

REVIEWS

KALDELLIS, Anthony. *ROMANLAND: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*. Cambridge; Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. xv + 373 pp. ISBN 978-0-674-98651-0.
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Fascination with the history of the direct successor of the Roman Empire in its eastern half has not subsided even in the 21st century. The predilection for the so-called small and ‘other’ themes in the last two or three decades in Byzantine studies has also resulted in an array of scholarly works, while the so-called big themes (political organization, ethnicity and ethnogenesis, religion) have receded somewhat in favour of more modern or rather post-modern ones. Kaldellis’s work represents something of an exception in this development. Following the author’s previous monographs, it is a logical outcome of his research and efforts to provide a new, rather source-reflecting, interpretation of the history of the state and society, which we have come to call Byzantine based on an unspecified ‘scholarly’ consensus obfuscated by tons of expert writings in the field.

The central thesis of this work is the claim not only of the continuity (and gradual transformation in line with historical development) of the Roman state organism in the empire’s eastern half but also of the formation of an ethnic community that called itself Roman inhabiting the Roman land or country (the author uses the term *Romanía* or *Romanland* as the equivalent of the Greek designation *Ρωμανία*) and speaking the Roman language (*ῥωμαίικα*). As the author himself states and refers to, he bases his thesis on the Roman (or *Romeic*) ethnogenesis of the East Roman population primarily on the results of recent research on the origin, formation, and further development of medieval genes and the search for their origins (R. Wenskus, F. Graus, W. Pohl, H. Wolfram, et al.), and especially on a thorough analysis of the contemporary primary sources. Although in this case we are not dealing with an ethnic community from distant or indeterminate geographical and mythological spaces, but rather a community perceiving itself as the direct successor of perhaps the most powerful European state formation ever – the Roman Empire, it has been seemingly incomprehensible for the scholarly discourse of the last 150 years or so to accept the thesis of political and ethnic continuity, even in the light of the legacy of the biased and condescending 18th century ‘Enlightenment’. To one unfamiliar with the realities of the time, and especially the primary sources, this new nomenclature might seem rather unusual, but it should not be forgotten – as the author points out – that, for example, the inhabitants of what is now Greece, namely Athens, were

still calling themselves Romans and their language Roman, i.e., *Roméika*, in the 18th century (Richard Chandler's testimony), although linguistically we would probably have described it as 'vernacular' Greek (*dimotikí*). He also quotes the testimony of a Russian newspaper of 1821, which distinguishes Ancient Greek from Modern Greek, calling the latter the *Romaic* language. Likewise, here he cites second-hand testimony from Arabic sources, which also make a clear distinction between the language of the ancient Hellenes (*Yūnāniyyūn*) and the language of the Byzantines (*Rūm*). To illustrate his thesis, he fragmentarily cites the testimony of Arabic or Persian sources but given the significance of the confrontation of the Eastern Roman state with the Islamic cultural realm and the serious impact of this struggle on the internal ecclesiastical-cultural and ideological politics, the demographic structure, and the related administrative-military and fiscal reorganization of the Byzantine state, an analysis of the Arabic sources would deserve much more attention. It should be noted, however, that the term *Romaic* language appearing in primary sources did not imply or denote the same ideological concept across time. As the Yugoslav/Serbian historian Ivan Đurić points out in his thorough analysis of 1986, in both 'Early Byzantine' and 'Middle Byzantine' sources, and specifically in *De administrando imperio*, the *Romaic* language (*glóttá*) and dialect (*diálektos*) refer to different linguistic situations. Initially, the term was used to refer to both the Latin and Greek languages that formed the cultural foundation of the Roman Empire, and as Kaldellis rightly points out, Latin was also understood as the ancient Roman language. The gradual Hellenization of the empire from the 7th century onwards also led to the exclusive identification of the Roman language with spoken Greek (which is otherwise strictly separated from Ancient Greek), while the gradual decline in knowledge of Latin in the East led to its cultural displacement as a foreign language of the barbarians, as can already be seen most eloquently in the work of Anna Comnena.

The author develops his thesis, which is based on an array of domestic and foreign sources, in two parts: firstly, he deals with the Romans themselves, how they came to be renamed Byzantines in some contemporary Western (Latin) sources and in scholarly writings, their Roman ethnicity and the process of Romanogenesis framed by the development of Late Antique society, and an analysis of the name of the state organism with which they identified themselves. Secondly, he examines other ethnic groups in relation to the Roman (or *Romaic*) nation/ethnos and concurrently inquiring whether Byzantium can be considered an empire not only in the 10th century, but throughout its entire duration, in accordance with recent theoretical conceptions of imperial states.

The introductory chapter of the first part dealing with Roman identity and the ethnogenesis of the community inhabiting the so-called Byzantine Empire may

be shocking and even scandalous for some readers (one may speak of the author's exaggeration), but it may not be such a surprise to scholars in the field. Therein he convincingly points to a striking, even embarrassing, disregard for primary sources in a wider scholarly community clinging to a kind of ephemeral Byzantine identity that the previous scholarly works have been unable to argue for cogently or convincingly, much less substantiate with sources. The author here speaks with some pathos, exaggeration, and purposeful controversy of a millennium-lasting 'denial' of the Eastern Empire's continuous Romanness (*Romanitas*). Although, for the policy on the part of the popes and Frankish/German kings, the bias and denial or non-recognition of the Romanness of the Eastern Empire and its exclusion from the Roman tradition and failure to acknowledge the Constantinopolitan Emperors as Roman Emperors, can be understood in the intent of the natural political struggle at the time to gain legitimacy for the claim to the title of Roman Emperor (especially from the 9th century commences the reclassification of the Eastern Roman Empire's inhabitants as Greeks – *Greece*), the obfuscation of the Roman character and Roman identity of the Eastern Roman Empire's population based on the testimony of numerous contemporary sources, even in the scholarly community, is downright astonishing. Although the designation Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire dates to the 16th century, and its use is wrongly attributed to 18th century Enlightenment writers (E. Gibbon et al.), it was not until the 19th century that literally a programmatic promotion of this term began, and as the author points out, it was related to the then current developments in relations between the major powers of European and world politics. Until the Crimean War, the thesis of Greek nationalists (especially after gaining independence from the Ottoman Turks in the war of 1821-29) about the Greek character of the East Roman Empire from about the 5th century until its demise was not questioned even in political and scientific circles in Western Europe. Yet, it also implied the claim of the modern Greek state to the territories still controlled by the Ottoman Empire: Epirus, Macedonia, Thrace, Constantinople, and the Asia Minor's western fringes. However, as the potentially realized ambitions of the modern Greeks would come at the expense of the weakest link in the post-Napoleonic order of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and would be seen by the Western powers (Great Britain, France, but also Prussia and Austria) as strengthening the Russian position in the Balkans and thus in the Eastern Mediterranean, after about 1850, there comes to a change in the scholarly discourse nomenclature concerning the Eastern Empire's history, as a response to the change in the geopolitical situation and the programmatic spread of Russophobic sentiments in the West. British and French scholarship played a key role in the 'Byzantinization' of the direction of historical inquiry into the Eastern Roman Empire. Political pressures to distort the interpretation of certain historical periods are not only typical of

modern history and the actual present. However, the book in this section, which is notable for its revelatory and overlapping coverage into modern times, as well as for its inclusion of the development of the understanding of Byzantine history in the Greek historiographical discourse of the 19th and 20th centuries, lacks at least some countervailing probe into the subject by Russian and later Soviet, or Bulgarian and Yugoslav (Serbian and Croatian) Byzantinist scholarship. Although the approaches, attitudes, and opinions of the giants of the pre-revolutionary and emigrant scholarly community (Vasiliev, Ostrogorsky, Obolensky, Kazhdan) are mentioned, the views of the Russian/Soviet Byzantinists of the 20th century, such as Uspensky, Goryanov, Pigulevskaya, Levchenko, Kosminski, Freydenberg, Udaltsova, Osipova, Litavrin, etc., who contributed in no small measure to the development of this historical discipline, are absent.

Based on a thorough study of sources of a diverse nature, not only of Roman-Byzantine, but also of Latin, Hebrew, Church Slavonic, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Armenian and Ottoman-Turkish provenance, the author is convinced that the use of the terms Byzantium, Byzantine Empire, Byzantine, Byzantines is completely unjustified. And even the greatest and contemporary capacities in the Byzantine studies (G. Ostrogorsky, D. Obolensky, A. Laiou, C. Mango, A. Cameron) are in part rightly criticized by him for clinging to (and several of them continue to cling to) this outdated conception of a soulless and shapeless Byzantine identity reduced to the imperial tradition and Orthodox Christianity. As part of his sometimes ruthless and unscrupulous critique of the concept of Byzantine 'non-ethnicity', he accuses its proponents of basing their conclusions on unsubstantiated assumptions, even irrational prejudices (A. Cameron), or of ignorance or deliberate disregard of primary sources. G. Ostrogorsky, in his characterization of the Byzantine civilization, states that its supporting elements were the Roman state form (law and public administration), Hellenistic culture and the Christian (Orthodox) faith. This is not actually denied by Kaldellis, but rather he reflects on the fact that, despite substantial transformations, the 'Byzantine' society retained continuity in terms of ethnic self-identification. In particular, he points out that belonging to a particular religious denomination – Orthodox Christianity – was not at all a dominant but rather a complementary element, and in view of the evidence of written sources, Roman did not always mean Christian and vice versa. The two identities were not always unquestionably interchangeable, although there were periods when the empire was besieged by foreign, non-Christian communities and the two identities blended into each other. He thus concludes that the Byzantines were Romans who were also Christians. Although the community of Orthodox peoples grew after the 9th century, the 'Byzantines' nevertheless considered themselves the 'elite', the truest Christians, and although they did not question the Orthodoxy of

Bulgarians, Serbs, Russians, or Georgians, their view of these ethnic groups was conditioned by a consciousness of their own cultural superiority. Although there were scholars who, in closer analysis, acknowledged the Roman identity of this state's inhabitants (G. Page), they never found the courage, so to speak, to name it clearly and distinctly. This is more striking because, as far as the members of the various ethnic minorities present on the territory of the empire are concerned, in this case the Byzantinists have had no problem speaking of Goths, Slavs or Armenians. Especially in the last case, they have been able to find them even where their ancestors had already arrived in the empire's territory two or three generations ago and the only link between these members of the aristocracy and the former cultural milieu was sometimes an Armenian-sounding name. The author aptly calls this the 'Armenian fallacy' of the scholarly community. Because such an interpretation of ethnicity is based on biological and false cultural continuity and does not consider the formation of identity based on the principle of cultural integration and assimilation. As he demonstrates with several examples of immigrants to the territory of the empire, whether members of elites or entire communities, the political, cultural, and linguistic assimilation of these individuals and groups was the backbone of the empire's 'integration' policy, not only in theory but also in practice, guaranteeing the successful overcoming of major military-political upheavals, as well as demographic losses.

In trying to define a 'Byzantine' identity, historians have often turned to Christianity as a supporting identity in conjunction with the imperial idea in the case of a community that boasted a rich and unbroken history of being a world power in its own right – the Roman Empire. Moreover, according to the author, in doing so they were guilty of a so-called ecumenical bias characterized by putting emphasis on the New Testament and its universalism, sometimes neglecting the much greater significance of the Old Testament in the religious-cultural life of the 'Byzantine' society that very frequently identified itself as the chosen people and its land as the new Israel. While these identity-forming elements may have formed part of the community's identity, they were never so dominant as to override other elements of identity. Based on his study of the sources, Kaldellis identifies the following core elements of Roman identity of the Eastern Empire's population: ethnonymy (*genos* vs. *ethnikoi*), customs (traditions such as *éthe/ἤθη*), and a strong, even fervent remembrance of and attachment to ancestors and religion (p. 6). Noteworthy is his analysis of belonging to the Roman nation (*genos/phylos*) and the preservation of the memory of Roman ancestors even among Romans who were descended from prisoners of war or captured civilians and who grew up among barbarians such as the Avars or the Slavs (*allophyloi*). Every community has a need to identify itself through a name, a name representing the totality of certain common (albeit consensual) features

shaping that community. Hence the Roman identity of the *Ρωμαῖοι*, their Roman ancestry, Roman customs and habits, Roman dress, Roman language (*roméika*), and, from the point of view of the foreign Christians, Roman religion (the Eastern Anatolian Paulicians in such a manner labelled the Roman Orthodoxy as opposed to their true and pure Christianity), are also attested in countless sources.

According to the author the granting of Roman citizenship to the Empire's entire population through the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 was of utmost importance for the process of Romanogenesis. Also, in confrontation with the outside world, a certain self-identification of the local population with the state, which they themselves called *Romanía*, had already developed in the East Roman Empire during the first centuries after the demise of its western part. As the author notes from his reading of primary sources, this was not an identity that came from educated urban elites, or some construct of elitist intellectual endeavour, but the result of a spontaneous process of creating a common identity that arose from the population's need to identify not only with a particular community but also with a clearly defined territory. This process of self-identification flowed, as it were, from a broader social base. An important element in homogenizing the population was the reforms of Justinian and his successors in the field of legal codification, the aim of which was to ensure the application of the same legislation throughout the state and to all citizens – the Romans without distinction. Although, in *Romanía*'s history, there were territories that could be governed by local legal customs (e.g., southern Italy and Sicily), Roman law, in conjunction with the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, stood at the highest level and ensured – in modern terms – legal certainty and the enforceability of the law throughout the entire state.

An equally remarkable and interesting part of the book is the author's reflection on whether Byzantium, especially after the enormous territorial losses of the 7th century, can be thought of an empire or whether it would not be more appropriate to view this polity as a kind of nation-state, at least until its re-expansion in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. Based on recent theoretical conceptions of the classification of states into empires (C. Ando, K. Barkey, J. Mackenzie, et al.), in terms of the political-legal definition of the relations between the metropolis and dependent territories, Byzantium cannot be explicitly spoken of as a state that had an empire, but rather as a state that developed into an empire by expansion into its immediate vicinity. As for the subjugated Bulgarian or Armenian states, this organic growth into an empire was accompanied by the absorption of the annexed territories in political-legal and economic-administrative terms. The analysis of the state-political terminology of the Late Roman period is a prelude to this issue. It is noteworthy that neither in the imperial period of the Roman Empire or in the period of its eastern successor did the word *imperium* appear in

the power-political vocabulary in the sense we understand it today. In both the Ancient and Late Antique periods, the term was primarily related to the power position of the Roman ruler in the domestical political context and was not used to refer to the political rule of the Romans over foreign states and ethnic groups. Nor was this Latin word among the several hundred lexical borrowings that were adopted into Greek in the 'early Byzantine' period. Contexts in which monarchy was referred to were denoted by the Greek terms *basileia* or *monarchia*, the concentration of power in the hands of the monarch found expression in the terms *autokrator/autokratoria*, and power itself in the terms *ischys* or *arche*.

If we start from the premise of the Roman identity of most of the population of the territories forming the core of the Byzantine state (the Balkan and Asia Minor provinces/*themata*), then we would have to accept Kaldellis's conclusion that this state was rather characterized by a relatively high degree of cultural and socio-political homogeneity and bore the hallmarks of a nation-state. And in fact, it was only through an expansionist policy in the Balkans and Anatolia that its imperial potential developed. By the 10th century, the East Roman/Byzantine state, with the help of the Church and the attraction of the urban cultural milieu, had succeeded in Hellenizing, even linguistically, the Slavic population of mainland Greece. This cultural and ethnic homogeneity was also greatly facilitated by official state policy, which subjected the larger ethnic groups taking refuge in the empire not to formal integration but to systematic assimilation.

The author must be acknowledged for his excellent knowledge of primary sources, which provide the testimony he has masterfully used to 'reinforce' his thesis that most inhabitants of the polity we have come to call the Byzantine Empire were Roman or *Romaic*. Yet, as Kaldellis points out without exaggeration, even with its imperial character it was not always clear-cut. Due to frequent and significant territorial encroachments, it very often lost its multi-ethnic character. In the first part of the book, dealing with the 'denialist' thesis and the ethno-genetic process of the Romans-Byzantines, the author proceeds like a skilled detective and creates a homogeneous but plastic mosaic in the search for answers to the postulated questions. In the second part, dealing with other ethnic groups living on the territory and in the empire's neighbourhood and the issue of empire, there is a certain fragmentation, fragmentation of the text, a slowing down of the pace of the text's fluency – although this was probably unavoidable, given the set range of questions. The monograph is equipped with a rich annotated apparatus at the end of the text, which makes reading somewhat uncomfortable, an extensive list of primary sources and secondary literature, as well as a name index. The treatment of the subject is thorough (except for the use of the misnomer of the ruler of the Avar Khaganate as *khan* rather than *khagan*, p. 141, or a few minor technical shortcomings in the annotation apparatus), and although it lacks

a certain coherence or unity, it is a very valuable contribution to an authentic understanding of the historical processes in a region with cultural and political emanations that touched our own latitudes, and will certainly play a significant role in reassessing ethnogenetic processes and aspects in the history of the East Roman Empire – *Byzantium*. Even though this monograph has a confrontational undertone in some of its positions and will certainly be the subject of more than one controversy, we expect, in agreement with its author, that it will provoke a fruitful and at the same time constructive discussion on this issue. The work is the first comprehensive survey of the formation and search for *origines* of the ethnic community in the sources called *genos* (*phylos*) that inhabited the eastern half (or what remained of it over the centuries) of the Roman Empire.

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STEINHÜBEL, Ján. *THE NITRIAN PRINCIPALITY: The Beginnings of Medieval Slovakia*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021, 670 p. ISBN 9789004437821.

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The publishing house Brill has published the monograph *The Nitrian Principality* by the Slovak medievalist Ján Steinhübel this year. It is the third publication of this book, following the Slovak editions by the publishers Veda and Rak in 2004 and 2016. Steinhübel's book is undoubtedly one of the key works of Slovak medieval studies. It covers the history of the territory now forming Slovakia from the second half of the 5th century to the beginning of the 12th century. The author understands this as the “beginnings of Medieval Slovakia”, and in this sense makes a remarkable connection between Great Moravian and Hungarian history. Let us recall here that the connection between Great Moravian and Hungarian history was one of the basic achievements of the older Slovak history and Slovak medieval studies. *The Nitrian Principality* is the heir to this tradition in the best sense of the word.

If history is the science devoted to the past of people and space, medieval studies is the investigation of space and its inhabitants during the Middle Ages. The historical space here is the territory of medieval Slovakia, but this is not exactly the same as the history of the territory within the present frontiers of Slovakia. This “medieval Slovakia” corresponds only approximately to the territory of the modern state. According to Ján Steinhübel, this spatial framework