

INTRODUCTION

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Ideas have lives of their own. Their genealogies, careers, mutations, and legacies form historical patterns and ontologies different from those of individual human beings and societies, though they are linked to them in manifold ways. Ideally, the history of ideas should be studied diachronically and across the boundaries of states, cultures, and periods, these being the most important categories that artificially break up intellectual history.¹ Yet the questions of how the Byzantines interacted with ideas which they received from earlier periods, and how they developed ideas of their own, are occluded in existing scholarship. It is typical for diachronic studies to jump from antiquity to the Renaissance, reinforcing a particular concept of the genealogy of the “west.” Intellectual histories of the medieval west rarely include the Byzantine world,² even though the western tradition draws from the same Greek, Roman, and Christian sources that were also part of the Byzantine patrimony. Moreover, within Byzantine Studies intellectual history is probably the least developed subfield, lacking titles to its name and definition in relation to other inflections of historical inquiry. We have therefore chosen the format of an *Intellectual History of Byzantium* as a preliminary step toward rectifying this imbalance: first, to provide the resources with which more integrated cross-cultural, diachronic, and analytical narratives may one day be written, and, second, to spur the growing interest in Byzantine intellectual history as a more or less distinct discipline.

WHY BYZANTINE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY IS IMPORTANT

Not only did the Byzantines develop a vibrant and complex intellectual culture for themselves, they can justly claim an important place in the intellectual history of the world. In an ideal world driven by genuine intellectual curiosity, cultures would be regarded as fascinating and worthy of study for their own sake. But as we live in more utilitarian times, it is necessary to list some of the contributions that Byzantium made to cultures

¹ Moyn and Sartori 2013. ² Colish 1997: 113–128 is an honorable exception.

other than itself, and also why it is important for historians of ideas to study it. This will also reveal some of the ways in which it is interesting in its own right.

Byzantium preserved, selected, and shaped the canon of the Greek classics. It is regularly acknowledged – even if only grudgingly – that the Byzantines were responsible for preserving almost all ancient Greek literature that we have today. Some texts survived through translations in other languages, stone inscriptions, or papyri, but they were a tiny minority compared to the volumes painstakingly copied out by Byzantine scribes over the duration of a millennium. When we look at our “classical libraries” (the Loeb, Oxford Classical Texts, or Teubner collections) we are in fact looking at a Byzantine classical library. In terms of the totality of surviving premodern Greek literature, our classical libraries are only a part of what the Byzantines chose to keep, in addition to their own writings that we artificially excise from our corpus of “classical Greek literature.” This, in turn, is only a subset of everything that was ever written in Greek, a great deal of which was lost because the Byzantines allowed it to lapse according to their confessional, curricular, and ideological priorities. Their own writings reveal those priorities. Yet the discipline of Classics has, to make an understatement, not been receptive to Byzantium and its texts. Most classicists fail to recognize that the Byzantines were their kindred spirits, indeed their forebears, when it comes to the study of the Greek classics. For the Byzantines did not preserve ancient literature for the benefit of future scholars in a more enlightened western society: they preserved the texts for their own use and benefit. Moreover, they did not merely *preserve* ancient literature: they made choices in selecting what to preserve and developed new textual technologies for that purpose. Thus, they played an active role in shaping the canon. Modernity may, in its ignorance, take it for granted as representing “the Greeks,” but in fact it represents a Byzantine vision of the Greeks too.³ To a large degree we are bound by Byzantine choices, we study and love the texts they did, and often unknowingly see Greek antiquity through their eyes. Therefore, we need to understand their point of view. This volume contributes to that goal. Many of its chapters show how antiquity was the starting point of Byzantine thinking in many fields.

Byzantium is our first point of contact with ancient Greek thought. For centuries scholarship has labored to create the illusion of unmediated access to the classical past, but it is largely a process of artificially wrenching our ancient heritage out of its Byzantine context, stripping it of Byzantine residues and accretions, and then claiming authenticity for the reconstructed product. Yet in material terms, the closest we can usually come

³ Kaldellis 2010.

to an ancient text is a Byzantine manuscript that dates after the tenth century. It is unwise to believe that those books are “pure” media that preserve classics immaculate. Byzantium was responsible for crucial changes to the textual technologies of learning, including the universal adoption of the codex form, the invention of minuscule script, and the concomitant need to “transliterate” all texts, leading to a bottle-neck of selection and loss. Texts were adapted, selected, anthologized, excerpted, abridged, and interpolated. Ancient commentaries, scholia, grammatical aids, and dictionaries were broken up and recombined with new Byzantine material that is often impossible to tell apart.

Modern historicism has tended to treat texts as anchored so firmly in original contexts that one can easily ignore their later textual settings, however important those settings may have been to the (possibly dominant) reading and perception of these texts throughout most of their history . . . Cultural histories thus tend to be written as narratives of a succession of discrete moments of creative acts of composition.⁴

But classicists who really want to know where their texts come from and what their words mean will inevitably end up dealing with the likes of Photios, the *Souda*, the *Etymologika*, and other Byzantine texts and authors for which their training has rarely prepared them.

Byzantium created the Orthodox tradition. Christianity began as one among the many cults of the ancient Mediterranean, but it became a world religion only in early Byzantium, specifically in the eastern provinces of the late Roman world. Its doctrines, theology, intellectual traditions, norms, and governing institutions took shape and were codified between the fourth and the sixth century, first in Greek and then derivatively in Latin and other languages. Thus, if we include early Byzantium within our scope, it is fair to say that Christianity in most of its forms after 300 CE has a Byzantine matrix. This volume, however, focuses on the later phases of Byzantine intellectual life, after 600 CE. By that point, Christianity in both east and west was set on variant trajectories that would lead away from its distinctively Byzantine configuration. But the latter subsequently became the crucible for the entire Orthodox world. The impact of Byzantine Orthodoxy on the intellectual life of the cultures that accepted Christianity from the eastern empire, from modern Greece to Russia, cannot be underestimated. This volume, then, charts the fundamental modes and orders of Byzantine Orthodoxy as they emerged after the formative period of late antiquity. They include, for example, the distinctively Byzantine theology of icons, the differential reception of Plato and Aristotle, the tense and conditional use of the Greek

⁴ Wagschal 2015: 27.

philosophical tradition (in the original), and the positions that emerged through contact with the rapidly changing west after the eleventh century, and also in the wake of Hesychasm.

Byzantium was a major player in its time. In addition to looking vertically at its past and future, we must also look at Byzantium horizontally in terms of its neighboring cultures. Today Byzantine Studies may be a relatively small field in comparison to its western medieval and early Islamic peers, but Byzantium, in its own time, was a major intellectual interlocutor and conduit for its neighbors. This was true not only for its art and the prestige of its imperial tradition, both of which were widely imitated and so have been studied, but also in the realms of ideas and scholarship. Byzantine exports included its unique access to the Greek tradition in the original language and its Orthodox inflection of Christianity, but there are also signs that medieval Europe, both western and eastern, accessed aspects of ancient Roman tradition not directly from Latin but from their Greek versions kept alive in Roman Byzantium. Let us not forget that Roman law was fixed for posterity by Justinian and, before it was revived in the west in the late eleventh century, it remained in force in the east through its Greek translations. We hope that this volume will provide a convenient point of entry for scholars in these “adjacent” fields who wish to learn more, and a starting point for further discussion of intellectual relations. Only a few chapters here are devoted to cross-cultural debates and contacts, but making the history of the Byzantine tradition more accessible *in general* is a necessary first step if we are all to engage in more interdisciplinary synthesis and dialogue.

Byzantium was a fascinating and unique combination of intellectual traditions in its own right. It was the only postclassical culture in the history of the world that (a) spoke and wrote in Greek and therefore had immediate access to the textual basis of ancient Hellenism; (b) was Orthodox, which meant that it had immediate access to all foundational Christian texts (the Gospels, Church Fathers, Acts of the Councils) and, also, was the first which had to work out a way of including selected pagan texts and concepts within an exclusive Christian framework; and (c) it also retained a strongly felt Roman identity and approaches to government, politics, and law, which were more or less modified (or only inflected) to accommodate Christian notions. No other society has ever been Greek, Christian, and Roman in this way, making Byzantium a fascinating laboratory for cultural and intellectual fusion, reception, combination, and reinvention.

WHAT IS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY?

An ancient Platonist would be surprised at the way in which modern historians view and treat ideas. Whereas Platonic ideas are timeless and

changeless, modern scholars of Platonism typically assume that even Plato's ideas changed over time. The paradox stems from a homonymous use of the word *idea*. Plato's ideas are Forms that transcend history and the world of change, but Plato's ideas about the Ideas *qua* Forms do not. The former are by definition unhistorical; the latter exist only within history. By extension, the reception of Plato in Byzantium amounts to different elaborations and applications of Plato's philosophy to politics, epistemology, and ontology that diversely reflect the changing interests of pagan, Christian, "heretical," or idiosyncratically "other" authors.

The distinction between the belief in ostensibly timeless entities (as Ideas) and the systematic study of ideas as reflecting shifts in human thought is typical of modernity. Classicists might point out that Aristotle and the ancient doxographers were already moving in that direction when they classified and commented on the views of ancient philosophers, but the history of ideas and concepts emerged properly as a distinct field with Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), and French Enlightenment thinkers such as Pierre Bayle (who attempted a history of "the human spirit"). Ties between original philosophy and the history of philosophy remained strong and fundamental philosophical questions gained new impetus: Do ideas persist independently of their agents, or are they contingent artifacts shifting according to historical circumstance? Do they have a purpose, i.e. are they teleologically directed to an end? These and related questions led Vico to conceive the possibility of a "conceptual dictionary" and "conceptual language common to all nations," as well as an "ideal eternal history," in order to explain the rise and fall of nations according to the transition from one paradigmatic age to another, each age defined by a central concept: People first sense what is *necessary*, then consider what is *useful*, next attend to *comfort*, later delight in *pleasures*, soon grow dissolute in *luxury*, and finally *go mad* squandering their estates.⁵ Vico was therefore one of the first to postulate a history of humanity based not entirely on periods and cultures, but on conceptually defined ages as well.

Gustav Teichmüller's *Studien zur Geschichte der Begriffe* (1874) subsequently took a step toward a thematic history of concepts rather than of individuals or events. But it was not easy to decouple the history of concepts from original philosophy. Hegel, who is sometimes credited with introducing the term *Begriffsgeschichte*, thought of the history of philosophy as a philosophical endeavor in itself, and later Hegelian philosophers, such as Benedetto Croce, effectively identified philosophy with history: Philosophy and history "are not mutually conditioned, but identical."⁶ It was up to philosophers, rather than historians, to study

⁵ Vico 1999: paras. 161–162 and 241. ⁶ Croce 1917: 196.

concepts, especially in their “pure” form (focusing, for example, on their logical consistency).

Not everyone agreed, of course. Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897), the great historian of Renaissance culture and friend and esteemed colleague of Friedrich Nietzsche (both inspired by the late Schopenhauer), argued that *Anschauung* (intuition and contemplation) is more important than speculative reason for the purposes of accessing the collective experience of the past. Art, poetry, and myth inspired an appreciation of history and culture very different from the conceptual schemas employed by state education, by the Church, and, last but not least, by philosophers: “Leave me to experience and feel history on this lower level instead of understanding it from the standpoint of first principles,” Burckhardt wrote to a friend in 1842, in a tone typical of his aristocratic liberalism.⁷ He was not convinced that history was governed by the exposition or unfolding of philosophical concepts.

By the end of the twentieth century, the history of ideas and concepts was progressively and effectively uncoupled from the history of philosophy. Various new methodologies and technical field-labels were introduced in order to study how people thought: *history of concepts*, *conceptual history*, *history of ideas*, *intellectual history*. These terms are not synonymous, though in practice they may bleed into each other. The *history of concepts* places emphasis on cataloguing and interpreting the occurrences of terms in sources and contexts. One example in our field would be the use of Aristotelian terms in Komnenian texts. *Conceptual history* tries to interpret historical conflicts through the concepts employed by their protagonists. Iconoclasm is an example of a Byzantine conflict with both a political and a strong and overt conceptual aspect. Here ideas may be studied in their historical role as weapons, rather than from a more detached philological-lexicographical standpoint. In some cases, the historian might know that “reality changed long before the change was conceptualized,” while at other times “concepts might have been formed to set free new realities.”⁸

The founder of the *history of ideas*, the American philosopher Arthur Lovejoy (1873–1962), sought to write the “biography” of ideas, arguing that they were not only historical, but also transhistorical, in the sense that they surface again and again in the form of specific “unit ideas”: the equivalent of chemical or component elements in the natural sciences, unit ideas are the “primary and persistent or recurrent dynamic units of the history of thought.”⁹ For example, he talked about the idea of the “chain of being” as

⁷ Dru 1955: 74. Cf. Sigurdson 2004: 87–95. ⁸ Koselleck 2002: 36

⁹ Lovejoy 1936: 7. These elements are “implicit, or incompletely explicit *assumptions*, or more or less *unconscious mental habits*, operating in the thought of an individual or generation.” Lovejoy’s beautiful book sees Plato as providing the ideal case-study: the idea of the Chain of Being, namely the idea of the complete rational intelligibility of the world, which evolved into “an experiment in thought carried on

it moved from culture to culture. Other ideas that could be studied from this point of view include the belief in an exclusive revelation of religious truth, or the very ideas of salvation, God, and man. Contrariwise, Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge School of *intellectual history* brought attention to particular contextual constraints, conceptual change, and rhetorical applications of philosophical vocabulary. Whereas *conceptual history* (as understood by Reinhart Koselleck) was “chiefly preoccupied with the slower march of time,” the focus now moved to “the pointillist study of sudden conceptual shifts.” Still, in both schools of thought concepts were seen “less as statements about the world than as tools and weapons of ideological debate.”¹⁰

This survey could be expanded by including perspectives that proved less popular, yet are potentially no less fascinating. For example, the philosopher and intellectual historian Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996) suggested a history of metaphors (*Metapherngeschichte*).¹¹ Nicolai Hartmann explored the possibility of a *Problemgeschichte* or *history of arguments*, suggesting that problems, rather than ideas, span historical time even if they are reflected in variable concepts.¹² In a similar vein, Leo Strauss criticized the “historicist thesis” which argued that, whereas all answers to philosophical questions intend to be valid, modern scholars treat them as “historically conditioned” and defective. He argued that the questions themselves may be universal and intrinsic to the philosophic effort, enabling classical thought to speak meaningfully to modernity.¹³ Others moved in the direction of a *histoire des mentalités*, a history of mentalities or attitudes that account for collective social mindsets and outlooks rather than individual ideas.¹⁴ This form of intellectual history was most closely allied with social history. Each approach made its own methodological distinctions, which are rarely maintained rigidly in practice. Different perspectives may be complementary rather than antagonistic. For example, a “sociology of ideas” that traces networks and alliances or the study of “social objects,” for example divorce and legal agreements, may be related to philosophical or religious ideas that defined the existential orientation of epistemic and social agents.

Intellectual history today is most often defined as the branch of historiography that focuses on the evolution of concepts and ideas within specific historical contexts and explores their political and rhetorical sources, entanglements, and effects. It is premised on the assumption that abstract thought and arguments emerge and change within shifting and

for many centuries by many great and lesser minds”, from Plato to Schelling, albeit one failing in a grandiose manner: the hypothesis of the absolute rationality of the cosmos is untenable (329).

¹⁰ Skinner 2003: 180–181. ¹¹ Blumenberg 1960. ¹² Oexle 2001. ¹³ Strauss 1959: 70.

¹⁴ Chartier 1982: 47–86.

intertwined social, political, and philosophical circumstances. Intellectual historians try to establish why and how historical agents defended, refuted, elaborated, or recontextualized particular ideas in a given situation, and how those ideas then may have impacted the surrounding social context. It may, then, be seen as a field of inquiry concerned with: (1) the relation between an author's life and his texts; (2) the relation between society and texts, especially in regards to the origins of his ideas; (3) the relation between an author's intentions and the reception and interpretation of his texts; and (4) "conceptual shifts," that is, (a) how words change meaning within varying sociopolitical situations, and (b) how changes in the sociopolitical framework caused ideas to shift, fade away, or reemerge, influencing the way that historical agents thought of philosophy, theology, medicine, or law. For example, how and why did conceptions of Hellenism, authority, revelation, or Orthodoxy change?

Intellectual history maintains an equal distance, on the one hand, from pure history of ideas and concepts, which more or less isolates ideas from their sociopolitical framework and which is closer to some varieties of pure philosophy that offer a kind of timeless "view from nowhere"; and, on the other hand, from social and cultural history, which tend to treat philosophical discourse and intellectual pursuits as mere epiphenomena of cultural trends or social circumstances.

For example, many social historians of late antiquity and Byzantium tend to treat classical *paideia* monolithically as a badge of elite distinction, forming an interchangeable currency of political facilitation. It can instead be seen as a tense and dynamic complex encompassing ideas at odds with each other, and choices within it were meaningful and purposive. Instead of studies in which disputation appears as a social performance without regard for what exactly was being disputed and why, we can ask instead what, then, is the author or intellectual who introduces an idea, or elaborates on an idea, *doing* exactly? Intellectual historians often see texts as containing speech acts: words and terms are deeds, insofar as they not only are carriers of depersonalized meaning but reflect the intentions of historical agents and the intentionality of texts that function as agents in a historical setting. So this also entails a break from strict analytical philosophy, which often treats speech acts without reference to historical context: intellectual history aims to uncover the function of words and ideas in a given social context.

Any "history of intellectual history" will show that the field has been inclusive and pluralistic in its methodological priorities.¹⁵ Moreover, approaches that at one moment seemed to have long lost their appeal resurface in interesting and inspiring ways. For example, recent theoretical

¹⁵ Whatmore and Young 2015: 2.

work reappraises Lovejoy's belief that it is possible to transcend the restrictions of periodization and that it is legitimate to study ideas through time, across different cultural settings.¹⁶ The strict compartmentalization of conceptual shifts imposed by the once dominant paradigm of contextualism – the idea that cultural artifacts, including ideas, can be properly interpreted only within their narrow historical context – now appears questionable. The flexibility of contemporary methodological approaches is particularly relevant and an asset to an emerging field such as Byzantine intellectual history, where pagan antiquity and late antique Christianity continued for centuries to shape a changing conceptual *osmosis*, thus inviting a *longue durée* historical treatment of its conceptual components, both underlying and on the surface. Moreover, from a philosophical perspective, contextualism may simply not suffice to appreciate the actual contents of concepts and ideas, as opposed to their implications and application at the narrow sociopolitical moment of their promulgation.

Thus, intellectual history may be seen as potentially taking into account both the diachronic aspect of ideas (Where does this or that term come from? How has it traveled from there to here?) as well as their synchronic aspect (How does this or that concept relate to the Byzantine context, or to other ideas that have a different history?). This includes studying the immediate impact of ideas in their natural context, but also their consequences as effective agents in the long run, that is, to use Hans-Georg Gadamer's term, their *Wirkungsgeschichte* or "history of influence (or effect)." Of special interest, then, is the broader intellectual space (*Ideenraum*) defined by the dissemination of ideas, and, *mutatis mutandis*, the limitations and restrictions imposed upon it (for example) by political or clerical authority.¹⁷ From the viewpoint of intellectual history, issues of intellectual conformism or dissent, dissimulation, heresy, and ideological deviance may instigate fascinating research. For example, how far did the trials of philosophers in Byzantium influence the intention and ability of intellectuals to experiment with ancient Greek philosophical ideas in innovative ways? And how far did heresy from late antiquity to late Byzantium preserve and perpetuate philosophical queries that were considered obsolete in mainstream theological and clerical discourse?

An important premise of intellectual history is that novelty does not presuppose the truthfulness of its propositions. Novelty-claims are independent of truth-claims. This effectively and further divorces intellectual history from what is commonly seen as the principal endeavor of analytical philosophy: establishing the validity of arguments. The former contextually explores perspectival revisions and shifts, while the latter abstractly seeks to establish the conditions of meaningful propositions and

¹⁶ McMahon 2014; Knight 2012. ¹⁷ Siniossoglou 2010b.

judgments. For example, the Neoplatonic triads might or might not reflect the ontological order of the world in a truthful way, and Cappadocian theology may or may not be true. But the very question about their presumed truthfulness is not the essence of intellectual history. Interpretations do not need to be true to be intellectual or, indeed, interesting and culturally meaningful. In Quentin Skinner's view, critical engagement with the truthfulness of past claims and beliefs diverts us from a genuine appreciation of their historical significance. There can be no account of ideas isolated from their context, but only a history of their uses: "There is nothing, I ventured to suggest, lying beneath or behind such uses; their history is the only history of ideas to be written."¹⁸

We might call this the *topical* rather than *essential* significance of ideas. The point is that past claims and beliefs are interpretative moves performed within shifting nexuses and intellectual constellations, potentially generating new nexuses and constellations out of the old ones. For the vast majority of the historical agents that we seek to understand, then, the essence of the world is taken to be inseparable from their situated acts of interpreting the world. This is the point of convergence for Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*, Gadamer's *hermeneutics*, Derrida's *deconstruction*, and Skinner's *intellectual history*. Rather than reveal a preexisting and set timeless reality, interpretation perpetually reveals meaning that consists in the way concepts are used.

However, it must be emphasized that the approach to intellectual history outlined above might create a mentality in modern researchers that is fundamentally at odds with that of their historical subjects. The modern (implicit) advocacy of contingency, ontologically anchorless flux, and nominalism seems to safeguard the open-ended and inclusive character of political discourse. Intellectual historians prioritizing the topical or situated significance of ideas are therefore deeply mistrustful of essentialism and realism. But the Byzantines were not committed to such projects. We may treat ideas as contingent cultural artifacts that changed over time, but from Proklos to Gennadios Scholarios the Byzantines were sincerely invested in the transcendent truth of those ideas and involved in processes of self-definition based on them. Even if we allow that ideas are not "real" in the sense of possessing an essence of their own outside history, they may still be essential to the *worldview* of their bearers as well as to the outlook of scholars studying them. Consequently, a mere retrieval of the topical significance of ideas alone does not fully exhaust the scope of their existential significance. Byzantine intellectuals did not think that their ideas were valuable only or primarily because they had immediate rhetorical, political, and social repercussions. They thought that they were

¹⁸ Quoted in Palonen 2003: 4.

meaningful and valuable insofar as they were *true*. It was epistemology and metaphysics that determined these thinkers' modality of being and life experience. It is one thing to make use of a notion, for example for rhetorical or polemical purposes, but it is another to commit ourselves to its conceptual content. Beneath the mere *use* of ideas lies the capacity of ideas to evolve as way-of-being, a *tropos hyparxeos*. The historian who steps out of the nexus of philosophical priorities that defines the metaphysical projects of his subjects isolates himself from their thought-world in much the same (absurd) way that the philosopher isolates himself from their life-world when disregarding the need for a historically embedded understanding of agents and ideas. In both cases the danger is to assume a viewpoint-from-nowhere that alternately overstates the case for historicizing or abstracting ideas.

Put otherwise: the competition of perspectives is referable to a competition of worldviews. As Wilhelm Dilthey put it, worldviews are structures of life, that is, sets of beliefs that have their roots in experience and the psyche, in the intellect as well as in will and emotion. They are a mode of existence that, when shared, potentially ties individuals together into a community. Worldviews become criteria of evaluation by means of which historical agents judge whether a particular belief is sensible, and they include moral principles, symbols and systems of signs, and products of religious revelation. For example, Orthodoxy in Byzantium was felt to be a worldview and criterion, just as Platonism was for late antique pagans. Worldviews often relate to pre-theoretical, possibly subconscious reflection and commitments. Still, the principal claim of most worldviews is that they approximate truth about the Whole, which is why, according to Dilthey, both ideas and people "coalesce into groups among which there exists a certain affinity."¹⁹ Thus intellectual history becomes social and religious history, creating or at least fueling it. An important question here concerns the relation among worldviews. For example, were Hellenism and Christianity in Byzantium worldviews in permanent tension at all times, or parallel internal discourses that may be studied non-combatively, or perhaps varied according to circumstances? And are there idiosyncratic instances of confluence and hybridization owing to individuals moving beyond mainstream Church and state discourse, such as mystics and heretics?

THE CONTOURS OF BYZANTINE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

By ancient and medieval standards, Byzantine society was marked by a fair degree of literacy. Its various departments of state were bureaucratized and

¹⁹ Kluback and Weinbaum 1957: 29.

run by paperwork to a relatively high degree. Byzantium produced many authors, who collectively wrote thousands of works, and also many scribes who copied the latter along with the works of antiquity that they deemed worthy of preservation. In addition, the official religion was based on a set of sacred texts (the Scriptures), and an official theology that was produced by the Church Fathers (also authors) and ratified by Church Councils. The Church was just as bureaucratized as the state, and also required a certain degree of literacy from its officials. Throughout Byzantine history, debates raged on matters of politics and religion, and these often took the form of written exchanges. It is natural, then, for an intellectual history of Byzantium to focus on this world of authors, books, and codified doctrines for its subject-matter, and this volume will indeed do so. But before we commit to this approach, two important qualifications must be made.

First, we traditionally organize our studies according to texts that have survived, focusing on authors as the building-blocks of analysis, but intellectual history was by no means textually limited. Many debates took place orally (whether primarily or initially so), and the texts that we have record only one or two voices in them, sometimes after they were settled. Also, some of our texts aim to capture or reflect oral media such as speeches (that were later “published” in writing), debates (written up in the form of “dialogues”), and proceedings of meetings (such as Councils), whereas others were written with oral presentation in mind, including speeches, epistolography, curricular philosophy, and in some cases even historiography.²⁰ Thus, we should think in terms not of a polarity between “orality” and “textuality,” but rather of a spectrum of discourse in which some written genres emerged from an oral background to capture one side or only one moment in a primarily oral debate. For all its (rightly) vaunted literacy, Byzantium was still mostly an oral culture. Yet the groundwork has not been laid in the field that would enable an intellectual history such as this to have an oral component. It remains a desideratum.

The second caveat is an extension of the first. Just as texts do not capture the sum of Byzantine intellectual history, intellectual activity was not limited to the world of bishops and elite lay authors, specifically to those whose works managed to survive, whether by accident or design. Every human being has an intellectual biography, though that of most Byzantines lies beyond our reach, and there is no guarantee that the few whom we know were more interesting or more important than the millions that are lost to us. We still (wrongly) think of *paideia* in terms of texts, yet it was possible through the channels of oral culture alone, especially by attending church and memorizing the key texts that were recited there, for the average Byzantine to acquire a substantial religious education. And

²⁰ Croke 2010: 28–34; for the Roman empire, see Winsbury 2009.

the ability to think critically about the content of that education did not necessarily require a familiarity with, say, Aristotle, any more than it does now.²¹ Unfortunately, apart from tentative studies of village culture and popular politics in Constantinople,²² the groundwork has not yet been laid for a *People's Intellectual History of Byzantium*.

A further distinction is now necessary. Our authors generally did not come from the super-elite: few of them were emperors, leading senators, owners of vast estates, or generals, but many were the latter's secretaries, mid-level officials, courtiers, along with bishops, priests, deacons, and monks, a large number of whom had humble social origins. In other words, most of our texts come from the service class directly below the truly powerful. This class had many privileges compared to the majority of the population, but also vulnerabilities. The loss of patronage and salary could be devastating. Second, our texts were for the most part not generated on behalf of institutions.²³ To be sure, the Byzantine Church was probably the leading institution in terms of the production of texts and documents pertaining to intellectual history, as it had stakes in the maintenance of authority over certain spheres of thought. Few Byzantine monasteries had a sustained impact on the empire's intellectual life (as did, for example, that of Stoudios), though they played a great role in copying and transmitting texts. Still, it is not clear that new works written by individual monks within them enjoyed the sanction of the institution when (or if) they were disseminated. The state produced even less in this regard (we might take imperial panegyrics as a genre that reflected its priorities). In sum, for the most part our subject-matter was produced by individual authors writing probably on their own initiative, backed only by their personal name-recognition, office, or patron. Their fate in the market of ideas could not be known in advance. Some were forgotten or ignored in their own time, or unexpectedly condemned as heretics, while others managed to reformulate Orthodoxy and become saints.

These, in a nutshell, are the social contours of Byzantine intellectual history. What about its disciplinary contours? These are harder to discuss, because among the many subfields of Byzantine Studies, intellectual history is so far the least developed, in fact it hovers tenuously between existence and non-existence and is liable to be conflated with related and adjacent modes of inquiry. Few Byzantinists have ever openly admitted to intellectual history (possibly only one);²⁴ what we tend to have instead are books with theology, dogma, or philosophy in their titles.²⁵ The rest of this

²¹ Kaldellis 2014a. ²² Baun 2007; Kaldellis 2015b. ²³ See also Chapter 1.

²⁴ The honorable exception is Anastos 1979.

²⁵ E.g. Podskalsky 1977; Meyendorff 1979; Gahbauer 2010; Rigo 2011a and 2013b; Bydén and Ierodiakonou 2012a.

section proposes a model for this promising field which attempts to define it against the background of other ways of arranging and studying the same material.

Our proposal generally follows the models of intellectual history that are practiced in many other fields, though it will likely encounter resistance, stemming from the particular and peculiar biases and ingrained assumptions of Byzantine Studies. We do not here claim to speak for the other contributors to this volume, nor can we present a “safe” consensus that will be relatively uncontroversial. There can be no consensus here, in part because the field of Byzantine intellectual history does not yet really exist, so in carving it out of existing scholarly practices we will necessarily engage in controversy. Conversely, we do not intend for our (provisional) model to be limited to this volume: there is scope for much more research to be done in the future. We hope that intellectual historians come out of the shadows cast by the current configurations and emphases of the field.

The study of Byzantium has traditionally focused on its political, military, diplomatic, social, economic, and ecclesiastical-religious history, for which texts – or rather brief excerpts of texts that are more often than not removed from their context – are used as “evidence.” Using texts as a means, in an instrumental way, has not been conducive to the emergence of intellectual history. For both heuristic and substantive reasons, intellectual life needs to be conceptually distinguished from the needs and preoccupations of other ways of looking at history: while sometimes they overlap, there are times and contexts when they diverge. For example, historians have abandoned the idea that political and economic history must march in step; we now know that political and imperial failures in the eleventh century were nevertheless accompanied by economic and demographic growth. So too we should distinguish intellectual history from, say, political history. For instance, the imperial decline of the Palaiologan empire was accompanied by remarkable experimentation and innovation in many areas of intellectual life, but this did not happen, by contrast, during the imperial collapse of the seventh century. Accordingly, a reign that was “great” in terms of military history need not have also patronized literature. Shifts in social history were not necessarily accompanied by new intellectual models (viewed perhaps as their epiphenomena).

The same disjunction should be applied to the level of the individual. Intellectual identity can be different from social or religious identity. Just because a person goes to church, or says the right words in contexts when they are required, does not mean that his thinking is orthodox in the way that contemporaries understood and valued orthodoxy. We cannot deny that a person was preoccupied with “pagan” thoughts on the grounds that he did not also go around performing pagan sacrifices: *social* conformity (or its opposite) is not the issue. The history of heresy in Byzantium makes it

clear that deviations from the norm did not necessarily imply one's parting from the ritual of the Church. In effect, no amount of evidence about a person's social life can predetermine the content of his or her intellectual identity, and it should, accordingly, not limit our options when it comes to its interpretation (to give a modern cautionary tale, consider the case of Mother Teresa, whose diaries present a spiritual profile riddled with doubt and insecurity in the faith, at odds with her public profile). Thus, different methods and assumptions are appropriate to establish the existential sites of our authors' lives that are studied by different subdisciplines, and these must include theology and the history of philosophy. The study of intellectual history should be taken at face value as distinct while remaining in open dialogue with all others.

As stressed in the previous section, intellectual history should not be seen or practiced in isolation from other types of history, with which it is mutually imbricated in more ways than can be described here. It does not occur in a vacuum, and so context is critically important. If we could summarize the middle ground that we aim to capture, it would be thus: "Ideas mattered, they were often reacting to cultural trends and social realities, and impacted upon them with what we might call an autonomous force; at the same time, however, they were always produced by specific authors reacting to their circumstances, whether immediate or general, and their existential valence and historical impact cannot be fully accounted for by general cultural, political, or social factors." Changes in the Byzantine sociopolitical framework caused ideas to shift, fade away, or reemerge, but the reverse could happen just as well. For example, Byzantine theological controversies, which obviously had a major impact on politics, society, and ideology, have never been successfully explained as expressions of other, underlying historical factors (e.g. social or ethnic struggles); instead, through mechanisms that have yet to be explained, differences in strongly held beliefs somehow created polarized social blocks. There is, of course, no way to sort out the reciprocal causal relationships between intellectual and non-intellectual factors and existential sites. In all fields, historians view events as driven by ideas (or ideologies) to a greater or lesser extent, and our contributors fall along different parts of this spectrum whenever they engage with this specific issue.

Despite its emphasis on cultural, economic, and social history, Byzantine Studies obviously does not entirely lack traditions of intellectual history. One substantial area of research, for obvious reasons, is theology. But for long the study of Byzantine theology either operated on a level of almost pure academic abstraction, or assumed a confessional vantage point that often claimed to be a natural continuation of the Byzantine tradition itself. Having said that, scholarly exponents of Orthodox theology are immensely useful guides who keep the field grounded in the key texts

and concepts, a service whose value increases when they are used as correctives to more flighty readings of the texts prompted by *au courant* literary theories (which tend, for instance, to dissolve the boundaries of “Christianity” or “Orthodoxy” and make them compatible with nearly anything – thus presupposing a viewpoint as unhistorical or ahistorical as any religious doctrine). On the other hand, the scope for a truly critical approach (beyond exposition) in exegetical scholarship is limited to subordinate aspects of the arguments. While confessional bias remains an issue – and one, moreover, that is rarely acknowledged – the study of theology has recently made tremendous advances, producing critical and historically embedded studies of religious-intellectual history, especially, in the case of Byzantium, of Orthodox–Catholic relations.²⁶

“Philosophy” in Byzantium (or, more problematically, “Byzantine philosophy”) is a controversial area for other reasons. For long this field was served by B. Tatakis’ brief and rather inadequate survey from 1949 (published in English translation in 2003, despite being hopelessly outdated). The study of philosophy in Byzantium has recently entered a new and vigorous phase, producing stimulating readings, especially of the Komnenian period and after. But, as Chapter 16 of this volume proposes, fundamental conceptual problems remain, or have been skirted. Most importantly, there is still no definition or consensus on what exactly might pass as philosophy in Byzantium: Was it *anything* that the Byzantines said it was, including the feats of physical self-denial practiced by ascetics? Can theology or scriptural revelation, which most of them took to be “true philosophy,” ipso facto count as philosophy for modern analysis? Such an inclusive approach would not pass muster in a department of philosophy, so by what standard are we to find philosophy in Byzantine texts? It sometimes seems as if this growing subfield is agreeing to pretend that the fundamental conceptual issues have been solved. What it tends to produce in the meantime are philologically oriented studies which take the form “Byzantine thinker X’s use of ancient thinker Y’s concept of Z,” focusing on commentaries and thereby skirting the question of what *philosophy* is – or should be – as an analytical category.²⁷ At any rate, whether or not the Byzantines produced much that properly counts as philosophy according to ancient and modern criteria, the Byzantine record manifests with clarity a profound preoccupation with the challenges posed by philosophy to a system of theological Orthodoxy that wanted to use philosophy for many of its own purposes but not grant it epistemic autonomy. It may be said that Byzantine thinkers were obsessed with the tension between “inner” and “outer”

²⁶ E.g. Hinterberger and Schabel 2011; Louth 2007a.

²⁷ See many of the papers in Ierodiakonou 2002c; Bydén and Ierodiakonou 2012a; Arabatzis 2013a.

wisdom, as they experienced it. Thus, the history of the concept of “philosophy” at their hands, as a perennial tension embedded in this culture that was in different ways both Hellenic and Christian, is just as interesting as any original philosophy they may have produced. We look forward to vigorous debates on this, as philosophy itself deserves no less.

Theology and philosophy – however defined and approached – do not exhaust the remit of intellectual history, which this volume takes in an expansive sense to include engagement with classical literature, the theorization of rhetoric, various technical fields, and more. This brings us to what is likely the biggest challenge faced by our emerging field in its efforts to achieve self-definition: the recent growth in the study of Byzantine “literature,” an altogether salutary development but one which itself faces challenges of definition. On one level, this is the study of the literary aspects of all the texts out of which textual-intellectual history must necessarily be built. These two fields need not be competitors, of course, and in fact they must work together. Specifically, analysis of the ideas in any text must rest on a firm understanding of the goals and contextual constraints of the genre of writing in each instance; it must also factor in the “rhetorical moment” of its composition, the text’s specific circumstances and (often unacknowledged) specific targets.²⁸ Byzantine authors will often make abstract, depersonalized arguments which seem to be making a general “intellectual” case, even if in practice they are marshaling those arguments to gain an advantage in a specific debate, and might happily abandon them, or use their opposites, when caught up in a different fight. How did Byzantine authors find ways to innovate and break out of the rhetorical conventions within which they thought when they needed to? How far did they (or could they) expect their thought to be applied beyond the situational needs of the rhetorical moment?

The recent spur of literary-historical analysis has taught us a lot about this aspect of Byzantine writing, though it is a problem faced by intellectual historians of any period or society. But “literature” and intellectual history do not overlap as analytical categories to the degree that some philologists turned literary critics seem to think, or at least not always on the terms that they propose. It used to be the case, until past the mid-twentieth century in fact, that the editor of a Byzantine text would provide an introduction to the author that often counted in the field thereafter as the standard discussion of his ideas (one thinks, for example, of introductions provided by L.G. Westerink). The parallel history of literary and intellectual analysis reached its apex (and likely terminus) in the massive surveys of Byzantine secular and ecclesiastical writings by H. Hunger and H.-G. Beck,²⁹ which are still standard points of reference. Their division of texts into fields and

²⁸ Odorico 2012. ²⁹ Hunger 1978; Beck 1959.

genres formed the starting point for subsequent research and is still generally respected. In recent decades, however, the development of Byzantine literary studies has taken that branch of research in new directions which, while exciting, do not always serve the needs and interests of intellectual history. Specifically, it is not clear that Byzantine literature is always defined so as to include *what* authors and texts had to say, as opposed to *how* they said it, to *whom* they said it, and *why*. Thus, we now have sophisticated analyses of the rhetorical structures, modalities, and innovations of authors, texts, and genres; of their imagery; of their engagement with tradition; of concepts of authorship and constructions of social-authorial personae for the presentation and reception of their work; as well as of the networks of patronage and social occasions that framed their works and defined their intentionality – all well and good, but in the end some studies avoid discussing whether these authors expressed interesting ideas in their works that are worth discussing as such. Were there intellectual (rather than socio-rhetorical) purposes for which this whole apparatus of literary composition was set into motion? A recent study of Byzantine poetry, while stimulating in all those other fronts, answers No to this question, which is candid but strikes us as improbable and harkens disquietingly to older prejudices that the Byzantines had nothing really new or interesting to say.³⁰

A final challenge to which we must draw attention is the persistent tendency by the field to homogenize Byzantine society – politically, religiously, intellectually – and to subordinate individuals to normative ideas that allegedly exerted a stranglehold on the mind of the entire population. Study after study claims or assumes that “the Byzantines” could not conceive a particular radical, heterodox, or supposedly modern idea because they could not think outside the box of their imperial-Orthodox framework, a framework that is constructed by scholars through the selective use of quotations taken from texts valorized as normative. It is thereby commonly assumed that everyone was “normal” in terms of Orthodoxy or acceptance of the imperial system and social hierarchy, and that it was only minor personal or historical circumstances that differentiated one expression of these ideals from another. This can become a true analytical bias, closing off interpretative avenues on a priori grounds. It is not clear why a conformist drive has been applied so dogmatically to Byzantium in particular. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “Byzantium” was treated by many as an archetypical Orthodox and absolutist society, whether negatively by its Enlightenment

³⁰ Bernard 2014: 339; Papaioannou (2013) offers a brilliant analysis of Psellos’ careful fashioning of a sophisticated authorial identity in relation to tradition, but leaves it unclear what ideas Psellos sought to promote beyond aesthetics and authorship.

opponents or more positively by its modern Orthodox apologists: either way, its utility as a monolithic manifestation of an abstract type was too great to be troubled by the messiness of empirical case-by-case studies. It thus became possible to reify the Mind of Byzantium. More recently, and as an extension of the interpretative priorities of the rise of “late antiquity,” Orthodox Christianity is seen less as a historical religion and more as an all-encompassing “discourse,” a framework of modern analysis. This too produces a bias in favor of seeing everyone and everything as a variant of the basic discourse. Anyone who stands outside would (inconveniently) require a different framework of analysis.

We will make two methodological suggestions at this point, beyond the obvious empirical point that each case should be studied on its own merits and not forced to fit a preconceived model for a given society. The first is widely conceded by Byzantinists, whether or not they grasp implications for intellectual history. Byzantium was not an intellectually free society: there was an official religion, no other religions or systems of philosophical belief (with the partial exception of Judaism) were permitted, and penalties were imposed on those who were found or even only perceived to have deviated from Orthodoxy. “The concept of orthodoxy implies not only intolerance but also violence.”³¹ This violence took many forms – physical, legal, rhetorical, and social – and was backed by the authority of powerful institutions, namely the imperial state and Church. Their direct interest in the circulation of ideas has left a powerful negative imprint in the record, which is not often recognized: despite producing many heresies, Byzantium managed to ruthlessly suppress the transmission of heretical texts, contenting itself only with their refutation. Even pagan texts fared better – after they were properly “domesticated.” As for living authors, trouble was only a half-step away for any thinker (philosopher or theologian) who said the wrong thing – even if it was not always clear in advance what the right thing was in unresolved areas.³² Many charged ahead anyway in the unshakeable conviction that they were right, but others, like thinkers in repressed societies throughout history, developed methods of playing it safe, or indirectly or covertly expressing subversive ideas. Few things are as easy to fake as piety. This is well studied in other premodern fields, but has hardly been touched in Byzantium.³³ But knowing what we know about the context, we can no longer assume that any declaration of belief was sincere. Admittedly, this problem does not receive much attention in the chapters of this volume, but it forms an important area for

³¹ Cameron 2008: 114. For a striking and full declaration of the responsibility of Orthodox authorities to physically exterminate people who challenge the faith, see Gennadios Scholarios, *Letter to Oises*, in *Ceuvres complètes*, v. 4, 476–489; cf. *Against Plethon*, v. 4, 114, on the requirement to defend the faith.

³² See, for example, Chapter 27. ³³ Zagorin 1990; Melzer 2014; Baltussen and Davis 2015.

future research: philology and hermeneutics need to be more context-sensitive.

The second methodological point is this. The field as a whole is off-balance in stressing the normativity, conformity, and sameness of the culture, and needs to be more open to dissidence, marginal cases, and deviation. One approach that is fruitful when it comes to intellectual history is to assume that every idea or issue was the site of disagreement, and to seek to explore the relevant debate – rather than to look exclusively for the normative core or outcome and premise subsequent analysis on that. For every cultural artifact, we should ask: How did they disagree about this? How was it politically and intellectually contentious?

The normative standing even of “real” existing consensus is not always unproblematic. Those in power obviously have an interest in claiming that a state of affairs which benefits them rests on a stable, morally binding consensus, so one must take their testimony with a grain of salt . . . [Moreover], conflict exists not merely between groups but also within each individual as diverse forms of morality struggle for hegemony. No era and no individual has a completely clearly articulated, single consistent world-view.³⁴

No society has ever been as monolithic in its ideological make-up as the Byzantium that one often encounters in the pages of scholarship. The totalizing fallacy of ideology-as-worldview must be exposed.³⁵ From this perspective, for example, Orthodoxy emerges as less a uniform blanket that covered the culture and more as a site of contestation: its very identity was constantly being challenged, defined, and redefined through dissent and disagreement. Orthodoxy was a matrix of heresy, and its relationship to Greek philosophy was especially fraught with tension from the beginning. While we did not put this before our contributors as a guideline, we find in the end that many of their chapters document this aspect of Byzantium, namely its vibrant and troubled intellectual life. Normative standards frequently became insecure, and individual thinkers broke from established beliefs (see, for example, Metochites and imperial ideology in Chapter 36). Others were thought to have done so in their own time but were later rehabilitated to Orthodoxy according to retrospective criteria (see, for example, the case of Maximos the Confessor in Chapter 24). Intellectual history is premised on the notion that historical agents could think for themselves in ways that problematize their subjection to those categories of cultural and social history that dominate the study of late antiquity and Byzantium today.

³⁴ Geuss 2001: 5. ³⁵ C. Bell 2009: 188.

Byzantine intellectual history must, therefore, historicize confessional theology; adopt rigorous standards and definitions against a too-permissive notion of philosophy; insist on ideas, concepts, and debates against the formalist tendency of literary study to limit its analysis with genres, authorial modalities, and the constraints of the rhetorical moment; and look beyond the ideological formal orders and limitation that the field has sought to impose on all Byzantine thinkers *a priori*. We hope that the cumulative effect of this volume will be to give this emerging subfield its own voice and focus.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS VOLUME

The overall shape of this volume and the major decisions that we made at its inception should be clear from the table of contents. In terms of approach, we commissioned authoritative discussions of the “state of the field” in each topic, drawing on a mix of established scholars and newer voices. Contributors were given room to make original arguments if warranted, while still covering the important authors, ideas, and themes. Our imagined readership consisted not primarily of experts in each topic but of students and scholars from adjacent fields (for example, Classical, Medieval, Islamic, Renaissance, and Early Modern Studies) who want to know more about this important aspect of Byzantium. The volume should, however, be just as useful to Byzantinists. First, even experts in the various areas will find that the chapters make original arguments that can emerge only from synthetic overviews that eschew hyper-specialization on one text or author. Second, no one knows equally all the fields covered here, certainly not in their dynamic combination and juxtaposition, and many of them have not received a synthetic survey in many decades – or ever. In this way, we aimed to consolidate the current state of Byzantine intellectual history and provide a platform for the growth that is sure to come.

Though both editors have track records of ec-centric, revisionist scholarship, we opted in this case for a more conservative approach, especially in the selection of topics. The Byzantines thought and wrote about a great many things, and there are perhaps no absolute standards by which some topics can be included and others excluded. The criteria that we used to select topics for coverage included (a) the bulk of the surviving material relating to a topic, as well as the resilience of ideas related to it, which loosely correlates to the intensity and popularity of Byzantine interest in it; (b) the particularity and discrete identity of any one topic relative to others, especially as expressed in the existence of distinct genres devoted to their exploration; for example, contributions bearing a field-specific title (e.g. relating to astronomy or rhetoric) indicate that the Byzantines themselves

considered this as an identifiable area of thought; and (c) the existence of a relatively specialized vocabulary and set of ideas for discussing that topic in explicitly theorized terms. These criteria in combination led to the exclusion of equally fascinating topics such as Byzantine thinking about gender, holiness, skepticism, the future, or economics.³⁶ We do not rule out the possibility of editing a separate volume on such topics. The criteria listed above, which are intrinsic to the Byzantine evidence, were reinforced by an external one as well: we wanted to present a volume that would interface easily with traditional topics of study in intellectual history generally, so that scholars from other fields can use our findings and data in their own work.

Another choice that we faced was chronological. An empire whose history spanned 1,100 years and which had provinces in three continents, where texts were produced in at least half a dozen languages, presents an unwieldy mass of materials. For a number of reasons, we decided to focus on the period after the seventh century. The early Byzantine period, known also as the late Roman period or late antiquity, has been amply covered in recent studies and surveys (for example, the *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*), whereas Byzantium after the seventh century has received less attention and never systematically in one place. The sheer bulk of the earlier material, and the space that would have to be devoted to such foundational authors as the Church Fathers and the Neoplatonists, would leave less room for those middle and later periods that are understudied and deserve a seat at the table. Intrinsic reasons reinforce this periodization. First, the imperial crisis of the seventh century led to a sudden decline in the practice of many areas of intellectual life, which were subsequently reconstituted on different terms, as the chapters that follow explain. In most fields, the transition from late antiquity to the middle Byzantine period involved a gap in production that lasted from the mid-seventh to the ninth century, or beyond. This gap justifies the period-break we adopt. While we do not wish to deny the axes of continuity which bridged that gap in various sites, Byzantine intellectual life was not a smooth continuation of one or another late antique worldview. We therefore asked our contributors to focus on the period after c. 650 CE, but in many cases they felt it necessary to get a long running start in the earlier period.

Second, the gap mentioned above coincided with a loss of linguistic and cultural diversity, especially of the provinces in which Latin, Coptic, and

³⁶ Our criteria would include the exegesis of biblical and patristic texts but for reasons of space we omitted this tradition, which will be covered extensively in handbooks of Byzantine literature (in preparation). This tradition is heavily weighted in favor of early Byzantium (late antiquity), which we eschew in this volume (see below for periodization).

Syriac were spoken, with the concomitant loss of the increasingly separatist ecclesiastical and theological traditions that some of them were harboring. In the early Byzantine period, intellectual life in Greek was, in many regions and the capital, influenced by and in dialogue with developments that were taking place in other languages, but this was much less the case after the seventh century. Only a small number of Byzantine thinkers subsequently read learned languages other than Greek. Therefore, while we are strongly in favor of inter-linguistic and cross-cultural study, we see intellectual life in Byzantium after the end of antiquity as essentially a Greek phenomenon. Parallel handbooks (in preparation) on Byzantine literary history have made the same choice. Third, to a far greater degree than in late antiquity, Byzantine intellectual life took place within an Orthodox Christian frame of reference. This is not to deny that individual thinkers took their engagement with pagan thought “too far,” as exponents of official doctrine and political authorities saw it. But in the middle and later periods this phenomenon assumed different forms of expression: it was not supported by a thriving non-Christian intellectual scene. By 550 CE, the Church and its allies in the administration had driven it out of existence. We did not, however, want to commit to a full and representative coverage of the end of pagan thought (which, we believe, has been presented in far too irenic colors recently). Still, individual contributions make clear the extent to which late antique Hellenizing thought lived on in the works of later thinkers, whether as a resource under “containment” or as a potentially revived threat.

As many of the chapters in this volume make clear, the Byzantines often divided their intellectual patrimony into its pagan and Christian components, each of which had canonical authors for various genres and fields. It is a commonplace to say that being educated in Byzantium meant that one had studied those canonical texts. But this had implications that are worth stating. Being educated did not, as it does today, mean that one was necessarily up-to-date on recent work. Indeed, it poses the question of whether Byzantine intellectual history was linear and accumulative, with each period building on the advances of its immediate predecessor. In many fields, it seems rather that each thinker was looking back to the culture’s ancient and patristic sources, jumping over much that came in between – or pretending to do so. This phenomenon tends to defeat the effort to write a linear, progressive, and integrated history. A thematic approach works better, which allows our contributors to assess the extent to which each field built upon recent advances or looked to the past.

In the end, periodization is largely a convenience for organizing material according to educational or academic typologies, “for the sake of instruction” as a Platonist commentator might put it. In substantive intellectual terms, period-limits are repeatedly defeated by the long shelf life of books

and the ability of ideas to reproduce themselves immaterially and perpetually, which makes them so radically different from individual persons, social classes, economic structures, and political institutions. The case of Byzantium is eminently illustrative of this. Its political life was long enough as it was, but some of the basic templates of its intellectual life were even older, constituted by a selective appropriation of classical Greek thought that was subsequently overlaid, or reconstructed, by the Church Fathers. These legacies or patrimonies, the classical and the patristic, provided the basic modes and orders within which most Byzantine intellectual life took place. Proklos and pseudo-Dionysios loom large in debates that took place many hundreds of years after their time. Julian the Apostate and “the pagan scare” continued to influence the way that theologians patrolled the borders of truth a thousand years after the last pagan emperor died, as his avatar was firmly lodged in their view of the world: the Byzantines never “got over” Julian, who for them stood for the possibility that the pagan thought-world might rise up and live again. Thus, the concept and viability of a pagan worldview was constantly present in Byzantine thought. To repeatedly deny an idea often amounts to preserving and perpetuating it. Thus, we encouraged our authors of chapters to reflect on classical or late antique material, to whatever degree deemed necessary to explain later developments. The volume thus has a flexible approach to periodization, while keeping its focus on the middle and later periods.

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