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A Message from the OUBS President
Dan Gallaher

For many years, the Oxford University Byzantine Society (OUBS) has stood at the heart of Oxford’s Late Antique and Byzantine Studies (LABS) community. The OUBS is an entirely graduate-run organisation that aims to foster a supportive academic community of students and scholars. Our main role involves welcoming new students into the discipline and keeping everyone up to date with news and information from week to week.

During my time as president, I have set out to shape the OUBS to reflect the huge variety of academic interests and backgrounds within the LABS community at Oxford. As the society continues to grow in size and ambition, I must acknowledge the tireless work of previous OUBS presidents and their committees. In just a few short years, they have radically redefined the scope of the society and moulded it into the dynamic entity that exists today. It is this spirit of adaptation and innovation that will, I hope, continue to drive the OUBS in the years to come.

A testament to this ambition is our annual research trip. Following on from successful research trips to Bulgaria, Iran and Greece, the OUBS will be leading a group of 35 to Georgia in April 2020. Georgia was chosen as the destination with a view to broadening the academic horizons of Oxford’s LABS community, bringing into focus the study of the South Caucasus.

The itinerary has been tailored to the research interests of the trip’s participants, ensuring that everyone is able to take full advantage of this opportunity. The trip will involve scholars from various stages in their academic careers, allowing the entire group to benefit from the specialist knowledge of its members. This will be an excellent opportunity to benefit from the experience of students and staff working specifically on Georgian material, as well as to deepen connections with Georgian scholars.

For over two decades, the OUBS has organised an international graduate conference. The event has continued to grow, and this year we are pleased to welcome 48 speakers from over 20 different countries. The conference is entitled ‘The State Between: Liminality, Transition and Transformation in Late Antiquity and Byzantium’ and will be held on the 28th-29th February 2020 in the History

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Faculty. The OUBS conference provides a platform for postgraduates and early career researchers to discuss their work in a friendly and supportive environment. It also performs an important role on a larger scale, showcasing the value and diversity of postgraduate research.

As my own academic interests lie in medieval Armenia, it has been my aim to open up the conference to scholars conducting research beyond the traditional framework of Byzantine studies. I look forward to hearing the many different responses to the conference theme and engaging with the interdisciplinary dialogue that will emerge from these two days. Nonetheless, it has been my intention to improve access in more general terms. Whilst presenting and discussing our own research is a necessary part of our academic development, these conferences often place a large financial burden upon postgraduate students. Thanks to an extraordinary donation from the Oxford Centre of Byzantine Research (OCBR), however, the OUBS has been able to provide bursaries to speakers for the very first time.

One of the central goals of the OUBS is to enable young researchers to engage with the wider academic community, giving them the opportunity to showcase their work and form lasting connections with contemporaries in sister disciplines. In addition to our research trip and graduate conference, the OUBS has organised events with Graduate Archaeology Oxford and the Oxford Medieval Society. I hope that these collaborations will continue to strengthen our ties with Oxford’s wider academic community.

Oxford can often come across as an unusual, and - dare I say it - Byzantine institution. For this reason, the OUBS has endeavoured to make the process of orientation more straightforward for incoming LABS students. In addition to organising a mentoring system for new graduates, the OUBS also publishes a 'Welcome Pack' to explain the idiosyncrasies of academic life at the university. Furthermore, our two weekly mailing lists exist to promote awareness of academic events and job opportunities, ensuring that students are able to make the most of their time at Oxford.
To that end, the OUBS has organised a wide range of social events: last term saw an 'emeriti tea', a 'women’s drinks' event, and a mid-term academic support meeting. Above all, these events aim to promote communication and foster support networks between postgraduates, faculty members and emeriti on an interdisciplinary level.

In the years to come, I have no doubt that the OUBS will continue to grow and innovate, uniting young researchers through shared interests and forging an international community for the next generation of scholars.
‘To hear this history rehearsed, for that there be inserted in it no fables, shall be perhaps not delightful.’ Ever since the Athenian Thucydides set for himself this standard to describe the events of the war in which he had fought, his has been interpreted as the golden example of objective historiography. In Byzantine times he was venerated as the Historian κατ’ ἐξοχήν, if mostly only for his model command of Attic Greek. Thucydides was the core of the literary canon, a linguistic and conceptual model to be emulated for most of Byzantine History. A writer wishing to draw particular attention to the purported objectivity of his historiographical endeavour had especially good reason to invoke Thucydides in more than just style, as we can see in the case of the deposed Emperor John Kantakouzenos, seeking to clean his record for posterity. If any historian ever had dire need of such precautionous professions of neutrality, however, it must have been Michael Kritovoulos, the Imbriote.

His Ξυγγραφή Ιστοριών (a title chosen itself to allude to a synthesising mimesis of Herodotos and Thucydides) would perhaps appear a solid work of narrative history in the Thucydidean, Herodotean and Byzantine classicising tradition, skilfully integrating both linguistic appeal and authentic experience, but not overly noteworthy among the many other works of historiography which have come down to us from the thriving literary culture of the late Palaiologan period, were it not for the astonishing fact that the Roman Emperor to whose glorious deeds and virtuous character it is dedicated is none else than the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, Conqueror of Constantinople. The work was presented to him as a gift, and is thus the closest thing to an official court biography of Mehmed we have. As we will see, he is not only portrayed sympathetically, but with all the tropes and attributes which have traditionally pertained to the Emperor in Byzantine historiography, bestowing literary legitimacy onto his claim to have seized the title of Roman Emperor together with the City.

It is thus not difficult to imagine why Kritovoulos should have chosen Thucydides as ‘lodestar of his Mimesis’: he may have
presciently sought to obviate some of the inevitable charges of treachery his fellow Greeks might have levelled against him by clearly invoking the precedence of a character universally respected. But could he have claimed in good faith to be writing the truth and only the truth? Should his work be regarded as base, if well-written, sycophancy or a dedicated and honest intellectual contribution? And was it all that singular in its idiosyncratic take on the momentous events of 1453; in interpreting the ἀλώσις as a translatio imperii?

Of Kritovoulos we know very little apart from what he provides us with himself. It is certain that he was born around the turn of the fifteenth century into a family of local notables on the island of Imbros. The cognomen Michael as well as the original patronymic form Κριτόπουλος, which he atticised to the more classically euphonic Κριτόβουλος, are known to us through a small number of preserved religious opuscula attributable to him and correspondence with his circle of fellow intellectuals in Constantinople, comprising such figures as Gennadios Scholarios, Ioannes Eugenikos and Georgios Amiroutzes. His adult life and deeds as governor of his island home, however, we know solely by his own account in the History, in which he describes how he adeptly transferred his allegiance to the new master of the City after its fall in 1453, and went on to serve the Sultan as a diplomat on various occasions thereafter. As a frequent and respected guest at that court, he worked on and continued to edit his magnum opus between the years of 1453 and 1468. External corroboration of this autobiographical part of the History is given by the Italian traveller and humanist Ciriaco d’Ancona, himself a shadowy historical figure, who had visited Imbros in 1444 and praised the hospitality of the vir doctus et nobilis Critobulus he encountered there. The history itself is divided in five books, covering approximately the time period from 1451, the final accession of Mehmed to the throne, and 1467, when Kritovoulos presented his finished work to his Maecenas. It follows a Thucydidean model of form as well, with speeches, excursions and eyewitness accounts interspersed with occasional commentary by the author on the events.
related.

‘To the Supreme Emperor, King of Kings, Mehmed, the fortunate, the victor, the winner of trophies, the triumphant, the invincible, Lord of land and sea by the will of God, Kritovoulos the Islander, slave of thy slaves.’; by this grandiose address Kritovoulos opens and dedicates his work to his patron. The work’s copious preface already makes it abundantly clear that the appeal to Thucydides does not preclude Kritovoulos from lavishing his adulation upon the intended recipient, and it is here that many later philologists encountered most of the ‘Byzantine obsequiousness’ which disgusted them so in the work. Stylistically, the epistle accompanying the work and the proem proper, that is the first section of Book One, belong together to form a complete classical proem. In Herodotean tradition, Kritovoulos lays out the reasons which compelled him to write down the history of his times, and then assures the readers of its accuracy by drawing almost verbatim on Thucydides (καὶ διὰ τῶν τάληθον τιλέστον λόγον ποιούμενος). Two aspects are of special interest to us in the proem, namely the juxtaposition of the mentioned panegyric to Mehmed and the subsequent paraitesis, but really apology, in which Kritovoulos addresses his countrymen.

Again, it seems Kritovoulos was well aware that History tends to not judge traitors kindly, and was eager to disavow himself of any base motives of either stupidity or perversity. The mere existence of this paraitesis at such a prominent place in the work also suggests already that the intended audience of the History was not solely Mehmed and his immediate court, and that Kritovoulos may have had farther aims than merely to ingratiate himself with the new overlord. Kritovoulos assures his compatriots that he ‘shares in their pain’, but his view of historical reality which he here presents to the audience must have been only more painful if anything to come to terms with:

‘For who has not known that from the time of man’s genesis the attributes of kingship and rule have not remained upon the same and not been confined to one people or race. Ever wandering, it has passed and settled everywhere, shifting from

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race to race and from place to place. At some times to the Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, at others to the Hellenes and Romans, it makes visits in accordance with the time and period and has never stood in the same place. And so it is not something astonishing that they do and experience the same things now and that the Romans lose their rule and fortune.’

The way he presents the cataclysmic fall of the City which had been the centre of the political and religious life of his society for over a millennium with such detachment is extraordinary enough, but it must also be remembered that the idea of cyclical history directly contradicts the religious fabric of Byzantine society. The Roman Empire was indeed traditionally conceived of as 'absolutely above all others and not under any circumstances to be compared or contrasted with any others', an illusion which Kritovoulos decidedly rejects. Kritovoulos, however, argues for the cathartic aspects of his model: rejecting providence in favour of cyclical history, he encourages the Greeks also not to blame any fault in their moral characters for the City’s fall, as opposed to the widespread idea that the Turks merely administered divine punishment for the sins committed by its citizens.

Turning towards the subject of Mehmed’s portrayal, the epistle sets the tone for a characterisation which will be elaborated throughout the History. The formal address offered to the sovereign quoted above contains a plethora of imperial traditions; among them the Persian King of Kings, the Seljuk Lord between the Seas, the Classical Winner of Trophies and the Byzantine Will of God. The most conspicuous aspect is the unequivocal recognition of Mehmed as the legitimate inheritor of the imperial title – supreme ruler of the world. But Mehmed is not only presented as a powerful ruler, but a man of extraordinary virtue at that, whose personal deeds easily rival those of ancient heroes such as Alexander the Great or Agamemnon, to whom he is likened indirectly by a borrowed aphorism from the Iliad. He is a man of culture and erudition, a philosopher king and philhellene. These three themes are elaborated throughout the books, not only by direct praise, but also by way of circumstantial evidence as well as
literary allusion.

In war, Mehmed fights alongside his soldiers, whom he extols in rousing speeches which Kritovoulos models on the famous Thucydidean examples, to ‘take time by the forelock’, and prevail through bravery. Mehmed turns into a proponent of classical virtue to be rewarded with victory, and archetype of the young leader willing to shape his own fate. In this, he is clearly modelled after the example of Alexander the Great, which is explicitly invoked at various points in the text. Kritovoulos evokes the identification of Mehmed with Alexander by borrowing a whole number of figures of speech, literal allusions and rich military vocabulary from Arrian’s *Anabasis Alexandri*. Interestingly, Kritovoulos sees no contradiction in presenting his hero as the new Alexander and a purported descendant of the Achaemenids at once. Going further, he lets him, on a visit to Troy again mirroring quite precisely Alexander’s visit to that place of legend as recounted by Arrian, muse on the role that faith has awarded him; to have finally avenged the Trojans as a fellow Asiatic against their conquerors, the Greeks. The special irony of this juxtaposition, considering the Empire the Sultan conquered was in fact the Empire of the Romans, which itself had traditionally been traced back to a Trojan origin, seems to have eluded Kritovoulos.

Mehmed is linked to a seemingly eclectic assembly of ancient heroes and kings; he is curiously both Agamemnon and Hektor, Alexander and Achaimenes. What unites them all and characterizes him as well is undoubtedly their prowess in war and personal virtue.

Mehmed also splendidly fulfils the other expectation placed on the classic ideal of a Roman Emperor. He gives himself over to the construction of public works, fora, baths and religious monuments in his new capital of Constantinople ‘to vie with the largest and finest of the temples already existing there’. He invests Patriarch Gennadios with the privilege to order church affairs, and thus claims for himself also the Emperor’s role as protector of the Orthodox Church. He personally sees to the capital’s inhabitants returning to it after the plunder and dislocation of the conquest, and encourages new settlement as well. Those Romans who
found themselves prisoners of his people he pays a wage, so that they may ransom themselves and resume their former livelihoods.

Finally, just as the erstwhile Roman conquerors of Greece, he is a dedicated philhellene; an admirer of Greek philosophy and letters, arts and science. He surrounds himself with learned men such as Gennadios Scholarios, George Amiroutzes, and, naturally, the author himself. Most poignantly, as Mehmed returned from the first campaign in the Peloponnese, we are told he went out of his way to visit the classical ruins of the Akropolis at Athens. Following in the footsteps of Polybios’ Flaminius and, again, Arrian’s Alexander, Mehmed has come to Hellas not only as a conqueror, but as an admirer of its glorious past. Kritovoulos considered the two anything but incompatible.

We have seen now how the aspects of Mehmed’s portrayal by Kritovoulos intertwine and create the outline of a figure greater than its parts: Mehmed, as acting Roman Emperor won by right of both virtue and history, guards the peace of the world, which in its entirety he subjects to his plans of universal conquest, as did Alexander of Macedon, and shows himself, through his personal philhellenism, to consciously place himself in their tradition. He has not destroyed Constantinople, but rather returned the City to her proper place at the centre of this world empire.
Outside of the study of Christianity, the religion’s message of non-violence seems to be emphasised. However, within early Christian hagiography, violence is in fact prevalent. For instance, in Egypt alone, a reputation of murder and conspiracy hangs over the patriarch Cyril of Alexandria, and the abbot of the White Monastery Shenoute is notorious for his assault of perceived dissidents and destruction of icons (e.g. Bell 1973: 16). One may view violence as a necessary response to the persecution of Christians, particularly within the anti-Chalcedonian Coptic Church, which was vulnerable within Christianity as well as without.

This would then suggest that violence within early Christianity, at least in the Coptic Church, was limited to high-status members of its clergy. In reality, there are numerous examples of violence enacted by martyr saints within hagiography written in Coptic that, while evidence of the perception of the cult of saints rather than the saints’ lives themselves, indicate that there was an acceptance of a culture of violence even among the holiest of the saints (Keskiaho 2015: 14; Kritzinger 2011: 36).

This paper will include a range of martyr saints attested in Coptic hagiography, who may also be attested in hagiography in other languages but for whom the exact narratives referred to in this paper will only be attested in Coptic. The violence enacted by them occurs in many forms and as part of martyrdoms and posthumous miracles. This paper therefore hypothesises that the violence enacted by martyr saints in these narratives suits the situation in which it occurs in form and severity, and will explore a range of examples to evaluate this.

**Apa Kollouthos**

Apa Kollouthos of Antinoopolis was a physician who was martyred under Diocletian (S00641). Most of the hagiography in his tradition is fragmentary, but there is a
complete encomium on Pierpont Morgan Codex M591, attributed to Isaak of Antinoopolis (E00666). In this encomium, visitors come to his shrine for aid with a range of medical complaints. Two of the posthumous miracles involve a man who injured his foot while drunk and a lame man respectively. While the form of Apa Kollouthos’ violence towards them is verbal rather than physical, there is the threat of further repercussions. The man with the injured foot he scolds for having become injured in the first place, saying ‘Indeed, these things have befallen you because of the excessive drunkenness with wine to which you have been accustomed’ (Thompson 1993: 53). The lame man he scolds for being impatient at the shrine, saying: ‘Your body was not set on fire like me’ (Thompson 1993: 55). Apa Kollouthos’ treatment of his patients therefore shows his character to behave suitably within the situation while still addressing their unsatisfactory conduct.

Apa Kollouthos also commits more severe violence. In a fragmentary text from a larger miracle collection, his shrine is attacked by a pagan man and his community when this man learns that his wife has gone to the shrine to be healed (Schenke 2013: 209; E00668). Once they reach the doorstep, they are blinded by the saint for three days and nights. While not as violent as many things that he could have done, the form and the severity of the violence seem to be suitable for the situation in that he protected his shrine and the pagan man’s wife, and provided a punishment of appropriate form and duration by a saint who was a physician during his life.

Apa Menas

Apa Menas, whose pilgrimage site was based at Abu Mina, is another saint whose hagiographical tradition is replete with healing miracles (Grossmann 1998: 281). However, in contrast to Apa Kollouthos, during his life Apa Menas was a soldier (E01223). It may therefore be suggested that he would commit more severe violence.

This certainly seems to be the case when Apa Menas saves a female pilgrim from being raped by an innkeeper (Drescher 1946: 121). The saint petrifies the innkeeper’s hand while he is still holding the sword with which he was threatening the pilgrim. Given that the innkeeper’s hand is unable to let go of the
sword and, instead of a fixed duration, he must travel to the saint’s shrine to be healed, this seems to be a more severe punishment than Apa Kollouthos’ blinding his attackers. Also, given the arguably greater severity of the crime, it therefore seems that this more severe violence was appropriate to the situation.

It may therefore be expected that Apa Menas would enact equally severe violence upon the perpetrators of other violent crimes. However, this does not seem to be the case, as in another posthumous miracle, he does not intervene until after a pilgrim has been murdered and his body dismembered. Apa Menas then appears to the murderer and resurrects the pilgrim, leaving the murderer chastised but unharmed (Drescher 1946: 112-13). This suggests that the form and severity of violence as a punishment is not always proportional to the level of violence demonstrated in the original crime, and that other factors are involved. It may be that a murder victim can be resurrected, but a rape victim cannot be ‘un-raped’, necessitating the saint’s intervention before the crime was committed and more severe violence towards the perpetrator. It therefore seems that the form and severity of violence committed by a saint is appropriate to the situation, but that appropriateness may not be at first apparent to a modern reader.

**Apa Merkourios**

While Apa Merkourios’ cult was based in Caesarea rather than in Egypt, the majority of hagiographical texts concerning him are written in Coptic. This may be because his cult has been conflated with a contemporary saint of the same name from Israel, but that is uncertain (S00225; S01323).

Apa Merkourios received encouragement from the archangel Michael while serving as a soldier and also while undergoing his martyrdom, which suggests the patronage of the archangel over at least some soldiers, seeing as there is no record in Coptic of him having appeared to Apa Menas (Budge 1915: 861). During the battle in which Apa Merkourios earned his acclaim with the emperor, the archangel Michael handed him a sword. This may have been a symbolic way of condoning the violence that he commits in his posthumous miracles as he, although using a spear rather than a sword, enacts the most severe violence of the saints included in this
paper. Apa Merkourios’ tradition most notably includes the killing of the emperor Julian the Apostate (Budge 1915: 826). This is the only time in which Apa Merkourios’ violence results in death, which could be argued to have been appropriate. Apa Merkourios almost kills another individual and violently humiliates another within the same manuscript. The former is a Jew who rides a mule into the saint’s shrine (Budge 1915: 842-3). Further evidence of the saint’s patronage by the archangel Michael comes from the fact that the text implies that he would have killed the Jew had the archangel not intervened. The latter is a magician who made a young woman grievously ill so that her parents would wed her to a certain young man. Apa Merkourios seems to have acknowledged the magician’s responsibility for the situation, and he publicly beats him at his shrine (Budge 1915: 851).

The patronage of the archangel Michael may explain the severity of the violence that this saint enacts. However, it is arguable that this violence was not always appropriate to the situation in which it occurred.

Thekla and Apa Paese

Apa Paese and Thekla of Alexandria are siblings whose exploits are contained in a single martyrdom (S00750; E01225). All of the physical violence committed in the martyrdom is done towards them. However, there is another form of violence committed by Thekla.

After one of the dux’s many unsuccessful attempts to torture the pair into renouncing their faith, there is an exchange between him and Thekla in which she calls him a ‘dog’ and challenges him to have Apollo appear to prove that he is the true god (Reymond and Barns 1973: 173). The writer’s choice to have Thekla participate in this exchange rather than Apa Paese is notable, at least to a modern reader, because of perceived greater risk of more severe physical, and perhaps sexual, violence in retaliation. However, it may have been justified in the context of the text’s composition to show Thekla as the more confrontational of the two saints, in order to show the female character as equal to male martyrs by following behaviours exhibited by some of the male martyrs included in this paper, albeit more aggressively (e.g. Reymond and Barns 1973: The Byzantinist | 13
148-9; Alcock: 12-13). With only a single female martyr included in this paper, it is not possible to suggest whether Thekla’s behaviour is typical.

This paper therefore argues that the form and severity of Thekla’s verbal violence was appropriate to the situation that she was in as male martyrs often have verbal exchanges with their persecutors.

Apa Viktor, son of Romanos

Most of the Coptic hagiographical tradition of Apa Viktor is attributed to Celestine of Rome (Reymond and Barns 1973: 156; O’Leary 1937: 279-80). According to this tradition, he was born in Antioch but exiled to Egypt to be tortured and martyred.

There are two incidents in Apa Viktor’s Coptic tradition that are similar to those of Apa Merkourios, but with notable differences. The first is that the archangel Michael also appears to Apa Viktor, although not while he is on the battlefield since Apa Viktor is a child at the time (Budge 1914: 276-7). The main difference from Apa Merkourios’ experience is that the archangel does not hand Apa Viktor a sword. This may be because he was a child, but it may also indicate, especially when considered alongside the second incident, that Apa Viktor also had the archangel’s patronage but was not expected to perform as severe violence as Apa Merkourios. The second incident is that Apa Viktor also appears to an emperor. He appears to Diocletian and his entourage, including his own father (Scott 1993: 113-14). Unlike Apa Merkourios’ appearance to Julian the Apostate, Apa Viktor instead rebukes them verbally, although not as aggressively as Thekla does the dux. The lack of violence may result from his being the son of a soldier rather than a soldier himself. However, this would then suggest that Apa Menas should have appeared to an emperor. It can therefore be surmised instead that Apa Merkourios and Apa Viktor both appeared to emperors because they were favoured by them before their martyrdoms.

This paper can therefore suggest that, like Thekla, the form of verbal rather than physical violence by Apa Viktor was appropriate to the situation, suggesting that the use of violence by Apa Merkourios is an anomaly within the behaviour of martyr saints.
James the Persian

The final saint to be discussed in this paper is James the Persian (alternatively known as ‘James the Dismembered’). His Coptic tradition is attested by a single text, which is a martyrdom that originated in Syriac. Like Apa Merkourios, James was martyred outside of Egypt. However, unlike Apa Merkourios, the Coptic translation of James’ martyrdom includes the narrative of how his relics were taken to Egypt (O’Leary 1937: 161).

In this narrative, James protects those moving his relics throughout their journey. This protection, albeit with no confrontations and therefore no violence to exemplify, seems to have led some of those moving his relics to be so fond of the saint that they tried to take the saint’s relics with them instead of leaving them in Egypt (Alcock 23-4). James the Persian appears to them and scolds them. It could be argued that thieves actually stealing not only from a shrine site but stealing the relics of a saint should have been treated with more severe violence by the saint concerned. However, this paper argues that the response that the perpetrators received from the saint was appropriate to the situation because of the relationship that they formed with him before the crime was committed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the hagiographical tradition in Coptic of a range of martyr saints to assess whether the form and severity of the violence enacted by them was appropriate to the situation in which it occurred. The hypothesis that the violence would be appropriate has been proven to be correct for all of the saints explored except for Apa Merkourios, the severity of whose violence seems to be particularly extreme but perhaps intended by the writer within the context of his narrative and his character. It can therefore be stated that the violence enacted by martyr saints in Coptic hagiographical tradition is a necessary part of their martyrdom experience, and is also necessary for the preservation of their shrines and those who visit them.
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An Interview with Professor Jonathan Harris
Professor of the History of Byzantium, Royal Holloway, University of London
Interviewer: Lorenzo Saccon (Wolfson College)

What created your interest in the field of Byzantine studies?

Like most people, I knew almost nothing about Byzantium before I went to university, having studied the 1815-1951 period for O and A Level. I had read Robert Graves’ Count Belisarius but I did not think it nearly as good as I Claudius. A week after arriving at King’s College London, I went to a lecture by Donald Nicol on the 1453 fall of Constantinople and was intrigued. The next step was reading Steven Runciman’s book on topic and anything else I could find (although there did not seem to be that much). I suspect that many others have discovered the subject in a similar way. During my second and third year, I chose to take Roman History up to 400 CE with Averil Cameron and the Optional and Special subjects offered by Julian Chrysostomides: ‘Byzantium and Italy, 518-1025’ and ‘Byzantium, Italy and the First Crusade, 1025-1118’. A period spent teaching in Turkey after completing my BA reinforced the fascination. It was not just that I was able to visit the great monuments like Hagia Sophia and the Chora: more of an impact was made by coming across a crumbling eleventh-century church with a few fragments of fresco left clinging to the brickwork. Perhaps I just like lost causes and so I came back to London to take my MA and then to embark on doctoral research with Julian Chrysostomides as my supervisor.

You have always showed a keen interest for the world of late Byzantium. What, in your opinion, makes this period so interesting?

That partly reflects the way that I came in at the end by walking into Donald Nicol’s lecture and by being taught by Julian Chrysostomides who was herself a specialist in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most Byzantinists do it the other way round by continuing on from the classical world and so, not surprisingly,
targeting Late Antiquity or middle Byzantium. For me the fascination with the last century and the period after 1453 is the wider range of source material that is available, especially archival documents. They provide a first-hand immediacy that is often lacking for previous centuries and give an insight into Byzantium’s interaction with the wider world: the Venetian maritime empire, Renaissance Italy and even Lancastrian and Yorkist England.

**Your books have probably been the introduction for many to the world of Byzantium. What are the challenges of presenting thorough scholarly research to a wider public?**

Most of my books have grown out of my BA and MA teaching at Royal Holloway and other London colleges. As in most universities these days, courses are only allowed to run if they meet a minimum recruitment threshold so I have to make Byzantine history attractive to as wide a cross section of the student body as possible. There is still (and perhaps always will be) a lingering suspicion that Byzantium is all a bit weird so I place the emphasis on themes that will be familiar from other courses such as political and military history, gender, economics and cultural interaction. I do not touch on current research themes which, while entirely valid, are not particularly riveting to those outside a small circle of specialists. The same applies to my books which link to subjects that are likely to be of wider interest such as, in one case, the crusades. There are other challenges as well. The unfamiliar names and specialised vocabulary are decidedly off-putting. English speakers seem daunted by words with more than two syllables so that ‘parakoimomenos’ and ‘Chalkokondyles’ cause particular problems. Greek plurals, such as ‘follis’ to ‘folleis’ and ‘tagma’ to ‘tagmata’, also spread alarm and despondency. I even find it a struggle sometimes to establish that the terms ‘Byzantium’ and ‘the Byzantine empire’ are acceptable but not ‘the Byzantium empire’. I have adopted a number of ways to make the vocabulary less of a barrier. I stick to a single form whenever possible or use a way round. For example, I talk about the ‘Phokas family’ rather than the ‘Phokades’. English equivalents can be used, such as...
‘chamberlain’ for parakoimomenos and, where one exists, the more familiar version of a Greek first name, hence ‘John’ rather than ‘Ioannis’. This is not an attempt to anglicise the Byzantines (as their ancient Greek forebears have long since been) but to make their history accessible to an international readership. When it comes to the books, I cite only English translations of primary sources where they exist and keep largely to secondary work in English. Reviewers have sometimes taken exception to this but I would never dream of doing it in an article for a learned journal! I am merely providing the annotation that is appropriate to the kind of readership the book is aimed at. Most of what I write is not designed to make some definitive statement or advance some ground-breaking theory but just to give students and readers a foot in the door to Byzantine studies.

Your ‘Introduction to Byzantium, 602-1453’ is going to be published by Routledge in April. How did this publication come about?

The main impetus for writing was to provide a textbook for my own teaching. There is already a very good textbook on Byzantium by Timothy Gregory but it is unsuited to what I do because it includes Late Antiquity and devotes relatively little space to the later centuries. Hence the date span of my book which is restricted to the period that I actually teach. There were other considerations too. When I was an undergraduate, it was assumed that you were familiar with certain things such as, for example, the Christian religion and the French language. That can no longer be assumed either in the UK or further afield. A few years ago, I taught for a couple weeks in China where Byzantium is covered as part of world history. The students (most of whom were on engineering or medical courses) had an extraordinarily high standard of English comprehension but, of course, none of the cultural background. I wanted my textbook to be usable in that environment. Finally, rather than just giving a narrative of events, I wanted to incorporate into the textbook some of the more stimulating scholarly debates that have shaped our subject and made it what it is today. So I have included profiles of some
prominent Byzantinists of the past in textboxes and outlined a few of the more influential theories and interpretations.

**What do you think of the state of the field of Byzantine studies?**

Byzantinists are much given to lamenting the neglect of their subject area but taking the United Kingdom as a whole there is a huge range of exciting and valuable work being done. We have historians, art historians, numismatists, epigraphers, theologians, palaeographers, literature specialists, language specialists and gender specialists, working in universities across the country, alongside others who have no institutional affiliation. That said, I think that we could do more to become aware of each other’s existence, to learn from the wide array of skills and approaches that we deploy, and to appreciate and celebrate the advances that are being made. There is a temptation to regard our own specialisation within the subject as central and that of others as peripheral: those who apply critical theory to Byzantium sometimes regard those who edit manuscripts as antiquarians and by the same token the manuscript specialists can be suspicious of new interpretations and approaches. Moreover, it might be time to consider what ‘Byzantine studies’ actually are. Traditionally the term has meant the Christian eastern empire from c.300-1453 CE but that means that historians of the later Roman empire are rather uneasily yoked together with people like me who study contemporaries of Chaucer. Moreover, since the pioneering work of Peter Brown in the early 1970s, Late Antiquity has grown to be a dynamic and rapidly evolving sphere of study and it is, in any case, demonstrably different from the world that emerged after the watershed of the seventh century. We might want to accept that we have two discrete areas of research here.

**Are you already working on a new project?**

Throughout my career, in between teaching and writing other books, I have continued to work on the topic that formed my PhD thesis:

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the Byzantine diaspora of the fifteenth century in the wake of the Ottoman conquest. The thesis was published in 1995 (in a very limited print run) but since then, great strides have been made with the work of Thierry Ganchou, Nada Zečević and others. My own research has also moved forward considerably as I have continued to write academic journal articles and chapters on this theme. I am now starting to plan out a new book that deals with issues of perception, integration and identity among the Byzantine émigrés. There are two other projects on the go: Along with my former PhD student, Georgios Chatzelis, I am preparing a collection of Byzantine texts on the crusades in English translation and I am editing a revised version of *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusade*. 
The first half of the fourteenth century was a turbulent period for Thessaloniki, which changed hands three times before being finally conquered by the Turks in 1430. Its archbishop, saint Symeon (c. 1381–1429), had been rather reticent to accede to his throne, aware of the dangers awaiting him within and without the city walls. This he admits in the following Apology, written to justify his sudden departure in a moment of great crisis. With this text, Symeon wanted to prove to his flock that they were not being abandoned by their shepherd, but rather that his journey was made for their advantage. Although very personal, this document does give a strong impression of the desperate situation of the late Byzantine Empire, surrounded on all sides by its enemies, Latins and Turks. Symeon wanted the Thessalonians to not cede to either side: neither to the godless Turks, nor to the heretical Venetians. This journey might be his last one, as the Apology strongly suggests towards its conclusion, but it is necessary to secure help from Constantinople. The results were very different. Symeon could not go further than Mt Athos, and Thessalonica was sold to the Venetians in 1423.

Homily and apology on setting out to Constantinople. After having reached the Holy Mountain, due to a raid of the godless Hagarenes, Symeon came back, dispatching the letters of the most blessed despot, since the holy men on mount Athos also recommended to do this in obligation to Christ.

1. Symeon, the last of the servants of Jesus Christ, archbishop of Thessalonica due to His grace and mercy, to his God-loving suffragan bishops, beloved brothers in Christ, to the most honourable leaders of the church in that city, to all priests and monks, to the most glorious senators of the people and to the whole body of the Christians, children in the Lord who most long for your humble archbishop: I pray, with my whole soul, that from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit you shall receive
grace, peace, blessings, health, joy, freedom from all evil. May you successfully progress in all goodness and all which is salvific and helpful, both earthly and heavenly.

2. Blessed be God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who from the beginning strengthened and fixed you in the true faith of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, who increased you in the prosperity of the Holy Spirit and granted you many fruits to strengthen your faith. Indeed, you have not received faith in a second moment, but from the beginning with the Lord’s apparition on earth. Nor did you learn the doctrine later, from some following teachers, but from those great heralds and eyewitnesses of the Lord. Indeed, Paul was your teacher, and those working with him for your salvation, Timothy, Luke and Silvanus; with them also many others, who are considered companions of the apostles. So, after you received the doctrine of the faith, you were not known to be careless and weak, but burning with zeal and courage about it. Wherefore, when you suffered much from the very beginning because of your pious devotion, as Paul testifies, and at the hands of your compatriots, you endured it all with joy. Because of this, your faith increased, and this entire city became of Christ, except a very few people, who were left to the most-evil demon as some wretched legacy. Many of you offered to God the fruits of their faith not only in words, but also in actions, neglecting their bodies and offering themselves to mortification for Christ, and their heads were girded with the shining crown of martyrdom, as they eagerly desired. Demetrios, the greatest of Christ’s champions, he who received to pour forth myrrh above them all because of his great purity and the immeasurable love he had towards God, is exceptional among them. You are always protected by his sleepless vigils and are rescued by his intercession to God from all vexation, and when you often fall into great woes because of your sins, you are saved from all calamity and violence through the martyr.

3. Indeed, the city was already captured by the infidels and suffered great troubles and destruction, and it endured woes when the heretics took control of it in a different time. It
was not long ago that it came under the control of the godless enemies, not because our watchful guardian was dozing off, nor because he was shrinking from his role – how could it be? – he who often rescued the city, at one time supporting it during a famine, at another saving it secretly from the plotting of the enemies, and protected her by many other actions, which are recorded and trusted to be true. Therefore, its handing over did not happen because of Demetrios' negligence, but because the inhabitants behaved ungratefully and maliciously towards God. For the Israelites were not destroyed because of Moses' carelessness, nor did many others die near Jordan because Joshua, his successor, did not duly lead them. Indeed, while they did not cease to carry out their commands, by words and by actions, the people went against God and did not obey them: these are the real reasons why such sufferings came to be, so that those who had been foolish could come to their senses. Yet, when this happened to our city, Demetrios, though disapproving, delivered it again from these difficulties against all hope. After all, this is most true now, not too long ago, as you all know, when he delivered this city from the beast-like, bloodthirsty, godless enemy, as from lion's claws or a dragon's mouth. I believe that Paul's prophecy, which he wrote to you Thessalonians saying: 'the Lord shall rescue you from the coming wrath' (Ep. Thess. 1.10) was fulfilled with precision by this action.

4. Nevertheless, we need to take care not to fall again in error as we did before. And no one else but us, even if we come up with many excuses, shall be the cause of this. Christ saved you through the martyr's supplication and watchful guard, and time after time through the prayers of the greatest of your shepherds and archbishops. Time after time, indeed, some remarkable men among you have been chosen by Christ: just as you were famous for their many and most beautiful words on piety, and gained the chief teachers among the apostles, so too you were later enriched by the teachers who followed those great men. This good tradition was maintained among you up to the days of the archbishop who preceded me, whom you all know to have been a godly and virtuous man,
who flourished in many actions according to God and honoured the rule of his office and of the monastic life in many ways. You know that the previous bishop became like Paul, more, like Jesus, and often laid his soul down for you. Even the one before him is known to you, a man full of virtues, an imitation of those men of old. And what man was the holy Gregory, how great his life! Was it not apostolic, the life of one of Christ’s champions? Was he not a theologian, and like the angels in his *hesychia*? Because of his suffering for our faith, was he not a martyr?

5. Only in me you have truly deviated from this tradition: I succeeded them, but was not adequate. Nevertheless, even if I did nothing good and useful for you, I did not neglect to do everything in my power, and ‘God loves that which is according to our power’ as one of the theologians said (Gregory Nazianzen, Orat. 7, 17). I am ashamed and humbled comparing the actions of those before me and my own. But, thanks to their prayers, I am again confident in Christ that I did not usurp this throne, and it was not by some human error that I came to this role, as I myself can tell, and that faithful witness in the sky. I do not know in detail, as He does, how, by God’s disposition, I came to this position, for I did avoid it because of the difficulty of the role. I avoided it not by chance, but because I partly knew that my strength was not enough, not only for the position, but also for the most terrible confusion and worries of this great city. To put it simply, I took pleasure in quietness because of the great weakness of my constitution, and lived a life which does not cause worries, and – for reasons beyond my powers – I enjoyed with liberality many favours in my homeland thanks to God’s compassion. I was satisfied with this, and I considered a burden what is thought to be more important. However, after I was forced to this position (only He who knows everything knows how, not me, as I said above), I did what I had to, but with distress. And immediately my sufferings began, once with haste and alone I left my homeland, forced to do this: all of a sudden, I was here, where no one knew me. You received me hospitably, granted me great honours, and showed me the greatest love, ‘as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself’,

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as Paul says (Gal. 4.14). And you gave yourselves first to the Lord and to me by the will of God, for which I gave thanks to God and I am forever grateful. You all kept that in the past. What then, if someone seemed to make me suffer? Even our Lord has suffered from those who received benefits and was afflicted by them. Consider Paul: did he not travel to this city? Did he not endure great sufferings? Then, what is remarkable if I, the least of God’s servants, endured some little pains? However, I did not fall short in doing what was in my power, and I took care of the good order of the churches, I organised the holy celebrations and promoted the restoration of holy houses. I urged you, with constant teachings, on the way of the gospel. I took great care to propitiate God with prayers, litanies and holy ceremonies. Without any gain, and with all care and precision, I made the priesthood available to those who are fitting, by God’s grace. With constant advice and indications, I have urged our most blessed despot, ruler of this city, on matters which regarded her, as the Lord is my witness, and with absolute purity and zeal of justice, I attended trials, without departing from truth. For this reason, I appeared stern to many, since I did not judge according to appearance, nor was I held back by anyone. I did not cease, as it seemed to me, to act according to God’s will; if it seemed different to others, it did not to me. Whence I suffered, and was in need, and was attacked by some, as you know.

6. The circumstances consumed me, and even before the storm, the great wave of the events caused me to fall ill: I was almost cast in the depths, led just before the gates of Hades. This happened while I was in this city, I do not know for what reason. However, I certainly know that the fault was truly mine, for I have upset God, and this happened to me, so that I might pay in part my debt to God. May my suffering be of education and profit for my brethren. I know no other cause for my sufferings than my own sin. Paul exulted in his sufferings, saying: ‘I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions’, and praying for his weakness to disappear he heard ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’, he rejoiced in his difficulty, saying: ‘Therefore, I
will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.’ (2 Cor, 12:10, 12:19) If he did this, then who of those with me would dare to say that what happened to him, especially the sickness, was not for his advantage? Therefore, I shall never leave the Thessalonians because of my weakness, since I do not want to gain the repute of a deserter and be thought to have no care for what is expected of me for the sake of the flesh. But, since I ought to worry for many other interests of ours and of those in this city, and if necessary brave danger for them, for constant dangers and storms accompany this undertaking, it seemed just to me to ignore the hardship of my sickness so far as to disregard my body, overlook dangers and brave, with my feeble strength, the roads, the sea, the things I mentioned before, so that, God willing, your situation might improve and become safe, somewhat thanks to my struggle. Indeed, I do not ask for anything else but that you stay with your Orthodox masters, guard your freedom, and keep your faith unshaken. Fathers should rejoice in their children’s faith, and children continuously prove themselves followers of their fathers’ orthodoxy. If anyone thinks otherwise, he is a traitor of the faith, and deserves a condemnation more severe than that of the infidel.

7. Our blessed despot, when I consulted him on this matter, approved my decision and wants to assist me in my journey, and on my part, I hasten on it. I know that many have different opinions on it all, but I tell you, in truth, that I was eager to do this all for your advantage. Then, become my helpers! But do not help, with wealth, nor by toiling in missions abroad, but uniting in concord and urging each other to do good. Strive over piety, stand for your homeland, endure all kinds of oppression, all anguish, all suffering, if necessary to keep yourselves free from the enemies of Christ. Look at our surrounding cities! What happened to them, brethren? What sorts of attacks do they withstand each day? Observe, what is worse, that many living in these cities endanger their souls by abandoning our religion, and, alas, little by little the pious decrease in number due to these daemonic assaults. Therefore,
let us not be careless nor negligent about what is happening: indolence is dangerous indeed. Truly, I know your woes and your anguish, and that many of you are distressed, miserable and poor because of these events. But stand firm to the end please, for the Lord, since He says that ‘the one who stands firm to the end will be saved’ (Mt. 10:22; Mk. 13:13), and He will give you the goods of the earth and there you will receive a great reward.

8. Do you not see what wondrous things Christ does for us through the supplications of his mother and of our guardian, the martyr Demetrios? He saved us against all expectations. He destroyed our enemies, who were insolent and plotted against us. He gave us freedom and relief from all this. Even if we fell because of our sins, which we began to revel in because of our thoughtlessness, it would not have been because of God, but us. And rightfully so, for we are thankless for his benefices, and unrepentant of the evils that we have done, and once we have some relief, we become complacent and think that everything is disposed by us, and not by our Lord: we are not humble nor thankful, we do not submit completely to the dispenser of every good. That is why we are crushed, why we are miserable, and why not only our enemies make us suffer, but also earthquakes, disease, hail and drought. We were forgetful of God and paid no attention to any of his things: we blasphemed against both. We lived like heathens, despite being the people consecrated by Christ’s blood. We lived the holy days devoted to him as common and profane. We had no respect for the feasts and Sunday, we did not pray, we did not remember God. We rejoiced in injustice and arrogance, in self-abandonment and impurity, we were absorbed in any other evil. Nor did we remember to gather at the right time in the churches of God, but in thought and expression and in worthless and dishonourable encounters with each other we angered him more, ‘for God’s wrath descends upon those who commit these actions’ (Ep. Col. 3.6; Ep. Rom. 2.2) as Paul says. Therefore, I pray, let us be alert and vigilant, let us ‘resist the devil and he will flee from you’ (Jm. 4:7), as Peter also commands. Let us approach the Lord in confession and fall
before him weeping, and he shall bestow his mercy upon us.

9. I entrust you to God and to the power of his grace, for He is the one who guides you to everything that is good, who guards and saves you. I came to you in love and in love I depart. I can boast in Christ that I desired neither silver, nor gold, nor any of your possession. I procured for myself no extravagant clothes, no riches, no other luxury. I can trust to say in Christ that I coveted nothing of yours. I leave without anything from this Church, and even if I had some little necessity, I did not take it from you here, but from the generous zeal of a devout soul in the love in Christ. And I am thankful for this, ‘for I do not seek what is yours, but you’ (2 Cor, 12:14), as Paul writes. Then, I ask for God’s blessing, peace, shelter and help for you. I recommend you by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all might have love in Christ, and peace towards each other, that each of you might act toward their salvation. God-loving bishops! Take care of your flock and do not leave them, since you owe Christ, the chief-shepherd, their salvation. Leaders of the holy monasteries and ministers of the spiritual services! strive with all your strength about the government of your holy monasteries and work for the salvation of the souls who approach you. Chosen administrators of the shrines and churches, take care of the administration of the holy hymns and of the beauty of the holy temples, of their order and organisation. Besides, take care of justice and give out righteous judgements, as if to bring a perfect gift to the good judge. Remaining priests and members of the clergy! Cling on to your faith and take care, with all your strength, continuously, of the holy hymns and prayers, so that God may always look after you. Maintain the doctrine given to you in Christ, in order to gain the Father’s blessing. All rulers, all ruled, be careful about your faith and salvation. Do not forget about your soul. You, first, do not go against those below you and crush them, while you others, who are under their command, do not hate your masters, but love each other as a part of one single body, united in Christ. Fear God, respect the Church, obey your emperor. Hold on to justice above all, which is able to exalt a people, and do not
depart from the earthly and heavenly goods. Pray for me too, that I might be led on the way towards salvation, and that I may accomplish something useful for you by attaining the divine supervision and salvation from this. I remit you all in Christ and ask from God shelter, blessing and salvation. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and His mercy be with us all,

Amen.