grants that these texts do not contain ideas that we did not already know from elsewhere (p. 101), but it is still worth exploring how they play out in this genre. Photios, for example, who elsewhere toyed with notions of an imperial-patriarchal dyarchy in the state, suppressed them in his homilies for the emperors, leaving the latter as supreme (p. 107). Especially fascinating are the homilies delivered by Philagathos Kerameus in Norman Sicily, which attribute to the Norman kings the imperial ideology of the emperors of Constantinople, thus instilling a sense of continuity in southern Italy, effacing the Norman conquest and the religious differences it may have entailed (p. 111–115). Yet homilists in Romanía attacked the Normans as enemies of the faith and empire, aligning themselves with the imperial propaganda of their time (p. 115–120, for the case of Theodosios Goudeles).

Nevertheless, the imperial idea, for all that it has reigned supreme in scholarship, was not the only way in which east Romans conceptualized their political sphere. For example, chapter 3 by Kostis Smyrlis on ideas of taxation and public wealth should be required reading for all who want to understand how the political system worked, especially when it came down to the most important government activity: taxation. Here we find a set of notions that are not incompatible with the imperial idea but rather point to a significantly different and more expansive conception of the public interest. Tax-revenue and the assets deployed by the emperors were clearly understood by all, and acknowledged by the court, to be public wealth that could be used only for the common good of the Romans. The people had the right to contest unreasonable requests, and frequently complained about them, whereas emperors had to ensure that the system worked fairly and that petitions were heard and answered. The emperors strove to appear as champions of the poor and the weak, who made up the majority of their subjects. The supreme justification for any imperial expense was the common good. The extensive documentation for these ideas provided by Smyrlis refutes the assumption (e.g., chap. 6, by Cheynet) that there was no conception of a common interest that held the provinces together as well as the notion that there was no robust sense of public interest that included commoners and elites alike.[7]

This issue is also relevant to the chapter contributed by the editor of the volume, Yannis Stouraitis (chap. 1). Stouraitis adds to the growing critical literature that sees Byzantine studies as a form of Orientalism, wherein

Byzantinism is defined as the antithesis of the positive values that Western Europe claims for itself. This has enabled it to be aligned with the Ottoman Empire rather than as a continuation of Rome or any Western receptions of Rome (p. 22). The West created its notion of a decadent Byzantium to advance, via inversion, its own positive self-representation (p. 25), which included its appropriation of an idealized Greco-Roman classicism (p. 27). Stouraitis also offers some interesting thoughts on how modern Greek national thinkers engaged with this Western paradigm of "Byzantium." While there is much to commend in his survey, there is also much to disagree with here. As I am currently writing a monograph-length survey of Western ideas of the Eastern empire from late antiquity to World War II, I will defer discussion of these points, except perhaps to mention that, *pace* Stouraitis, "Byzantinism" is largely a product of Western *medieval* views of "the Greeks" and is not a modern development (p. 23). Edward Gibbon contributed little to the bundle of prejudices that we are still coping with; he merely synthesized them. Moreover, Stouraitis downplays the original sin of Byzantinism, which is the denial of eastern Roman identity. All the other prejudices flow from that denial and were enabled by it. Stouraitis has himself contributed to that denial in the past, by arguing that Romanness was essentially a fiction, a "homogenizing discourse" concocted by some "elites" in Constantinople. I have yet to see any concrete evidence presented in favor of this theory, nor can it explain why Arab writers, who were surely not party to this conspiracy, also regarded the majority of the empire's population as ethnically Roman. Under the guise of critical theory, this approach merely protracts an old denialist trope that the Roman identity of Byzantium was a rhetorical deception perpetrated by its rulers.[8]

Stouraitis devotes quite a few pages of his chapter to refute a position advanced by H. G. Beck and myself about the nature of the political/public sphere in Romanía (p. 37–41). Beck and I argued that popular interventions in the political sphere were not only common but normative, and that the people were given highly charged performative roles in the ratification of political outcomes. This points toward a conception of the public sphere in which the people were regarded, both by themselves and elites, as legitimate stakeholders in the polity. Stouraitis dismisses our evidence and argues instead that these were only "contingent events with a contingent outcome" (p. 38). We do not need an abstract model of the political sphere to account for what happened, he argues, it is enough to merely look at the balance of power among interested parties at each time. He may regard this as a "sober analysis," but in fact it represents a step backward toward an untheorized model of east Roman politics. His view of politics is essentially that "stuff happens" and is rationalized only after the fact in religious terms (p. 40)—"God must have willed it so." Stouraitis dismisses inclusive concepts of the polity and the common good that are found in east Roman texts and replaces them with mere narrative and cynical power-calculations. Thus, to refute one interpretation of east Roman politics he has exercised the "nuclear option" by destroying the possibility of *any* interpretation and leaving us only with contingency. It is strange that the editor of a volume on identity and ideology would advance a model of politics in which neither identity nor ideology play a role.

The imperial idea also appears in Annick Peters-Custot's examination of the Greeks under Norman rule (chap. 15). Her argument is that the Norman kings did not seek to Latinize the churches of their Greek subjects and did not interfere in their doctrines and practices (p. 373–374). The kings indifferently allowed their subjects to maintain their differences, which she calls a policy of "an indifferent difference" (p. 375). But Peters-Custot's efforts to link this to notions of "the imperial" are confusing. She never defines the "imperial," so it is unclear how it is being used throughout the chapter and in the title. Is it "imperial" to be indifferent to subjects' diversity (as in the Norman case), to seek to maintain and enforce difference (e.g., in the Ottoman case), or to try to eliminate it (e.g., in the late Roman case)? Likewise, it is unclear what the author means when she claims that the Normans "made poor use of diversity" (p. 374) or uses the term "pseudo-imperial" (p. 382). These ambiguities are not entirely Peters-Custot's fault. They stem from the way in which our field has fetishized terms such as "universal," "imperial," and "ecumenical," without properly defining them. The kings' policy qualifies as ecumenical, she concludes, because it "maintained diversity and made well-directed use of it" (p. 381). But "ecumenical" is more commonly used in the opposite sense, to refer to the spread or imposition of a universal norm. If the term can mean both things, we should abandon it.

Furthermore, the theorizing in this chapter is often hard to follow; for example, "Social determination supersedes the anthropological vision of culture and its communal expressions" (p. 369). To return to our discussion of ethnicity, Peters-Custot seems to take an openly dismissive approach to it when she states that the groups that made up the kingdom "are fortunately less and less described in terms of ethnicity" (p. 368). Previous scholarship on southern Italy has not suggested an overemphasis on ethnicity. However, Peters-Custot does not commit to an alternative; she proposes "law"—one legal regime for Christians, another for Muslims, Jews, etc.—as "the medieval documentation often defines the people by their law" (p. 368). But much of that documentation is legal in nature, so its categories are a function of genre. Moreover, in Roman and much medieval law, a distinctive *lex* was understood to belong to each ethnic group, city, or polity, making this categorization is compatible with ethnicity.[9] Furthermore, later in the chapter, Peters-Custot is effectively talking about ethnic groups; she refers, for example, to the "Greek, Sicilian, Jewish, and 'Latin' people" of the kingdom (p. 373). At the end she argues that high-status Greeks at the court came from abroad and showed no apparent solidarity with the native Greeks of the kingdom. When she concludes that "social barriers were stronger than their cultural consciousness" (p. 376), it is hard not to read "cultural consciousness"

as a stand-in, or euphemism, for ethnicity. We have left the concept of law far behind.

We need to start defining these terms precisely every time we use them, and it is a responsibility of a volume editor to encourage or even enforce such clarity, especially when the papers deal with such a variety of topics. The contribution by Vlada Stanković, for example, gestures toward a highly revisionist account of the history of Serbia in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century (chap. 16). Most of it is a sketch of a future research agenda that would deconstruct the notion of a unified Serbia before that point and attribute agency for its creation to the foreign policy of the east Roman emperor Manuel I Komnenos. The chapter's second half interprets the second baptism of Stephen Nemanja and the possible symbolism of his names, suggesting some fascinating possibilities. Stanković also argues that the revolution in Serbia brought about by Manuel I Komnenos and Nemanja provided an ideological basis that relied on "Byzantine political ideology" (p. 397), though this term is not defined. It certainly is not Smyrlis' robust sense of public interest, Stouraitis' "stuff happens" approach to politics, or Peters-Custot's "indifferent difference." In the current state of research, "Byzantine political ideology" is too vague a term to be used without specification. Stanković also argues that Serbia acquired a "strong and unyielding Orthodox-Constantinopolitan orientation" (p. 396), however, this suggestion runs up against the fact that Serbia sought a royal crown from the papacy in the 1210s (p. 397). At any rate, the new directions that he promises to bring to the history of his Serbia in his forthcoming monograph will be welcome.

Other Domains

I have focused this review on the chapters that touch on a specific set of concepts that have historically either been marginalized or overemphasized in research on east Rome—ethnicity, the politics of Romanness, and the imperial idea. The volume also includes several excellent contributions that discuss identity or ideology in other domains and deserve more attention than I can give them here, yet they merit at least a brief mention.

Among these chapters, Panagiotis Agapitos provides a nuanced reading of the social class that the classical scholar Ioannes Tzetzes in the twelfth century seems to claim for himself in his letter collection (chap. 6). He situates himself below the Komnenian aristocracy but above the parade of "vulgar" types that appear, to a comical effect, in the letters. Because of some personal mishaps, and a scandal, Tzetzes was unable to achieve a position in the court, as Psellos had done in the eleventh century. Agapitos gestures toward a new reading of ep. 6, which seems to contain abusive language directed at one Isaakios Komnenos; whether it is a real letter as opposed to a textbook exercise requires consideration, as Tzetzes often used his letters for teaching purposes. Nevertheless, Agapitos claims to detect here a game of interlinked classical allusions that would have been understood by the recipient. A more fleshed-out reading of the letter along these lines would be welcome.

Additionally, Jonathan Shepard makes a strong showing with a chapter on the changing nature of imperial propaganda between the eighth century and Alexios I Komnenos (chap. 12). He focuses on how much emperors could distort reality in their communications with foreigners, which diminished over time as imperial affairs became more explicable by foreigners on the spot and as communications between east and west became denser. By ca. 1100, Alexios had to deal with respondents who had mastered many of the same techniques that the emperors had used in the past, and so he had to adjust his strategies. As with anything written by Shepard, there is a lot more going on here than can be summarized along with a deployment of many sources and perspectives that make for a rewarding read.

In a paper that nicely complements that of Leslie Brubaker (chap. 5) mentioned above, Daniel Reynolds examines the attributes of personal identity that are recorded in rural contexts in the provinces of Arabia and Palestine in AD 500–630, mainly in church dedications but also in the Petra papyri (chap. 7). Reynolds defends Greek epigraphy as a valid window to identities; namely, that it was not an entirely artificial and public form of expression. He is also correct that we should not exaggerate differences between urban and rural populations (p. 168), especially in this period of rising prosperity in the countryside (p. 191). Reynolds offers nuanced readings of the close interplay of language, cultural background, and (possibly) ethnicity. In addition to the aspects on which he focuses, I point to the use of the *tabula ansata* form for inscriptions (p. 171, 185), which indicates a desire by rural people to endow themselves with the status markers of an official Roman identity.

Reynolds programmatically examines identity "from below," or as low as our sources for identity allow us to reach in that context. This approach is shared by Fotini Kondyli in chapter 8, in which she examines community-building through the archaeological remains of middle-period Athens, especially in the agora. Kondyli focuses on burial practices and micro-communities that formed around neighborhoods and streets. From excavation reports, old and new, she reconstructs the collective endeavors that brought these communities together (or provided the framework for disputes) on a granular level. She situates this level as the local antipode of the high politics that are reflected in our textual sources—for example, the world of governors. This is very important work, and if we obtain more of it, the top-down and bottom-up views may eventually converge and produce a helpful synthesis. After all, a bishop of Athens, Michael Choniates, wrote orations regarding the governors of Greece, which discussed how their policies impacted the common people of Athens, including their finances, inheritances, legal security, and other issues that may have played out on the street level. The aforementioned chapter by Smyrlis provides many references to this effect (e.g., p. 68–71), and in the long run they may help us bridge the imperial center

and the neighborhood. Those policies had "street-level" impact, as attested by Choniates' persistent mention of them.

That bridge between the high and the low is discussed in the chapter offered by Johannes Koder (chap. 2), who usefully raises some of the challenges of crossing the gap. I am confident that, with additional research, we will be able to do so, especially once we understand better how state institutions worked in relation to the polity's demography, common values, and economy, topics on which Koder himself has made many advances in the past.

Conclusion

In sum, the volume under review presents a picture that is quite common in Byzantine scholarship: the papers are excellent and stimulating when it comes to the particulars of their arguments, but conceptual chaos reigns when it comes to higher-order concepts such as "Byzantine political ideology," "imperial" and "empire," "border identities," "ecumenical," and other chimeras, in addition to "the Byzantines," "Byzantium," and "the Greeks." The editor is to be commended for soliciting papers that cover a wide spectrum of identities and ideologies, from ethnicity and politics to literary personae and archaeology. However, the editor failed to solicit definitions of key terms in many chapters. Such imprecision and reliance on misleading and undertheorized modern concepts have been the norm in Byzantine studies to date, unfortunately. For now,zintellectual defenses, work up from the sources, and insist on conceptual clarity.

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https://doi.org/10.53979/yillik.2023.12

1 Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2019), ix–xii.

2 For military manuals, see, for example, Leon VI, *Taktika*, passim, but especially the introductory sections; Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.154.

3 See the references, analysis, and other similar passages in Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 94–97.

4 Some of the sources are cited in Kaldellis, "Civic Identity and Civic Participation in Constantinople," in Cédric Brélaz and Els Rose, eds., *Civic Identity and Civic Participation in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2021), 106.

5 When Cheynet discusses the episode of Lake Pousgouse (p. 240), he turns the historian Choniates' reference to the Romans' common *genos* and religion into a common language and religion.

6 Kaldellis, "Ethnicity and Clothing in Byzantium," in Koray Durak and Ivana Jevtić, eds., *Identity and the Other in Byzantium: Papers from the 4th International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium* (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2019), 41–52.

7 For example, see John Haldon, "Res publica Byzantina? State Formation and Issues of Identity in Medieval East Rome," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 1 (2016): 4–16, https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.2.

8 Ioannis Stouraitis, "Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107, no. 1 (2014): 175–220, https://doi.org/10.1515/bz-2014-0009; cf. Kaldellis, "The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach," *Byzantina Symmeikta* 27 (2017): 173–210.

9 Clifford Ando, "Religiöse und politische Zugehörigkeit von Caracalla bis Theodosius," in *Religiöse Praktiken in der Antike: Individuum – Gesellschaft – Weltbeziehung*, ed. Leif Scheuermann and Wolfgang Spickermann (Graz: Zentrum Antike, 2016), 61–73.

Sarah Bassett, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Constantinople*. Cambridge Companions to the Ancient World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xx + 413 pages, 31 figures. ISBN: 9781108632614

The study of Byzantine civilization and its history has witnessed a proliferation of companion volumes and handbooks over the past decade, signaling that this established field keeps evolving into a dynamic and diversified research area. One noteworthy addition to this growing body of handbook literature is *The Cambridge Companion to Constantinople* by Sarah Bassett, released in 2022 by Cambridge University Press. To tackle such a multifaceted subject, the editor employs a multidisciplinary approach, bringing together international experts in various fields, thus making the companion a valuable resource for anyone seeking a comprehensive understanding of Constantinople's rich history—often compared to a palimpsest, with layers of history coexisting, waning, and reemerging.

Coincidence or not, the publication of the volume is preceded by Shirine Hamadeh and Çiğdem Kafescioğlu's *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul* published by Brill in 2021 (reviewed by James Grehan in *YILLIK* 4 [2022]). Both companions contribute to the scholarship of Byzantine and Ottoman studies respectively—having the exploration of the imperial capital at their core—but they also correlate and could be explained by two noticeable phenomena: Constantinople/Istanbul fascinates, and its long and transient history is significantly reconceptualized across the Byzantine and Ottoman fields. Current scholarship is moving away both from a traditional focus on the city as the imperial center and a top-down approach (i.e., focusing on the role of the elites) to a much richer understanding of its urbanity as shaping and being shaped by a myriad of human experiences. These recent methodological and conceptual shifts give a new slant to the studies of Constantinople and Istanbul, whose multidisciplinary research and exponential bibliographies rightfully deserve companion volumes. Furthermore, these two volumes arrived on the academic scene at a critical moment when Turkey was grappling with politically charged cultural heritage issues, such as the reconversion of the Hagia Sophia and Kariye Museums into mosques in July and August 2020. Clearly, the Byzantine and Ottoman cultural heritage and past of Istanbul do not concern only historians and scholars. They are relevant to the current political situation in Turkey as well as to contemporary discussions surrounding the reshaping and erasure of cultural memory in many other changing and conflicting politico-religious contexts around the world.