The Byzantinist
A Message from the President

My first ever experience of Byzantine studies was through the Oxford University Byzantine Society when I attended its 2013 International Graduate Conference. I was struck by the size and vitality of the postgraduate community here, quite unlike any other university I have been to, the way the student community collaborated and the sense of a shared camaraderie and friendships forged through a love for an academic subject. There was a sense that this would be the right place for me. More than the libraries, more than the academics I met, it was the conference and talking to postgraduates that convinced me to abandon work in a golf shop and to return to academic study. It has been an honour to be part of the OUBS committee this year and to build upon the work of my predecessors who made the society into the beating heart of the Late Antique and Byzantine studies community in Oxford. My only hope is that I leave the OUBS in the same healthy state it was before and continues to help foster the welcoming and supportive atmosphere that attracted me to Oxford way back in 2013.

With this in mind, we established a more formalised mentoring programme for all new postgraduate students. We were helped by the enthusiastic response of the current student body who volunteered to be mentors and with so many mentors we could match mentors to new students according to interests. Oxford and its somewhat idiosyncratic ways can be quite confusing, so hopefully the society, with the mentoring programme and its two mailing lists helps its members find the necessary support and opportunities for themselves. To further this goal we have also tried to encourage informal contact between retired members of staff and students as well. With such a wealth of knowledge available it seemed a shame for it not to be used in some way.

Continuing on with the good work from last year, we have organised a society research road-trip through Serbia and Kosovo in the upcoming Easter holidays. We have only been able to do so with the generous help of members of staff and the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research. If the trip is anything like last year’s to Thessaloniki we will see many sites and appreciate them in a way that would not be possible any other way. It is shaping up into a fantastic trip and a perfect opportunity to forge closer friendships within the community.

And talking of opportunities, this brings to mind the International Graduate Conference, now in its seventeenth year, to be held on the 27th-28th February in the History Faculty on ‘Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Byzantine World’. The theme naturally lends itself to the inter-disciplinary nature of Byzantine studies in Oxford and has attracted forty-eight confirmed speakers from institutions coming from as far afield as the USA and Japan to Oxford. We also hope that it will enable us to produce a volume of selected papers that not only enables an examination of the issue but demonstrates the importance of postgraduates in keeping research in Byzantine studies, in the broadest sense possible, fresh and innovative.

A taster of this can be seen in this fifth edition of the ‘Byzantinist’. The articles and book reviews cover the entire period of Byzantium’s existence and cover topics as broad as the Cult of Angels to the study of ethnography. The articles, reviews and the profiles within this newsletter demonstrate the pluralism of the community here and what opportunities are available to those who seek them. It is with great pride that the OUBS presents the latest issue of ‘The Byzantinist’ to you. Long may it and the society continue to flourish in this place that will always remain dear to my heart.

Andrew M. Small, President 2014-15
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Front image: The Rotunda of Galerius, 4th century A.D., Thessaloniki
Some Material Evidence for the Origin and Makeup of the Cult of Angels

Sydney Taylor, Brasenose College

Little scholarly attention has been devoted to the Christian cult of angels, particularly as evident in the archaeological record. Previous research related to Christian angeloi, particularly the archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel, has often only focused upon Michael, devoting little more than a sentence or two to cult activity surrounding other archangels. These examinations also tend to focus upon literary rather than archaeological evidence. This emphasis upon source literature, such as hagiographies, histories, et cetera, is understandable to some degree in light of the limited material evidence available for the cult, particularly early churches or cult sites definitely linked with these angels. The remains of churches offer no specific architectural or design features which suggest these were sites of veneration, and their identification thus depends upon epigraphic evidence or, in its absence, literary attestations. Although limited, the physical remains permit the generation of a geographic distribution of the cult of angels from AD 300 to 800 as well as provide some insight into characteristics of the cult.

A consideration of the geographic distribution of the Christian cult of angels during these centuries indicates a significant number of cult sites and churches associated with these figures in the East, particularly in Anatolia and Syria. In Anatolia for example, the remnants of churches dedicated to archangels have been identified at Germia in Galatia, at Aphrodisias and at Miletus in Caria. The first building phase of the church at Germia may date to the fifth century. The churches in Aphrodisias and Miletus represent sixth-century foundations which incorporate pre-existing pagan temple structures. An additional four churches of archangels appear in epigraphic evidence, with dedications from Çarşamba, Saparta, Sazak, and Sozopolis. In the province of Syria, archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicate four churches associated with archangels, namely a Michaelion at Huarte, a church of Michael at il-Anderin, a church to unspecified archangels at Fa‘lul, and a church to Michael and Gabriel at al-Gharizzeh al-Gharbizzeh in the Hauran region. Inscriptions invoking archangels but not associated with churches have been discovered in Umm el-Jimal and il-Burdj. In Anatolia and Syria, an additional fifteen churches feature in literary accounts, including perhaps the most prominently attested cult sites at Chonai, Sosthenion, Anaplus, and Pythia, but most of these sites have not been fully excavated and in some cases their exact location is unknown.

In comparison, the number of surviving or attested sites dedicated to angels in the West is far less. The sanctuary at Monte Gargano in Italy may date to the sixth century, and the foundation inscription of San Michele in Africisco, Ravenna, suggests a date of ca. 545 although very little of the actual church survives. The existence of other churches associated with archangels in Italy is suggested by literary accounts, but the physical evidence remains limited.

Gaul provides similarly restricted archaeological evidence for cult sites of the archangels, although such sites as Mont Saint-Michel with its eighth-century foundations are well attested, as well as the monastery at St Mihiel-Verdun (ca. early eighth century). At the time of writing there are no churches associated with Christian angels known to the author from this period in Spain, either in the archaeological evidence or attested in literary sources. In both Gaul and Spain, the cult of saints and in particular of martyrs appears to have been more popular in during the late antique and early Byzantine periods. Evidence for the foundation of churches in Spain associated with the archangels only begins to appear at the end of the eighth century, significantly later than the earliest known sites in the East.

The results of a consideration of the geographic distribution of churches and cult sites associated with Christian angels reveals several noteworthy trends. First, the greater prevalence of sites in the East compared to the West may suggest that the cult was not as popular in the latter region, if we take the number of known or attested sacred sites as an indicator of popularity. Second, among the angels venerated at such sites,
the archangel Michael appears most regularly, although other archangels, Gabriel in particular, may appear on their own or in conjunction with Michael. In some instances, the epigraphic dedications appear non-specific, noting an unspecified ἀρχαγγέλος or general ἀρχαγγελοί. Finally, the plan and architecture of the excavated churches associated with archangels do not appear to bear significant differences from those connected with the veneration of human saints. The surviving invocations also suggest no marked differences in how these figures, archangels and saints, were approached or in the type of action desired by supplicants, particularly petitions for protection or healing.

These preliminary conclusions prompt considerations of the origins and the nature of the cult of angels during this period. Previous research has only considered the distribution of Michael, such as Wilhelm Lueken’s 1898 monograph, Michael: eine Darstellung und Vergleichung der jüdischen und der morgenländisch-christlichen Tradition vom Erzengel Michael, which argued that Michael’s cult originated at Chonai. The claim for a single geographic point of origin for not only the cult of Michael but also for the cult of angels in general cannot be substantiated by the available archaeological evidence. The higher occurrence of cultic activity and association of sites with archangels in the East than in the West, however, suggests a regional origin for the cult in the East.

Beyond a geographic origin, the prevalence of sites associated with archangels in the East may also indicate a cultural-religious predisposition toward veneration and invocation of angels arising from pre-Christian eastern traditions of angeloi cults. In terms of definition, as semi-divine intermediaries, pre-Christian references to angeloi appear similar in meaning to Jewish and Christian textual allusions to angels. Many sites in the Roman world show evidence, both archaeological and literary, of having acted as sacred points where heaven and earth were believed to meet, a belief shared in some cases by different religious traditions, such as Christians, Jews, and pagans. Some such sites were associated with angeloi and, as at the so-called Fountain of the Lamps at Corinth, centered upon springs or other water features. Among the votive lamps discovered here include some invocations which contain names and ritual elements derived from Christianity, Judaism, and perhaps magical papyri, such as an invocation “by the great god Sabaoth, by Michael, by Gabriel.” Based upon such syncretistic elements evident at Corinth as well as other sites associated with angeloi-veneration, it may be argued, as Rangar Cline has suggested in his work Ancient Angels, that such formulas were designed not with regard for orthodoxy but efficacy.

These overlapping ritual elements, as well as shared sites of sacred veneration, may provide some context for such literary evidence as a passage in Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians 2:8 which expressly discourages the worship of angels. The proximity of Colossae to the shrine at Chonai may indicate early syncretistic rituals at the latter site, perhaps similar to those at Corinth. In response to such communal religious activity, the Synod of Laodicia (ca. 360) prohibited the veneration of extra-ecclesiastical angeloi, an injunction which may have encouraged the growing popularity of archangels, making the invocation of these figures licit by subjecting the cult to ecclesiastical authority. Similarly, Christian apologists by the third century found it necessary to delineate between good angeloi and evil daimones, as well as to outline proper veneration practices. In particular, despite their semi-divine nature, angeloi should not be worshipped as theoi, as they were among Gentiles, and should not themselves be the objects of prayer. Rather these figures should convey prayers or petitions to the Christian God. Such distinctions suggest the confusion arising for Christians by the third century regarding the veneration of these figures, resulting in the necessity for the clear stipulation of Christian doctrine on the nature and role of angeloi.

It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that an examination of material culture associated with pagan or pre-Christian angeloi veneration, such as amulets and inscriptions, offers some points of similarity between traditional and Christian cult activity related to angels. These include the relation of certain characteristics, i.e. protection, healing, thaumaturgy, and connections with geographic features (caves and high places) and natural elements (water in particular), with angelic figures. Although offering some

1 Cline (2011), 120.
2 The is particularly clear in passages from Origin’s Contra Celsum (3.37, 5.4, 8.25, 8.31) and from Augustine’s Civ. Dei (9.19, 10.26).
3 Contra Celsum 5.4.
suggestion of the manner in which supplicants interacted with angels, these characteristics were not universal in either traditional angeloi-veneration or in the Christian cult, indicated by the fewer number of such interactions in the West from AD 300 to 800 (at least as measured by the number of cult sites). Moreover, many of these same characteristics may be observed within the cult of saints. Common to both the eastern and western Empires, for example, were numerous healing centers associated with various saints, such as St Martin of Tours, St Sergius and Bacchus, or St Thekla. This continuity among pre-Christian and Christian cults indicates some degree of shared purpose or function, perhaps pointing to the Hellenic culture in which early Christianity emerged and with which it negotiated.

The brief examination of some of the material evidence associated with the Christian cult of angels from AD 300 to 800 presents a cult of eastern origins closely linked, at least in its early stages, with the cultural-religious environment of the late Roman world. The cult of angels sheds further light upon the religious landscape of the late antique and early Byzantine periods, highlighting the early continuity and syncretism with pre-Christian cults. Such communal cult activity, however, was short-lived and soon the cult of angels came more under the control of the Church. Sites such as the Fountain of the Lamps at which multiple religious groups had worshiped together fell into decline by the fifth and sixth century, while orthodox churches expressly dedicated to admissible angels were constructed.

Further Reading:


Rage, rage against the dying of the light: Roman resilience in the afterglow of Empire

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History has a dual purpose. Its study not only aims to understand the past, but can reveal a mirror for contemporary prejudices. In few other areas of late antique historiography is this more apparent than in the study of the fall of the Western Roman Empire. To read a vast body of the current secondary literature is to discover that the end of the West apparently ‘took place in a natural, organic and generally eirenic manner’. The barbarians, we are told, were accommodated peacefully by Romans who embraced the end of empire. War as a causal force is banished from history by a generation or two of western scholars for whom it is not a first-hand experience.

In an age in which, until recently, European integration, American protection and largely free markets looked set to insulate the West from the uncertainties of history, it became somewhat distasteful to see Rome collapsing in a maelstrom of fire and iron. André Piganiol’s epigram proclaiming that la civilisation romaine…a été assassinée was surely to be dismissed as idiosyncratic. Piganiol was a Frenchman who had lived through a brutal Germanic invasion and whose L’Empire chrétien was published amidst the ashes of post-war Europe.

Yet it is not only because the ephemeral certainties of the late twentieth century are arguably fading away, that a more realistic reconstruction of the fall of Rome is possible. A close analysis of the sources – a worldlier reading more sensitive to context – belies the fallacy of what we can call the ‘accommodationist tendency’. There are many ways in which this analysis can be done. One of the most effective is thoroughly to critique the careers of men often cited in accommodationist arguments as evidence for widespread treason or passive acquiescence. As so often in history, things are not as they seem.

Let us start with the sometime Gallic Prefect Arvandus. He allegedly did not merely accede to the new post-Roman reality, but is reported actively to have encouraged it. He purportedly wrote a letter to the Gothic King Euric, calling on him to divide Gaul with the Burgundians and to spurn all alliance with the Emperor. What clearer example of the so-called ‘climate of treason’ supposedly enveloping the ailing Western Empire can there be?

The principle source for the career of Arvandus, Sidonius Apollinaris’ Letters 1.7, is, however, hardly clear-cut. The events surrounding the disgraced Prefect were highly peculiar and demand further investigation. What is most curious of all is that, if his treason was as obvious as his accusers argued and as the quick verdict would suggest (1.7.5; 1.7.11), why did Arvandus, who must have been familiar with the law, show no recognition whatsoever of the gravity of his situation?

Sidonius’ character sketch suggests why. Despite professing to be a friend of Arvandus (1.7.1), Sidonius does not hide the fact that his second term in office was marred by ‘the greatest degree of plundering’ (1.7.3). Arvandus was, significantly, ‘burdened by debt’ (1.7.3). It is clear from the description of his character that desperate action to alleviate his situation was not beyond him (1.7.2).

The implication arising from the letter is that Arvandus had attempted to remedy his dire financial situation through a criminal level of taxation that he intended to divert to his own use. That explains why his accusers are all Gallic provincials and not central officials cracking down on peripheral treason (1.7.4): the province had been fleeced. Arvandus, therefore, failed to appreciate news of the damning letter to King Euric because it was so alien to the charges he was preparing to rebut that it could be dismissed as ‘superfluous panic’ (1.7.7). It was the kind of wild rumour that has a tendency to attach itself to those who fall into disgrace.

When Romans are actually found working with barbarians, one should not blithely assume that they did so voluntarily, when other options remained open. Another character from Sidonius’ corpus (Letters 8.9), the orator Lampridius, is frequently given as an example of how Roman provincials could perceive opportunity in the more local centres of power and patronage presented by the barbarian kings.
A forensic study of Lampridius, however, shows how reductive and how unrealistically optimistic this interpretation is.

Sidonius presents Lampridius as enjoying the favour of the Visigothic court. Yet his epistle to the orator contains a short panegyric poem suggesting that Lampridius’ life had not been without profound disruption. The twelfth line reveals that Lampridius’ lands had earlier been stolen from him: ‘now you, Tityrus, with your country-lands restored’. This restoration is probably what Sidonius is describing when mentioning Euric’s ‘kingly generosity’ (8.9.1). Sidonius’ insistence that it is this that has made Lampridius ‘now secure’ (8.9.1) hints that he is writing about a quite recent development.

The date of the letter is important. Sidonius is clearly writing during his short banishment after the fall of his city to the Goths in 475: ‘I am in distress, you are lucky; I am yet an exile, you now play the citizen’ (8.9.3). Lampridius stands on the victor’s podium (8.9.6) whereas Sidonius remains on the racetrack (8.9.6).

The meaning of the imagery of competition becomes clear when one considers the description of the whole world petitioning Euric (lines 19-20 of the poem). Lampridius had evidently only come to the Visigothic court and thereby into the King’s service as a supplicant, desperate after his land was seized by barbarian brawn. His was not a voluntary choice. Indeed, the dating of the letter strongly suggests that Lampridius had only gone cap in hand to Euric within a year of the forced abdication of Romulus Augustulus, recognised – surely not uniquely – by Sidonius as the end of empire (Letters, 8.2.1). Rome, therefore, had to be breathing her last before an accommodation with the new world was to be sought.

That this world was created in a process far more violent and uncertain than the accommodationist tendency allows arises from our final witness, Paulinus of Pella. He and his family were, like Lampridius, forced to seek crumbs from the Gothic royal table. They were not, however, as successful as the orator.

Both of Paulinus’ sons met an untimely death at Toulouse. One of them, Paulinus hints, seems to have been killed on the direct orders of the King: ‘then he…cursed in deed and end, tossed about in the King’s friendship and hate, lost almost all my property and came to an equal end’ (Thanksgiving, 512-515). It is not surprising, with this in mind, that Paulinus had earlier considered permanent exile before Gothic power in Aquitaine had been consolidated (406-419). Were he to have left Gaul, he would have added to the ranks of Gallic refugees found elsewhere in the contemporary sources. Those who appear in the poem On His Return by Rutilius Namatianus are evidently, Paulinus’ concerns would suggest, examples of a far broader trend (On His Return I.493 and I.540-564). The allegedly ‘eirenic’ nature of the barbarian invasions must have escaped these men entirely.

Nowhere, indeed, does Paulinus present the incursion and settlement of barbarian groups in Gaul as a peaceful, evolutionary process. The reader of the Thanksgiving is left in no doubt that the Roman world was hacked out from under him. The Rhine invasion of 406 pierced the very bowels of the empire (Thanksgiving, 235), destroying peace (238). His family’s estates were ravaged (239) as were their urban properties (286-290). When he does mention Romans coming to some form of modus vivendi with Goths, it is only after they had first suffered sorrow at barbarian hands (308).

The end of the poem is as moving as it is telling. Paulinus receives some material security when a Goth buys his small farm (575). The price Paulinus has to accept, however, is said to have been ‘hardly indeed fair’ (578). It was clearly the nature of the times for economic exchange to be so one-sided. The only hope for the future is to be found in death and consequent union with the divine (582-616): a fitting sentiment to end a poem that is nothing if not the author’s attempt to reconcile himself in religion to the traumas of his life.

Dating is again significant. The Thanksgiving was composed in 459. Even then was it possible for Paulinus to write that he had outlived his fatherland (310). Crucially, the very fact that Gallo-Romans could think this and yet, like Lampridius, wait for fifteen years or more before they tried to find a place for themselves in a barbarian world is powerful testimony to the resilience of political loyalty to the Roman Empire.

It is evident, therefore, that the world of the barbarian kingdoms was forced upon the elites of the Roman provinces. They did not embrace it. Coercion ultimately underscored Romano-barbarian interaction in the afterglow of empire. Many provincials indeed fought for
Rome long after its legions had marched into the pages of history. Not only did Aegidius hold parts of northern Gaul ‘in the Roman name’ (Hydatius, Chronicle, 224), but Gildas waxes Churchillian when describing Romano-British resistance to the Germanic invader: ‘they fought and fought, entrenching themselves in the very mountains, caves and thickets’ (On the Ruin of Britain, 20.2).

The notion that the fall of the Western Roman Empire was ‘natural, organic and generally eirenical’ is little more than a modern scholarly myth.

Select Bibliography

For an overall narrative:

Heather, P., The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History, London, 2005

For the ‘accommodationist tendency’:


…And for a targeted rebuttal:

Ward-Perkins, B., The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilisation, Oxford, 2005
Femininity and Subversion in the Synaxarion of the Honourable Donkey

Kirsty Stewart, Queen’s College

Animals in literature are inherently subversive. They do not conform to the rules of mankind, nor often the rules of genre, and are at once familiar and strange, comfortable and threatening. One of the ways nature was used in later Byzantine literature was to present a picture of femininity as defined by male authors. The descriptions on which I will focus here are not necessarily of real women, and it is doubtful that the authors were women, though the possibility cannot be ruled out entirely. Rather, these figures are reflections of concepts about women, nature and society, the joining of images to express an idea, a social construct. Feminised nature could thus be used to subvert and comment on the familiar through the recognizable mirror of the natural world.

The Synaxarion of the Honourable Donkey is an anonymous vernacular poem dated to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. It tells the story of the Donkey, who is taken from his field by the Fox and the Wolf, ostensibly to be educated by them. The animals end up on a boat in the middle of the sea and due to the possibility of death from a storm ‘prophesied’ by the Fox, they agree to make confession and punish whoever has committed the worst sin, apparently in an attempt to gain God’s favour and save themselves from drowning. Inevitably, the poor Donkey is chosen despite the trifling nature of his sin, apparently in an attempt to gain God’s favour and save themselves from drowning. Inevitably, the poor Donkey is chosen despite the trifling nature of his sin. However, the outcome is not as expected; the Donkey is not eaten, as the Fox had intended, but saves himself, and the Wolf and Fox declare that he should no longer be referred to as a γάδαρος, meaning donkey, but as νικόν, another, later term that also means donkey but plays with the verb νίκάω, to have victory over, conquer.

The designation of the Fox as female in this text is not a purely linguistic feature. Rather the anonymous author seems to have consciously made the fox character female. While the Wolf and Donkey are addressed with masculine titles, the Fox is addressed as a female; The Wolf calls her συντεκνίσσα five times. In line 212 she is κυρία μου ἁγία and in line 215 the Wolf goes so far as to call her ὡσία μου, ἁγία μου. He also describes her as νομοδιδασκάλισσα (117a) meaning teacher of law or, here, possibly teacher of all things.

Apart from terminology of address, the anthropomorphous representation of the Fox is closely linked with the misogynistic representation of women. This is done both through the adjectives used of the Fox and through her behaviour. She is described several times as πονηρά, meaning wicked, a term frequently used to describe women. For example, it is used frequently in Syntipas, a Persian work translated into Greek around the end of the eleventh century, and reworked probably in the thirteenth, which focuses on the sexual misdemeanors and general scheming of women. The Fox is also termed μηχανουργός (44) and δολιοπανοργός (252), both of which may be translated as cunning or wily. She commits cunning deeds and slanders, τὰ τύτης πανοργείματα καὶ τὰς διαβολίς (140), and behaves in a deceitful way, δόλαιν τρόπων (114), so that we are left in no doubt as to her deceptive and sinful character, which women, as descendants of Eve, were often accused of possessing.

Although not overtly mentioned as a trait, the Fox is by far the most verbose of the three animals. This corresponds to the misogynistic topos of loquaciousness. In the ancient novel, the heroine does sometimes speak more than the hero, but this trend was reversed in the twelfth-century Komnenian novels where the correlation between femininity and silence is often highlighted. For example, in the fragments we have of Manasses’s novel, Aristandros and Kallithea, we find a clear example of this idea;

‘O woman, it is an adornment for women and especially for maidens not to wear their tongues out on useless matters, but to close their mouths and not waste time on long and superfluous discussions.’

The Fox in the *Synaxarion* is behaving in a manner that was apparently unacceptable to the male-dominated society of Byzantium, and is thus the opposite of the idealised heroine of the Komnenian and Palaiologan novels. Her confession stretches to 66 verses, the longest continuous speech in the text, and she speaks alone for an additional 96 verses, as well as sharing 14 with the Wolf. In comparison, the Wolf’s confession covers only 10 verses, and he speaks alone for an additional 30. The Donkey speaks for a total of 68 verses, of which his confession spans 24.

It is the Fox who has a plan to trick the Donkey, she is always the driving force and the Wolf simply follows her lead, or apparently believes her words. When she and the Wolf fall for the Donkey’s words, she is still cautious enough to encourage the Wolf to accept the ‘gift’ rather than placing herself in any danger. When the Wolf brings this up after their defeat, she will not accept the allegation he makes that it is her fault he is injured (356-358), but places the responsibility for the events with God, who has saved the Donkey from them on account of that animal’s humility (360-371). In her long speeches, the Fox describes herself as both an ἀστρονόμος and a μαντεύτρα, which I translate as astronomer and prophetess. Both these terms associate her with the more dubious aspects of education. While dream interpretation, astrology and astronomy were popular in later Byzantium, they were also looked at with suspicion. She claims vast knowledge of all things, and is attributed this also by the Wolf. The Fox is by far the more intelligent of the two evil companions, and her knowledge and cunning are continually stated, albeit often by her. The Wolf, as her companion, whose intellect is never mentioned, blindly follows her, furthering the humour through his deference to his συντέκνισσα, who would normally be portrayed in the submissive role. It seems obvious that some Byzantine women were highly educated, but for them to be so cannot have been the norm, at least outside of the court. The Fox’s verbosity, her apparent knowledge, her leadership and role as συντέκνισσα in relation to the monkish Wolf present a distinct image of this character. She thus subverts a number of ideals of femininity, such as silence and deference, and is portrayed negatively on account of this.

The *Synaxarion* uses ideas of cunning and verbosity and plays with their traditional animal associations from fable but, at its heart, it seems to be concerned with religion. The whole tale is based around acts of confession and the idea of false sacrifice. It has been suggested in the Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium and by others that the satire of this text is directed towards false preachers who lead their flocks astray. The Wolf who changes himself into a monk-like figure, playing on the Biblical passage of wolves in sheep’s clothing, certainly seems appropriate here but what of the Fox? Her femininity is, as we have seen, heavily stressed. Female preachers were not a feature of Byzantine Orthodoxy, however, they were familiar to Byzantines through the heretical Bogomils. Women played a prominent role within that heresy, as they could be perfects, ascetic holy leaders. Men and women seem to have attained a certain degree of equality under a religious doctrine that saw the physical world as evil and thus allowed for civil disobedience and the subversion of social norms. The traditional Orthodox role of women as wives and mothers was argued against as ‘all sex was evil, marriage an abomination, and the birth of children a victory for the Devil’.²

Anna Komnene gives us a clear Orthodox view of these heretics in *The Alexiad*, describing female Bogomils in the twelfth century as ‘wretched women of loose habits and thoroughly bad’. According to St Sava women could preach Bogomilism. They were therefore educated though mainly, or even only, in the theological and dogmatic thought of the Bogomils. The Fox’s behaviour would seem to fit quite neatly with this image of women presented by the Orthodox opponents of the Bogomils. She acts as a spiritual equal to the Wolf, and is the leader of the group, apparently making the decisions and formulating plans. She claims a relatively high level of education, but in fairly specific areas, primarily the *Nomocanon*. It is possible that the text is not just mocking the vices of churchmen in general, but that it satirises particular heretics, singling them out for comparison with animals. This would not be a new concept; Epiphanius had used animals, particularly poisonous creatures, to describe heretics in his *Panarion* in the fourth century.

In his discussion of Bogomilism, Nikephoros Gregorios, a fourteenth-century historian and polymath describes Bogomils as

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² Levin, E. *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs 900-1700* (1989) p. 70
behaving like most heretics, burning icons and leading the innocent astray, but also as revering the urine of holy men such that they sprinkle it on their food. It is hard to see where this accusation comes from, as I have found no other reference to this behaviour in discussions on the Bogomils. The idea of holiness passing from one person to another through bodily contact is not unheard of, and is connected with saintly miracles, this story perhaps inverts that idea. However, this accusation perhaps lends some additional weight to the Fox as a depiction of such heretical beliefs.

At the end of her confession, apparently unable to feel any true regret for the pain she has caused others the Fox cannot cry the tears of the true penitent. Since she cannot produce real tears the Fox resorts to faking them. She says;

‘... I squeeze myself a bit, 
And I piss on my tail, I water my eyes, 
And I knit my brows together, 
And it looks like tears and I have great hope 
That God will hold my tears in high esteem’

The Fox therefore makes a mockery of a very familiar act of penitence. Not only does she fake tears, but she goes so far as to use urine to do so. Such scatological humour was a frequent feature of Byzantine comedy, appearing regularly in the vernacular beast literature. Here it does not necessarily disparage the actual belief in penitent mourning, but it mocks those who fake such emotion for their own ends, dirtying themselves further by such an act, quite literally in this case. That the Wolf praises the Fox so effusively for this confession, and that the Fox herself expresses her hope that God will be pleased with her attempt, increases the comedic, and possibly satirical value. The Fox is attempting to hoodwink God in the same way as she is trying to do with the Donkey. It seems appropriate that such an evil creature, already associated with clever but disgusting behaviour, should be the one to mock those who are cunning and disgusting in their attempts to deceive God, or unclean in beliefs and behaviour, namely, heretics like the Bogomils.

That is not to say that this is the only interpretation of the Fox’s character. The Synaxarion may have any number of political or social meanings which we cannot read as we are too far removed from the events. Equally, the texts may be purely humorous, in which case the feminine imagery is straightforwardly mocking traits considered feminine but undesirable by Byzantine society. However, the religious satire of the text does at least present the possibility that it is mocking heretics.

I would like to suggest here that animals in later Byzantine literature primarily appear in a satirical context where they transgress social and cultural norms, mocking the society in which they were created as well as others around them. The Synaxarion of the Honourable Donkey offers us a case in which the gender of the Fox allows for transgression and perhaps even points to the violation of Orthodoxy by heretics. Even if it does not, it presents us with a character who brazenly ignores convention and, though punished at the end, survives to champion the humble Donkey, himself elevated transgressively to the role of respected hero.

Selected Bibliography


Dr. Tim Greenwood is the first faculty member from a university other than Oxford to be interviewed for *The Byzantinist*. He is currently Senior Lecturer in History at the University of St Andrews. His connection to Oxford begins with his time as a student here. It has continued through his own students from St Andrews, many of whom he encouraged to continue Byzantine studies beyond undergraduate, extolling the virtues of Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, here and elsewhere. He has proved successful in convincing many. Indeed, two of his former students are the current President and Secretary of the OUBS!

**How did you become involved in Armenian Studies?**

It really began with an Oxford Modern History Special Subject, Byzantium in the Age of Constantine Porphyrogenitus 913-959, which I decided to take in Michaelmas 1989. As my own college, Oriel, did not offer this in-house, I was sent to James Howard-Johnston at Corpus. In the days before the Ioannou Centre, this involved weekly tutorials in a basement office in what was then the History Faculty Library on the corner of Broad Street and Holywell Street. About half-way through the term, I was given three or four extra days to study the ‘Manzikert incident’ of 940 and work out which Armenian princes had attended on the Hamdanid Sayf al-Dawla and why. I failed, of course, but this was the closest I’d come to doing some original research (there was no compulsory thesis at the time) and I found it exciting. The fact that I can still remember this twenty-five years later suggests that this must have made quite an impression. And when I took the Near East in the Age of Justinian and Muhammad Further Subject the following term, with Mark Whittow, I wrote an essay which touched on seventh-century churches in Armenia and why they were so large (it’s still a good question!). So there was an Armenian thread running through my final year during which I was introduced to the riches of medieval Armenian literature.

**You have a relatively unusual background for an academic being a former City lawyer. Why did you decide to leave the law and come back into academia?**

I graduated in June 1990 and vowed that I would never return! That summer I had various interviews with firms in London and accepted a training contract with one of the bigger City firms. Strangely the partner who interviewed me asked me whether I would ever be tempted to go back to postgraduate study and I replied categorically no; in retrospect he knew me better than I knew myself. I spent two years at Law School, two years as a trainee solicitor (or ‘articled particle’ as we called ourselves!) and then one year as a qualified assistant solicitor, working in the Insurance Litigation department. But I wasn’t convinced I was a particularly good lawyer. I always wanted my clients to settle their claims and thus avoid the costs, as well as the uncertainties, of litigation. Clearly I was not ‘commercially minded’ because the long and complex case represents a major income stream for solicitors and is to be encouraged and nurtured, not settled as quickly as possible! Although the legal issues interested me, the process did not. I came to realise that the firm could squeeze you as it saw fit; either you were working flat out, in which case your billable hours looked good but you had no time of your own; or your work load reduced, in which case your figures started to look less healthy. I also felt uneasy at being charged out at £150 an hour when I really did not know what I was doing! So I began to think about what else I might do and quickly ruled out moving to another practice or out of London to a provincial firm, leaving a return to research as the most attractive option. I think I would add that if I had left it another year, it would have been too late – the hike in salary would have been considerable – and I would

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probably still be a solicitor. As it turned out, the
timing was serendipitous. Robert Thomson had
recently arrived in Oxford, as Calouste
Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian Studies, and
was offering the MSt in Classical Armenian.
Without his rigorous training that year, I would
not have made any progress.

Do you think your research and teaching has
benefited from not going straight into
academia?

Definitely. The decision I made in January 1995
to return involved a series of positive actions
starting with typing up old essays late on a
Sunday evening in a school’s computer room. I
talked to James Howard-Johnston and my old
college tutor Jeremy Catto, both of whom tried to
dissuade me; looking back, these were both
interviews to see how serious I was. So I did not
embark on research for want of anything better to
do but made a clear and deliberate choice,
requiring me to resign from the law firm and start
again. Having had a career outside academia, I
am very aware of the freedoms that academic life
offers. I still have to pinch myself that I am being
paid for doing something that I
am passionate
about! Moreover if you have had your working
life divided into six
-minute units of chargeable
time (for billing purposes) I can assure you that
the prospect of spending weeks or months in a
library working on topics that you have identified
is infinitely more attractive
– or at least it is for me!

What changes over the last decade have you
seen in academia and what advice would you
have for postgraduate students today?

Well, here at St Andrews we have so far
managed to avoid dramatic structural upheaval
within the University and management is
decidedly light-touch. Long may this state of
affairs continue! But Byzantine Studies, among
other fields, has proved vulnerable to the changes
in higher education, both in UK and in Europe.
We need to be alive to these threats and able to
respond quickly and effectively, making the case
for Byzantine Studies. But perhaps we also need
to start thinking more collaboratively when it
comes to research funding as well as building
PhD studentships into funding applications. My
sense is that the amount of public funding for
doctoral research is going to reduce. I’ve only
been at St Andrews for eight years and have seen
the introduction of three different AHRC
schemes, the most recent of which is not going to
work in our favour. So funding for postgraduate
students, which has always been hard, is going to
become harder. Perhaps as a result of my earlier
career, I always treated my time as a postgraduate
as a privilege. I fully expected that I would have
to stop at some point and return to law or retrain
for a third time. So whilst trying very hard to
keep going, I was aware that the prospects of
finding an academic position were very small. I
saw some research recently which suggested that
just 3% of students who embark on Masters’
programmes end up in permanent academic
positions. Now I don’t have any figures for
Byzantine Studies but I think it is only right that
postgraduate students embarking upon doctoral
research are made aware of how hard it is to
secure a post-doctoral fellowship, let alone a
permanent position. I’m not suggesting ‘don’t try’
but I am saying ‘be realistic’. One last suggestion:
if you do complete a doctorate, it may be a good
idea to have a date in mind at which you reassess
your progress and reflect on whether you want to
keep going or whether it is time to explore other
avenues. A doctorate is a highly regarded
qualification and will open all kinds of doors
beyond academia.

What are your current research interests?

Some of your readers will know that I have
been working on an early eleventh-century
Armenian history by Stephen of Taron for several
years! This text has long been of interest to
Byzantinists because it seems to have exploited a
work of imperial history which overlaps with, but
is distinct from, later eleventh-century historical
compositions by Skylitzes and the Christian Arab
doctor Yahya of Antioch. The triangulation of
texts in Armenian, Greek and Arabic presents a
particular challenge – which I’m not sure is
capable of resolution – but this is only one of the
features of the text. Who would have thought this
text also contains reflections on the Buyids, for
example? As the work is titled Universal History,
it runs from Abraham to the present day (1004
CE) and I’ve spent a fair amount of time studying
and publishing on other texts to which Stephen
had access but which lacked scholarly treatment.
Having finished the annotated translation back in
early September 2014 (finally!), I have only the
introduction to tidy up. I have a period of
research leave starting in January 2015 and this will be devoted to finishing this. One irony is that Stephen himself was delayed in completing the project and apologised to his sponsor, pleading pressure of work. I can only do likewise! There are various other pieces coming out in the coming year, including a study of three pieces of late Antique Armenian silverware which have recently come to light. The next bigger project will be centred on vernacular legal culture in medieval Armenia. There is a wealth of charters – some engraved onto the facades of churches, others preserved within a later Armenian historical compilation – which seem to me to merit further study. The earliest of the charters, dating from the middle of the ninth century, contains transliterated Middle Persian terms, implying that legal culture in the region of Siwnik at that time was still informed by principles and judicial processes deriving from pre-Islamic Sasanian Iran. The charters contemplate a range of transactions, involving property and water rights, and contain a series of fearful curses directed against anyone in the future who might dare to meddle in the contract. Fascinatingly some of the imprecations curse Christians but others curse Muslims. So there is plenty here to be getting on with! I haven’t yet worked out whether this research will generate a monograph or a database or both but I suspect it will end up being both and I have a couple of colleagues in France and Germany who may be interested in working collaboratively on this.

A common problem amongst postgraduates, and academia in general, is keeping the right balance between studies and everything else. What are your recommendations?

A tough final question! Everyone will have their own strategies but here are four things which have worked for me. Firstly I try to separate my home life from my work life by not working at home. I live outside St Andrews and drive into and out of the town every day. I find this rhythm helpful. All my books and papers are in my office, preventing me from working at home. If you are a postgraduate, your ‘home’ will probably be just a room so I think I would recommend trying to get into good working habits by working in a University library or dedicated study space. Secondly there is a natural temptation to say yes to every request. It is often flattering to be asked to contribute a paper or co-organise a graduate workshop. Learning to say no is hard but is a lesson that we all need to relearn, repeatedly. Last autumn I ended up giving three different papers in three different countries on three successive weeks during full term which was utter madness! Here is St Andrews there is a big push on to improve the PhD completion rate so that we have no students taking more than four years. It is always the PhD which takes the hit. One of my colleagues explained a strategy which had helped him, dividing his responsibilities into urgent/non-urgent and immediate/long-term. The thesis [or a major publication (Stephen of Taron’s History springs to mind!)] is urgent but long-term. Assessing and then prioritizing urgent over non-urgent may prove helpful. I’m very aware that saying no is extremely hard to do and I’m not sure I would suggest any postgraduate ever says no to the first offer of teaching; without teaching experience, you will struggle to get onto the shortlist of any fixed term Teaching Fellowship. But many of the other demands on your time can be deferred until after the completion of the thesis. If you do feel compelled to publish something before submission, I’d suggest publishing one or at most two pieces, not five or six. Or if you are offered teaching on a course, do it once but not repeatedly. The third piece of advice is to try and avoid distraction during the working day. Whether this means leaving your mobile in a bag or switched off or using a laptop which is not connected to the internet, these will be decisions for you. I know that these work for me. Writing is hard enough as it is without trying to deal with the stream of emails – non-urgent but requiring immediate answers – which I receive every day. Good working habits, practised every day, help to advance research. Finally, take holidays! There is a point of diminishing return, when time and output are in inverse proportion to one another. When that happens, my gentle advice, which I have not always heeded, is to take a break. Just about everyone outside academia imagines that if you are not teaching or lecturing, you must somehow be on holiday. We all know that is not true (and I gave up trying to explain this years ago) but there is a risk that we end up trying to convince everyone, including perhaps ourselves, that we are busy and productive all the time. Yet this cannot be possible. So don’t skimp taking holidays, even two weeks at a time. You’ll come back refreshed and ready to write. I wonder how many interviews have ended by advocating taking a holiday?!

Byzantium matters. It matters because it has for so long been neglected, simplistically studied or manipulated for more modern ends. We are only on the very cusp of approaching an understanding of a field of history that ‘belongs to all of us’. Such are the premises and conclusions of Professor Cameron’s Byzantine Matters. Once one has had the pleasure of reading her deceptively slight little book, it is all but impossible to disagree.

Byzantine Matters is a series of five essays set between a thoughtful introduction and a punchy conclusion. It aims to bring together the musings of one of the most distinguished minds in her field on certain selected historical and historiographical topics. The book does not pretend to be a history of Byzantium in any way, but a manifesto that will no doubt decisively inform the histories of the future.

Chapter One asks why Byzantium has been cast to the margins of historical enquiry. Cameron ably shows how our approaches to Byzantine history are often subconsciously conditioned by knowledge that it ‘fell’, the supposed backwardness of a society seen as dominated by a Christianity without Reformation or Enlightenment, and conventional western assumptions of the Orient. Cameron not only exposes the ways in which Byzantium has been orientalised but identifies new risks facing the Byzantinist. Though well known as a late antiquarian, she probably rightly warns that Late Antiquity’s growing fascination with Islam and an increasing study of the world of the Eurasian steppe may again relegate Byzantium to the sidelines.

Cameron attempts to combat the marginality of Byzantium by defending its identity as an empire in Chapter Two. She points to the surprising strength of the imperial office together with what she terms Byzantium’s ‘flexibility’ and ability militarily to endure in the face of external shocks to show that the state remained imperial. Byzantium’s story was not a parallel to Britain’s of bandaging the wound of imperial retreat with the dressing of commonwealth. The lands ruled from Constantinople did indeed expand as well as contract over the course of Byzantium’s long history.

Chapter Three, ‘Hellenism’, largely concerns the quest of western scholars to excavate the classical from the medieval empire before a deeper discussion of Byzantine identity. Cameron explores how contested terms like ‘hellenism’ can be and demonstrates how much work there still remains to be done on Byzantine intellectual culture. Here, she starts more fully to elucidate one of the defining methodological insights of the book: Byzantine Studies is a woefully under-theorised field. Considering her call for more sophisticated approaches to the sources and a demonstration of the traps and gaps involved in using the loaded language of hellenism, Cameron’s perhaps slightly ambiguous conclusions to the chapter are not only understandable, but necessary.

Another scholarly approach that has constrained the study of Byzantium, namely the history of art, is tackled in Chapter 4. As in the previous chapter, Cameron not only explores how Byzantine history has been conditioned by the ways in which it was born as an academic discipline, but also embarks on a detailed discussion of a seminal episode in the story of Byzantium: Iconoclasm. She shows how the relationship between image, text and God had deeper roots than iconodule historiography would suggest and foregrounds her later investigation into Orthodoxy by using the Iconoclast Controversy to show how contestable Byzantine Christianity in fact was. The end of the chapter offers another line to the book’s chorus. The study of art should not stand alone, but be integrated into the wider study of Byzantine history and culture. This study should also not be afraid to harness the kind of theoretical approaches now common in fields like Classical Art.
Chapter Five, ‘The Very Model of Orthodoxy?’, is the most passionate and powerful of the book. It is now well and truly 1453 for the notion of Byzantium as an ossified, unchanging and rigorously ‘Orthodox’ society. Cameron shows that the very nature of ‘Orthodoxy’ itself was ‘the product of struggles over definition that continued over many centuries’. Byzantine religious culture was not centripetal and stultified but is best characterised as a ‘complex interplay of interest and rivalry’. Historians have to develop the theological and theoretical tools successfully to engage with what should not be dismissed as turgid and enervating religious texts. They should consider wider aspects of Byzantine religious behaviour, not least ‘orthopraxy’. Cameron also uses the example of Alexius I’s ecclesiastical disputes to show that Caesar was no Pope.

It is not impossible, however, to find criticisms of the book. Byzantine Matters, like its subject, is occasionally at risk of falling between two fields, namely the academic and the popular. It seems superficially to be aimed at a popular audience and often reads like it is, only for the reader soon to be presented with the kind of detail and academic jargon alien to the non-specialist. If this is a fault, it may be the publisher’s. This tension, however, is seen in the author’s tendency to place words like ‘decline’ and ‘fall’ in the quotation marks now habitual to Late Antiquity without a discussion of why these terms are, or should be, so readily dismissed. Especially if one takes the long view of Byzantium that Cameron advocates in the Epilogue, it is hard, at least at first sight, not to see something of the Gibbonesque ‘decline’ between the High Classical and the medieval Byzantine worlds.

These are but minor qualifications to a book whose size conceals its impact. Byzantine Matters should be read not only by everyone with even a passing interest in the field, but also by students of history generally as an exercise in the deconstruction of historiography. The insights distilled in this little book from Professor Cameron’s truly remarkable career consolidate a generation of scholarship and light the way to the future. Those who sail to Byzantium will now find themselves arriving at a new, vibrant and perhaps surprising destination.

James Moreton Wakeley, Lincoln College


As ever, Anthony Kaldellis produces in Ethnography After Antiquity a volume that both holistically opens an understudied topic, and provides a provocatively holistic argument. The monograph’s basic question is deceptively straightforward: why does ethnography – a well-established Greco-Roman genre – apparently disappear during the seventh century, to only return in a new form in the fourteenth? This question is certainly timely, considering the prominence of ethnicity in late antique studies, it is odd that something of this kind has no predecessors for the medieval empire. Answering this need, Ethnography After Antiquity does not merely fill a gap, but will also significantly delineate the agenda for future scholars.

In approaching his question, Kaldellis takes a characteristically diachronic approach, building up his argument in the reflections of literary developments from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages. In his preface Kaldellis first outlines the volume’s methodological parameters: it is a study of ‘ethnography as a literary practice in Byzantium; that is, it focuses on accounts of foreign peoples the Byzantines themselves wrote.’ The author then goes on to outline, in broad terms, the nature of ethnography as a genre and subgenre in classical Greek and Roman literature. He argues that even as a subgenre – such as with ethnographic sections in otherwise historiographical texts – ethnography remained relatively coherent in form and aim. Nevertheless, these features either rapidly shrink, or vanish completely in post-seventh century texts. The preface thus sets out the apparent problem, with Kaldellis noting: ‘[medieval] authors learnt to imitate those models [late antique writers] in virtually every other respect, so why not in this one?’

With his definition of the genre and the
problem established, Kaldellis turns to the early Byzantine historians in chapter one. Using Prokopios and Agathias as his main exemplars, Kaldellis carefully lays out the main features of Greek ethnography in the late Roman world, where many of the (sub)genre’s characteristics are unchanged from earlier centuries. In particular, he identifies the historians’ use of ethnographic ‘introductions’ for foreign peoples in the narrative, illustrating both how extensive these sections can be – sometimes dense with realia and geographical detail – and the fact that they almost always have a fundamental rhetorical role in the texts’ wider purposes. The latter point is a key argument of the volume, as Kaldellis emphasises that even in late antiquity, and despite the patina of realia, ethnography is ultimately a literary mechanism by which the Romans examined themselves and their own society. Of course, this is a well-established argument, first made familiar to students of classical literature by Francois Hartog’s *The Mirror of Herodotus. The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (University of California, 1988), and more recently for late antique texts by the works of scholars such as Walter Pohl.

In chapter two Kaldellis outlines his proposition that, whilst ethnography may have declined in the middle period (c.640-1204), this does not mean that medieval Romans of the east had less information than their forebears. Illustrating the variety of routes by which information was gathered – including military spies, foreign ambassadors, and a host of other formal and informal methods – Kaldellis points his readers to the bewildering array of texts in which this information is dimly recalled or briefly reflected. The chapter’s implication is that we must imagine a whole host of centrally-organised information gathering processes. Moreover, much of this information would have been at least partially ethnographic, and a significant amount would be documented and held in Constantinople. This then nuances his original question: it is not that ethnography simply declined, that the East Romans were uninterested, or that there was a lack of sources. The issue, according to Kaldellis, is an active decision on the part of medieval authors to avoid extensive ethnography in extant literary texts.

Thus in chapter three Kaldellis provides an explanation for this proposed conscious end to ethnographic writing, particularly in historiography. He opens the chapter with an assessment of historiographical genres in late antique and medieval Greek literature. The author attacks the notion that Prokopios, Agathias and other late antique authors are representative of ‘Byzantine’ history writing, arguing that they are ancient, whilst only those of the medieval era are truly Byzantine. This distinction is clearly defensible, and yet one wonders who exactly is in Kaldellis’ sights here – the explosive growth of late antique studies has increasingly brought older notions of early, middle, and late ‘Byzantium’ under reconsideration. Many would consider Prokopios a ‘late Roman’ more than an ‘early Byzantine’, and a growing consensus recognises that real ruptures in the Greco-Roman literary tradition do not occur until the seventh century. Nevertheless, the point is cogent to Kaldellis’ argument, as he outlines how ninth-century historiography shifts from the ‘universal’ tradition of Georgios Synkellos and Theophanes, to the ‘Constantinopolitan’ outlook evoked by historians such as Genesios and those after him. Challenging Cyril Mango’s argument that the ninth century witnessed a shrinking of the East Roman world view, Kaldellis counterposes that this development reflects a shift away from both a Christian and Roman outlook – including eastern Christians under Arab rule – to a more narrowly Roman perspective. Of course, this is not such a departure, but Kaldellis extends the argument to include the proposition that ‘the Byzantines generally did not have an ecumenical outlook or adhere to the notion of a panorthodox commonwealth, which is a modern, not a medieval, concept.’ Thus attempting dismantle the pervasiveness of Ostrogorsky’s ‘Byzantine Commonwealth’, the author lays out a vision of medieval historians primarily concerned with the immediate, political circumstance, and who assumed the superiority of a coherent Roman people, viewing themselves as members of a common, Roman politeia. If they are not primarily concerned with a particular faction or political person, Kaldellis argues, then these writers engage in ‘internal ethnography’, seeking only to assess foreign peoples insofar as they revealed the Roman state and its society’s own shortcomings.

Chapter four expands on this argument, with Kaldellis addressing the generations-old debate over the ethnographic usefulness of Leon VI’s *Taktika* and Konstantinos VII’s *De
Administrando Imperio. Arguing that they hold very little in the way of ‘real’ ethnographic information, the author moves to the question of their uniqueness. Placing them alongside the *origines gentium* found in the histories of Leon the Deacon, Ioannes Skylitzes, Michael Attaleiates, and other historians of the ‘Golden Age’ of medieval Greek historiography, Kaldellis convincingly demonstrates that these texts almost certainly share roots in the information gathering of the East Roman state outlined in chapter two. Indeed, Kaldellis’ illustration of the use of archive material by medieval Roman historians is one of *Ethnography*’s most significant contributions to scholarship. This chapter, moreover, crystallises Kaldellis’ central argument: that ethnographic features tell us more about the Romans themselves than foreign peoples, and reveal a critical mirroring of their own state and society.

The fifth chapter then covers the ‘re-emergence’ of ethnography as a dedicated genre during the Palaiologan period, particularly in the 1360s. Kaldellis identifies several interesting nuances between the approaches of these writers as compared with those of the pre-1204 world. In particular, they appear no longer so certain of (East) Roman superiority, and begin to place themselves in a world of competing and comparable peoples, each with their own characteristics. Moreover, they use ethnography as a mechanism to express their sadness at an ancient world coming to its end. In his epilogue Kaldellis briefly considers ethnography in late-Palaiologan and post-1453 literature, particularly the works of Laonikos Chalkokondyles – the subject of a recent monograph by the same author (*A New Herodotos: Laonikos Chalkokondyles on the Ottoman Empire, the Fall of Byzantium, and the Emergence of the West*, Harvard University Press, 2014).

Thus *Ethnography After Antiquity* is a significant achievement. In little under 200 pages Kaldellis gives the reader an engaging tour of the sources, providing enough literary context for non-specialists to follow, and all the while proposing his own, forceful explanation for the problems as defined. Yet these achievements may be at the root of the volume’s weaknesses. In attempting to provide such a holistic picture in so brief a space, Kaldellis leaves the reader without an understanding of, for example, how socio-economic changes between the seventh and ninth centuries influence literary developments. Though he rightfully insists on turning the spotlight onto the East Romans’ own self-definition, little attention is paid to cultural change in their society. Nor, indeed, is much attention paid to the individual social positions of each author discussed. A laudable feature of Kaldellis’ argument is the importance of the Christian worldview in the medieval era, yet his implication that Christian writing is antithetical to ethnography is bold, to say the least. One feels that with a more subtle evaluation of cultural change between centuries, the question of why ethnography disappeared – as defined by Kaldellis – seems less relevant. While medieval authors were talented inheritors of the Greco-Roman literary tradition, there is no *a priori* reason why they should use ethnic discourse in the same manner as their ancient forebears. As Kaldellis convincingly argues, it is dangerous to essentialise texts across both periods and between – even within – genres, expecting them to conform to forms irrelevant in a new cultural context. If we appreciate this, then the question of ‘disappearance’ becomes a problem of our own terms and definitions. Nevertheless, the real strength of Kaldellis’ monograph is in opening wide a new avenue for research. With his meticulous gathering of diverse sources and engaging, provocative arguments, future scholars will be well served in addressing the issues he raises in this volume.

Nicholas Matheou, Pembroke College
I spent my undergraduate and my graduate years in Italy, where I was born: in Bologna I discussed both my BA and my Master thesis, under the supervision of Professors Renzo Tosi and Camillo Neri, in Ancient Greek Literature: already from the beginning, I started focusing on the Greek Alexander Romance, especially in its last chapters – mainly Alexander's murder. I spent six month in Paris IV - Sorbonne, where, after some palaeography lessons with Professor Bernard Flusin and some discussions with the Alexander Romance expert Professor Corinne Jouanno, I decided to focus on the manuscript and strictly textual aspect of this text. Thus, my Master's thesis was the (very partial and very old style) edition of the last chapters (III 30-35) of a particular version of the Romance, the so-called λ version, usually dated to the end of the 7th or beginning of the 8th century.

I was admitted to Oxford to continue my studies, with a D.Phil. under the supervision of Professor Marc Lauxtermann, becoming a member of the "Byzantinist" college – thus it was presented to me at my first point of arrival: Exeter College. My D.Phil. project focused on the edition not only of the last chapters of the Romance, but on the whole third book of version λ: this particular version, preserved in seven manuscripts, had been only partially edited by Helmut van Thiel in 1959, and it is different from the other versions of this text because it alone offers some pages – not just a rewriting, but a very precise word-to-word reprise - of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. This fact led me to two different paths: on one side, the edition of the manuscripts – an edition that became a synoptic one, because one of the manuscripts presents a totally different language from the other six – and research on apocalyptic literature and everything connected with it, such as Antichrists, demons and the end of the world.

The edition was a hard task not just because of the impossibility, for me, to personally read one of the most important manuscripts, preserved on Mount Athos. Working on a text such as the Romance was first of all a change of perspective for a classicist such as I was. I was used to very well fixed stemmata codicum, very strict Lachmannian rules, and very regular copyist errors. Not one of these certainties was granted to me: the Romance is first of all a work of imagination, a collection of legends, a divertissement. Every copyist could change the story he was reading, adding or deleting episodes, modifying its language, and characters. Thus, a canonical edition was impossible, and I had to use a synoptic edition with many caveats.

Simultaneously, my interest in the apocalyptic narrative led me to investigate non-Greek cultures, such as the Syriac one, a task that was possible thanks to the fantastic environment I found in Oxford, both in Exeter College and in the OUBS enclave. Whenever I had a single doubt on my subject(s), whether it was literary, historical, linguistic, archaeological, whether it reached Byzantium, Syria, Armenia, Persia, I always found an answer and a serious conversation that resolved my doubts.

The Oxford University Byzantine Society (once only the Oxford Byzantine Society) acted also as a springboard for a series of conferences I went to. I participated in the Graduate Conferences in Oxford from 2010 on, and I had the chance to speak all around Europe – England, France, Poland, Finland, Italy. But the most amazing work-related experience I had was to become Secretary of the Society, in 2012, and having to organise the Conference first and then to supervise the first ever edition of some selected papers from this same conference ("Landscapes of Power"), published by Peter Lang. It was an incredibly rewarding experience, both from a human and working point of view, which forced me into the world of editing and publishing. And not that of ancient texts.

During my D.Phil. in Oxford I had the
chance to ascertain whether I really wanted to work on texts and not in field archaeology, taking part in an excavation in Naples (and the result was, luckily for me, the confirmation of my love for books, dust, and shade), I had to learn late antique and Byzantine Greek, I started to read Syriac and Hebrew, and I organised conferences.

I am working now as a post-doc in the University of Bologna: I am member of a project focusing of the complete digital edition of the scholia to Aeschylus’ Persae, a work that requires a lot of eye-sight losing abilities and of palaeographical knowledge. I would not have the chance to complete it, or even have started it, without all the training I received in Oxford, in palaeography, editorial technique and the humility to ask for help without being ashamed of what I was asking. And without the OUBS I would have been a much less complete scholar and person.
Graduate Profile

Nicholas Evans, Wadham College, Oxford

Five years ago, sitting in the interrogation room in a police station in Vladikavkaz, I was beginning to feel anxious. I had been walking between mountain villages in North Ossetia with a Polish friend, during a weekend break during my year abroad as part of a History and Russian degree at Wadham College, Oxford. It turned out we had infringed a recent law restricting travel for foreign citizens in certain areas of the North Caucasus. The police had confiscated a book we were carrying about the medieval fortifications, churches and cemeteries of the region. Forgetting the reason why they had arrested us in the first place, one of the policemen kept asking why we hadn’t visited various sites mentioned in the book. The interrogation ended with a feast of Ossetian pies, lamb and endless toasts to the Friendship of Nations – and we were landed with a small fine to pay on our return to our university in nearby Pyatigorsk.

When I concluded my undergraduate degree, I decided to pursue my interest in the early medieval history of the North Caucasus at graduate level. I had been drawn to study in the region in the first place by tutorials on the Khazars with James Howard-Johnston and by romantic ideas about the region derived from nineteenth-century Russian poets and novelists such as Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy whom I had read during my Russian degree. Having taken a paper on 10th century Byzantium as an undergraduate, I took the M.St. in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies here at Oxford in 2011/12. During this year, I began learning Arabic and had my first introduction to using archaeological evidence.

Since 2012, I have been working for a DPhil under the supervision of Dr Mark Whittow and Professor Jonathan Shepard with the title Mountains, Steppes and Empires: A Historical Geography of the North Caucasus in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The aim of the project is to use textual and archaeological evidence to look at how selected North Caucasian landscapes were shaped in the minds of imperial elites in Constantinople and Baghdad, and on the ground. Recent archaeological research in Russia makes this possible, and offers new insights into debates about the end of Late Antiquity in wider West Eurasian perspective. Following archival work in Moscow last year, I was grateful for the opportunity to take part in excavations run by Russian archaeologists this autumn.

During my time in Oxford, I have been privileged to take part in the exceptionally rich seminar culture on the Late Antique and Medieval worlds, as well as the opportunities for language learning, especially in Russian, Greek and Arabic. Over the last couple of years, I have been teaching the 10th century Byzantine paper to undergraduates, and have run a lecture course on historical materialism with medievalist fellow-traveller, James Norrie.
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