

The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe. Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Jake Ransohoff, eds.

Extravagantes 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022. xviii + 458 pp. \$40.

This volume of thirteen papers from a conference held at Harvard University in 2017, organized by the editors, examines the history of “Byzantine studies” (editors’ scare quotes) from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, for which “no truly comprehensive history exists (3).” Byzantium is the Latinized name of the Greek *polis* that Constantine I, the first Christian emperor, chose as a new Eastern capital of the Roman Empire. With the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, Constantinople became the capital of the (Eastern) Roman Empire until its definitive fall to the Ottomans in 1453, Constantine XI the last emperor. “Byzantium” also refers to this “Byzantine Empire,” a term never used by “the ‘Byzantines’ who called themselves [in Greek] ‘Romans’ (*Ρωμαῖοι*)” (1). Byzantium was thus a unique fusion of Greek, Roman, and Christian elements that endured for more than a millennium, though barely known as such throughout this time.

The book demonstrates how the early modern neologism *Byzantine*, pejorative in English, came to define by the nineteenth century a distinct field of Byzantine studies in three great powers—Britain, France, and Germany—the latter where the first issue of *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* in 1892 marks the formal birth of *Byzantinistik* (Byzantine studies). The book redresses the absence in previous scholarship on the intellectual history of early modern Europe’s Western core, where Byzantium appears marginal to the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment. Based on the historiography of James Westfall Thompson, Alexander Vasiliev, and George Ostrogorsky, the editors posit a synthetic four-stage development from “humanist indifference” to “Baroque enthusiasm,” then “Enlightenment contempt” followed by “nineteenth-century institutionalization” (3). This schema is reflected in the book’s four-part arrangement, from “Reinventing Byzantium in the Fifteenth Century” to “Chronologies of Byzantium from the Enlightenment to Modernity.”

In this traditional view, humanists saw Byzantium as repository of Greek classical culture but regarded the Byzantines themselves with a lack of interest or outright disdain. The “grudging ‘father’ of Byzantine studies” (4), Hieronymus Wolf, who has been dubiously credited with the term *Byzantine* to distinguish an inferior later empire from its Roman forebear, edited and translated Byzantine historians for a *Corpus Historiae Byzantinae*, though with denigrating prefaces. In seventeenth-century France under the royal patronage of Louis XIV, Phillippe Labbe oversaw a new *Corpus Parisinum* with major contributor Charles Du Cange, whose interests spanned numismatics to historiography. This enthusiasm was curbed in the next century as *philosophes* Montesquieu and Voltaire viewed Byzantium as the antithesis of Enlightenment ideals.

Worse still, in the anglophone world Gibbon's monumental *Decline and Fall* covered five centuries of Byzantine history in one chapter, "a tedious and uniform tale of weakness and misery" of a people who "dishonor the names of both Greeks and Romans" (6). The nineteenth-century institutionalization begins in Germany with Barthold Niebuhr's series of edited Byzantine texts, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*. The War of Greek Independence inspired Jakob Fallmerayer and George Finlay to revisit Greece's pre-Ottoman, Byzantine past. In the later nineteenth century, J. B. Bury, Charles Diehl, Karl Krumbacher (editor of *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*), and Vasilij Vasil'evskij were consolidating a new, professional Byzantine studies in Britain, France, Germany, and Russia.

This traditional biographical approach that focuses on individual great (or not so great) scholars decontextualizes their work, as it takes for granted the ultimate outcome of a formal discipline of Byzantine studies. The editors take inspiration from Agostino Pertusi (*Storiografia umanistica e mondo bizantino*, 4), to whom the volume is dedicated, who argued for the "study of the motivations that led scholars" of earlier centuries to "be specifically interested in Byzantine history," rather than a sterile "history of erudition that led to Byzantine studies" (10, editors' translation).

Twelve scholars from the fields of medieval and early modern European history, classics, literature, art history, lexicography, and hagiography bring many heretofore relatively obscure figures to light: Gemisthos Pletho, , and Cyriac of Ancona; Martin Crusius, Martin Hanke; Bernard de Montfaucon, Jean Bolland; Anna Notaras, Johannes Meursius. Du Cange, whose name if nothing else is familiar to Byzantinists, receives two chapters and two appendixes. The editors concede that this is hardly the last word, but it is a solid beginning. I appreciated the traditional footnotes, but a Manuel Chrysolorus separate bibliography would have been useful.

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The Library: A Fragile History. Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, eds. New York: Basic Books, 2021. 518 pp. + color pls. \$35.

In *The Library: A Fragile History*, Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, a pair of scholars with considerable experience as coauthors and coeditors of works examining histories of reading, book production, and information exchange in early modern Europe, turn their attention to a subject of much wider geographical and chronological scope: a popular history of the library. Surveying library history from the Assyrian Empire to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pettegree and der Weduwen lay out a narrative that is accessible to nonspecialist readers but that resists the hagiography common to popular histories of reading and libraries—as they declare in the book's preface, "we