

*Precursors**The Historiography of the Enlightenment*

The Eastern Roman empire, named ‘Byzantine’ a century after its demise, is a latecomer to European historiography. Following its fall to the Ottomans in 1453, its history evoked scant interest in the Latin West and among the humanists of the Renaissance. Émigré Byzantine intellectuals such as Manuel Chrysoloras, John Argyropoulos and Bessarion inaugurated the study of Greek philology in Italy, but what motivated their work and that of their pupils was an interest not in the history of the ‘Greek empire’ but in classical learning. ‘Byzantium’, George Ostrogorski observed about this period, ‘was regarded as the store house in which the treasures of the classical world were to be found, while there was little interest in the schismatic Byzantine Empire itself.’¹

The very idea of a ‘Byzantine empire’ as a cultural-political concept radically different from the Roman empire was slow to take root before the nineteenth century as power politics kept sustaining the terminological obscurity surrounding the notion of Byzantine. On the one hand, following the institution of the self-professed Holy Roman empire towards the end of the eighth century, the Latin West had sought to deny the Romanity of the Byzantines, branding their empire as ‘Greek’, ‘Orthodox’, ‘Lower’ or ‘empire of Constantinople’ and laying exclusive claim to the prestige, legacy and power of Rome. Byzantium in this sense functioned as an exonym of Western European coinage intended to convey its ‘otherness’ to Rome and, by extension, ‘Europe’. At the same time, however, when Louis XIV laid bare his aspirations to the imperial dignity of the emperors of Constantinople, he did so not because he wanted to show himself as a Byzantine emperor but because he saw himself as the successor of the Roman emperors. In his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734), Montesquieu also acknowledged, for strategic polemical reasons, the idea of a continuous Roman empire.²

¹ Ostrogorsky 1980: 2.

² On the abiding effects of the ‘rhetorical violence of Latin propaganda’ that painted the Byzantines as not really Romans but something else (typically Greeks and/or Orthodox), see Kaldellis 2019: 3–37.

Western interest, philological and historical, in the 'East Rome' and its heritage originated in the sixteenth century, initially in Italy. Its stimuli were primarily political (the threat from the expanding Ottoman state that served to arouse interest not only in the Ottoman Turks themselves but in the Eastern Roman imperial past as well), humanistic (the discovery of the Greek and Byzantine worlds) and religious (the attention to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine aroused by the denominational struggles between reformers and counter-reformers).³ In Germany, it was an interest in German unity in the face of the Turkish danger and considerable stakes in oriental trade that inspired the powerful business-house of the Fuggers in Augsburg to finance, and its librarian Hieronymus Wolf to undertake, work on the edition and translation of Byzantine authors' *Corpus historiae byzantinae* in 1562 – an enterprise that Wolf's pupil, David Hoeschel, continued with philological skill and 'scrupulous dealing with historical criticism'.⁴

The flourishing of Byzantine studies and Byzantine history in seventeenth-century France, on the other hand, was directly connected with the development of French absolutist and imperial ideology and France's particularly strong diplomatic and economic relations with the Ottoman empire.⁵ Hellenist and religious *érudits* were called upon to explain the history of Byzantium in such a way as to legitimise the rights of the king of France over the imperial title at the expense of the Ottoman sultans and Habsburg emperors. Closely linked with this political historical interest was the study of the Greek language in its various forms and historical evolution – a preoccupation 'tied in with the very immediate demands of the cultural politics of the period which produced it'.⁶ The crowning achievement of the French school, financed by the royal court, was the corpus of the Byzantine historians, the so-called *Byzantine du Louvre* (or *Corpus Parisiense*), published in twenty-four volumes between 1645 and 1711. These bilingual editions, in Greek and Latin, were executed by learned Jesuits, Benedictines and Dominicans, notably Philippe Labbé, Pierre Poussines, Charles du Fresne du Cange, François Combefis, Jean Mabillon and Bernard de Montfaucon, who combined imperial visions

On Byzantium as an 'avatar' of the Roman Empire in seventeenth-century French imperial ideology, see Spieser 2016: 199–210.

³ A standard reference for the historiography of Byzantine history in the sixteenth and seventeenth century is Pertusi 1967. Characteristically, this erudite work draws a distinction between the intellectual work done by scholars and the use made of it by the powerful – a dichotomy that is no longer acceptable from an epistemological point of view. See Reinsch 2010: 435–44.

⁴ Reinsch 2016: 43–54. ⁵ Bréhier 1901: 1–36; Auzépy and Grélois 2001.

⁶ Jeffreys, Haldon and Cormack 2008: 7.

with a new interest in the traditions of the Eastern Church in the spirit of the 'positive theology'. Labbé, remarkably, urged European scholars to search out and publish Byzantine texts, and stressed the importance of the Eastern empire, 'so astonishing in the number of events, so alluring in its diversity, so remarkable in the length of its duration'.⁷ Du Cange, considered by some to be 'the real founder of Byzantine historical studies', produced several works on Byzantine history, among them *The History of the Empire of Constantinople under the French Emperors* (1657), which he dedicated to Louis XIV, and *Historia Byzantina* (1680), exhorting the young ruler to undertake a new conquest of Constantinople and regain the imperial throne earlier occupied by his ancestors.⁸

Until the eighteenth century, the historiography of Byzantium closely followed the theological, dynastic and annalistic traditions. Historical narratives of the empire, in the best case, remained focussed on the history of emperors, wars and intrigues. Significantly, until the eighteenth century, Byzantium was not considered a historical reality in itself but as the (degenerate) successor to the Roman empire. The greatest achievement of the humanists of the 'Age of Erudition' was the collection of and critical philological work on the Byzantine sources and the development of the auxiliary disciplines. The erudite studies on Byzantine history, which had begun in Italy and Germany and spread to France during the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, accumulated an impressive amount of material ready to be used for a monumental work: a history of the millennial Byzantine 'civilisation'. The rationalism and religious scepticism of the Age of Enlightenment transformed this potential into a history of the millennial 'decadence' of the empire. One had to wait until the late nineteenth century for the erudite research of the preceding three centuries to bear fruit and for the new science of Byzantine studies to acknowledge the value of the Eastern Roman world.⁹

In Russia, the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries also saw a revived interest in the history of the Greek Orthodox world. But there, too, this interest was neither purely academic nor unequivocal. The attitude of Muscovite society to Byzantium and its legacy was marked by what Dimitri Obolensky defined as an 'ambiguous blend of attraction and repulsion', while Byzantine history was put to highly selective, didactic and tendentious use in support of power politics or ecclesiastical reform.¹⁰

⁷ Vasiliev 1952: 4. ⁸ Spieser 2016: 200–4; Ostrogorsky 1980: 4. ⁹ Pertusi 1966: 3–25.

¹⁰ Obolensky 1966: 62–3.

Before the late eighteenth century, engagement with Byzantium in the countries that were part of its heritage in the period of Ottoman control was far weaker and tallied with the long-standing tradition of ecclesiastical history and theological literature. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was some interest among the Greek-speaking literati in editing and publishing Byzantine manuscripts. However, this interest was directed towards certain philological and religious aspects of Byzantine intellectual activity and did not entail a systematic engagement with, let alone serious exploration of, Byzantine history.¹¹ All this was to change starting with the later eighteenth century.

'By the Enlightenment, *Aufklärung*', R. G. Collingwood wrote, 'is meant that endeavour . . . to secularise every department of human life.'¹² Recent scholarship has added prodigiously to our understanding of the complex relationship between religion and the Enlightenment, yet it remains beyond doubt that, in the polemical drive towards secularisation, not only the medieval church and clergy but also the Middle Ages themselves were treated as meaningless. The historically minded representatives of this new intellectual movement drew up a historical picture in which the Roman Republic became the exemplary and binding norm of every state order; in comparison to this classic Roman community, everything that followed the Roman empire and its Eastern incarnation, Byzantium, appeared as a harmful and nefarious deviation – an accumulation of abuses and a triumph of barbarism and obscurantism. It was from such premises that Byzantium came to be evaluated, most resoundingly in the works of the French state theorist Charles de Montesquieu, the French philosopher and historian François Voltaire, the founder of Russian research in Germany August Ludwig von Schlözer and the British historian Edward Gibbon.¹³

For Voltaire, Byzantine history was nothing but 'a worthless collection of declamations and miracles' and 'a disgrace for the human mind'.¹⁴ Montesquieu's *Reflections on the Causes of the Greatness and Fall of the Romans* and Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* gave expression to the revulsion and rationalist hostility many Enlightenment thinkers felt for absolutism and the politics of the medieval church, both Eastern and Western. The Byzantine empire, Montesquieu contended, had so many organic defects in its social structure, religious life

¹¹ See in this respect Gazi 2000: 67–8, note 38. ¹² Collingwood 1974: 76.

¹³ Guillou 1966: 27–39.

¹⁴ Voltaire, *Le pyrrhonism de l'histoire*, ch. 15, quoted in Vasiliev 1952: 6.

and methods of warfare that the only explanation he could find for the millennial survival of so corrupt a polity was some ‘unusual outside causes’.¹⁵ Beginning with the early seventh century, Gibbon avowed, Roman history turned into ‘a tedious and uniform tale of weakness and misery. On the throne, in the camp, in the schools, we search, perhaps with fruitless diligence, the names and characters that deserve to be rescued from oblivion.’¹⁶ To Gibbon, the business of the historian of the Eastern Roman empire appeared to be sad and infertile, a repetition of a boring, monotonous narrative of decay. In his eyes, ‘the Greeks’ of the Middle Ages were a degenerate people, bound by the bonds of low, oppressive superstition, their minds raving about metaphysical disputes, their belief in visions and miracles supplanting all principles of moral certainty – a veritable ‘triumph of barbarism and religion’. Voltaire’s ‘*Écrasez l’infâme!*’ speaks from these invectives, which projected the dangerous opponent of the present back into a less dangerous past.¹⁷

For Enlightenment thought generally, neglectful of the study of medieval history as it was, Byzantium became the epitome of everything the Age of Reason disdained: despotism, religious fanaticism and irrationalism, political corruption, ignorance, and effeminateness (as attested by the presence of eunuchs and the influence of women in public life). This imaginary Byzantium of the philosophers was not supposed to be historical: ‘it functioned as a screen on which they could safely project all that they feared and disliked about their own world and its pitfalls, a dystopian mirror for the early modern nation-state’.¹⁸ This attitude survived the period of the French Revolution and persisted through the early part of the nineteenth century. From the position of his evolutionary theory of progress, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel considered Byzantium a historical aberration. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, he saw the ‘general aspect’ of Byzantine history as presenting

a disgusting picture of imbecility; wretched, nay insane passions, stifle the growth of all that is noble in thoughts, deeds, and persons. Rebellion on the part of generals, depositions of the emperors by their means or through the intrigues of the courtiers, assassinations or poisoning of the emperors by their own wives and sons, women surrendering themselves to lusts and

¹⁵ Voltaire, *Le pyrrhonism de l’histoire*, ch. 15, quoted in Vasiliev 1952: 7.

¹⁶ Runciman 1976: 103–10. According to Runciman, it was chiefly because of Gibbon’s widely read *History* that the word ‘Byzantinism’ came to mean tortuous intrigue and corruption (106). It should be noted, however, that Gibbon was not proficient in Greek, and his interpretation of the internal history of the Empire after Heraclius is superficial and abounds with factual errors.

¹⁷ Irmscher 1976: 241–68. ¹⁸ Kaldellis 2019: 14.

abominations of all kinds – such are the scenes which history here brings before us; till at last about the middle of the fifteenth century (A.D. 1453) the rotten edifice of the Eastern Empire crumbled in pieces before the might of the vigorous Turks.

Byzantine history, Hegel summed up, ‘exhibits to us a millennial series of uninterrupted crimes, weaknesses, basenesses and want of principle’.¹⁹

That this eighteenth-century conception could be maintained, so that despite its historical fragility it is still alive today in the consciousness of a broad Western public, is due to the fact that it accommodated many other tendencies which had little to do with the ‘progressive spirit’ of the Enlightenment. For the representatives of classical philology, for example, who were educated in the neoclassical and neohumanist spirit, Byzantium was of significance only insofar as it conveyed ancient ideas; its own achievement was only recognised inasmuch as it adapted itself to this tradition in form and content. The Romantics, on the other hand, looked exclusively at the Occidental empire, whose glorification left no room for the empire of Constantinople, let alone for its claims to priority and exclusivity. The Roman Catholic point of view, in turn, was able to recognise only schismatics in the Eastern Church. Finally, the historiographical tradition left behind by illustrious historians such as Leopold von Ranke and François Guizot underwired the Eurocentric perspective that recognised only the Romanesque-Germanic state system as historically significant, while denying the Greco-Slavic East any historically formative power.²⁰

Finally, the contempt for Byzantium, merging nationalism with orientalism, was instrumental; it helped Western European scholars ‘to place the origins of the European states in the Latin Middle Ages . . . and also to claim the heritage of ancient Greece civilisation through Rome and the Renaissance’.²¹ Its reverse side was the profound concern with and pervasive admiration for Greek antiquity, where the ‘West’ believed its cultural origins were located – an ideological view underpinned by what Peter Gay has termed ‘the rise of modern paganism’ during the Enlightenment and which infused most of the Romantic and post-Romantic historical literature devoted to the cultural genealogy of ‘Europe’.²² True, in Germany the indefatigable Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831) kept the flame of Byzantine research burning by initiating the compilation of the fifty-volume *Corpus scriptorum historiae*

¹⁹ Hegel 1857: 352. ²⁰ Irmischer 1976: 252–3. ²¹ Agapitos 1992: 238.

²² See, among others, Canat 1951, 1953, 1955; Jenkins 1980. On the reception of classical antiquity in the West since the eighteenth century in opposition to the East, see Bernal 1987.

byzantinae (1828–97) – usually referred to as the Bonn Corpus and hailed as the greatest editorial enterprise in the field of Byzantine secular literature in the nineteenth century – but elsewhere in Western Europe the study of Byzantium was all but abandoned for nearly a hundred years.

In eighteenth-century Russia, Byzantine history continued to be used as a weapon in the debate over specific policies in church and state rather than as a field of erudite research. In a vein reminiscent of Voltaire or Gibbon, Peter the Great blamed the bigotry of the Byzantine emperors, Byzantine monasticism, civil disobedience and treachery for the unenviable fate of the empire.²³ Since the 1770s, stimulated by Catherine the Great's expansionist policies (as epitomised by the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji of 1774 and her 'Greek Plan' of 1782 to crush the Ottoman empire and reinstate Byzantium under Russian protection), interest in Byzantine history and the collection and publication of sources had been increasing. Pioneering these studies were a number of German scholars – Theophilus Siegfried Bayer, Gerhard Friedrich Müller, August Ludwig von Schlözer, Johann Gotthilf Stritter, Johann-Philipp Krug and, somewhat later, Ernst Eduard Kunik – who settled in Russia in the latter half of the eighteenth century and became, in the words of F. Uspenskiy, 'the first heralds and transmitters [in Russia] of Byzantine studies properly speaking'. Until the 1870s, German academic traditions were decisive in shaping Russian historical scholarship generally and the (later illustrious) St Petersburg school of Byzantine studies in particular.²⁴

Investigations during this period concerned only marginally Byzantium proper and its history. The German scholars, many of them elected members of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences (founded in 1725), emphasised the importance of Byzantium and Byzantine sources for understanding ancient Russian history and mainly treated questions that might elucidate this history. The first major outcome of this work was a four-volume collection of Byzantine sources (1770–5) edited by Johann Stritter and containing information about the ancient inhabitants of the Russian lands and their neighbours. Johann Philipp Krug's important work on Byzantine chronology and chronography also approached the study of Byzantine texts from the point of view of Russian history. Overall, until the second half of the nineteenth century one can barely speak of serious and systematic Byzantine studies in Russia.²⁵

²³ Obolensky 1966: 63. ²⁴ See Medvedev 2006: 9–32.

²⁵ Medvedev 2006: 11–13; Vasiliev 1927: 539–45.

The late-Enlightenment period in the Balkans set the stage for what later became known as ‘national awakenings’ – a process undertaken by a handful of ‘enlightened’ clergymen and internationally connected intellectuals that centred on the creation of national historical narratives, national languages and national folklore. And if the search for the historical roots of these nations-in-the-making reached back to ancient times, their emergence as real ‘subjects of history’ in the then-prevalent Hegelian understanding of the term – that is, as political entities or centralised states – was firmly located in the Middle Ages. The Greeks were an exception to this rule, a fact that confronted the ‘neo-Hellenic enlighteners’ with specific challenges that would be ultimately solved by the full appropriation of Byzantium as a ‘Greek state’.

Generally speaking, the particulars – geographic, social and political – of the process of medieval state-building, as well as certain methodological shifts in the writing of history, put Byzantium at different removes from the core of the respective national historical narratives. Because of its proximity to Constantinople, relatively early state formation and territorial expansion, medieval Bulgaria was more intensely and lastingly exposed to direct confrontation with and influences from Byzantium than were the Serbs and especially the Romanians and Turks. The historiography of the Enlightenment, on the other hand, paid little attention to questions of continuity *per se*. It was primarily concerned with issues of genealogy and the search for historical models of the modern organisation of society, hence with ‘revivalism’.²⁶ These two groups of causes made Byzantium a constant, albeit variously valued, key reference in the Greek and Bulgarian historical canons already at their inception in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the Serbian, Romanian and Turkish historiographies, the empire emerged as a powerful factor during the late nineteenth century when the task of asserting ethnic continuity and historical mission amid growing competition over the ‘legacy’ of the empire began to loom large on the agenda of the ‘national historians’.

A vital aspect of our theme, especially for the period of ‘national awakenings’, is the fact that the historical successor to the Byzantine empire was the Ottoman empire, which since the fifteenth century had ruled over the Balkan Christians and whose regime, during the age of nationalism, was experienced as increasingly oppressive. The Ecumenical Patriarchate itself – the intact powerful survivor of the Byzantine era – formed an integral part of the Ottoman governing system. This

²⁶ Liakos 2008: 204–6.

determined in great measure the persisting negative attitude of the revolutionary and many moderate 'awakeners' towards Byzantium and its legacy, to which European Enlightenment thought contributed with arguments about the 'anti-European' and 'regressive' nature of both empires.

Present-day Greeks, as Alexis Politis observed, have great difficulty grasping that the sense of continuity of the Greek nation, as it is widely shared and taught at school, was the invention of the mid-nineteenth century. Most of the founders of modern Greece felt a cultural and political affinity with the ancient Greeks alone and considered the entire Byzantine period to be one of foreign, Roman rule and subjugation.²⁷ Domestic and foreign currents fused to give ancient history and culture a pervasive allure to the mind of the 'neo-Hellenic Enlightenment', which would only later and rather slowly be tempered, though never surpassed, by the romantic concept of a Greek Byzantium and the notion of historical continuity.

It is just as remarkable that ancient Greece's prominence in Greek historical awareness was itself only a few decades old. Migrant Byzantine humanists to Italy and their pupils, typically converts to Catholicism, endeavoured to cultivate Hellenic consciousness under the influence of the Renaissance – Hellenism as a cultural *topos* ('place'/'category') was, after all, an intellectual product of the Renaissance. However, the Hellenocentric narratives of the post-Byzantine thinkers operating in an Italo-Byzantine context barely had any impact in the Ottoman realm, where religiously determined, all-Balkan Christian identity nurtured by the administrative system of the *Millet-i-Rum* overrode linguistic and cultural differences.²⁸ Until the third quarter of the eighteenth century, all the historical works written or available in the Greek-speaking areas of the empire espoused a strictly Christian perspective on the past informed by Orthodox providentialism, and observed chronographic and ecclesiastical patterns of narration, replicating a Byzantine literary tradition and completely omitting ancient Hellenism.²⁹ Coming from the most socially (and politically) elevated Greek-speaking Christian stratum of Ottoman society, Phanariot literary culture and historiography is revealing in this sense: the world it was concerned with was not that of *ellinismos* but of Orthodoxy, with its centre in Constantinople, and it was this world that it sought to recreate and that the Christians sought to regain.³⁰ In the traditional historiography, tinted since the early eighteenth century by

²⁷ Politis 1998: 1. ²⁸ Kaldellis 2014: 227–33; Zelepos 2002: 43–4. ²⁹ Politis 1998: 4–5.

³⁰ Mango 1973: 49–55. The Phanariots were members of the wealthy Greek families of the Phanar, the Greek quarter of Istanbul, who served as administrators in the civil bureaucracy of the Ottoman empire and dominated the administration of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

the ecclesiastical humanism of the church, Byzantium constituted the immediate and obvious historical past of the Ottoman empire and its Christian subjects.

From around the 1770s, things began to change, as can be seen in the writings of the Phanariot Dimitrios Katartzis (c.1730–1800), an exponent of enlightened despotism and an enthusiast of the *Encyclopédie* and the French *philosophes*. Katartzis is said to be the first to systematically use the term *ethnos* in the singular and to make a clear distinction between the (genealogy of the) Greek-speaking Romans, *Romaioi*, and the other Christian subject peoples of the Ottomans. Among the illustrious ancestors of the *Romaioi*, he counted Pericles and Themistocles as well as (the Byzantine emperors and military leaders) Theodosius, Belisarius, Narses, the Boulgaroktonos ('Bulgar-Slayer', the nickname of Emperor Basil II) and Tsimiskes.³¹ Significantly, the descent thus purported did not translate into national (self-)identification: Katartzis posited the existence not of a 'Hellenic' but of a 'Roman' nation – and insisted that the correct phrase to describe his own identity is *Romiós Christianós* – since religion for him was a much more important criterion of identity than language.³² Genealogy (or origin) and identity thus went separate ways. The Greek-speaking clergymen and historians living in Wallachia, Dimitrie (Daniel) Phillipides (1750–1832) and Grigorios Konstantas (1753–1844), as well as Rigas Velestinlis (1757–98) – the long-haired harbinger of revolution and democracy in the Balkans – present interesting hybrid cases fusing ecumenist and nationalist visions. The first two contemplated an empire of 'enlightened despotism', freed from the Ottomans by Russian intervention in the Balkans. But they also spoke favourably of Alexander the Great and introduced the key notion that latter-day 'national historians' would use to bring about a re-evaluation of Byzantium in the Greeks' historical consciousness – namely, that what took place in Byzantium was the 'Hellenisation' of the Romans. 'Those Romans who emigrated to Constantinople abandoned the Roman language and mores and Hellenised themselves.'³³ The celebrated manifestos of Rigas Velestinlis, *Great Map of Greece* and *Constitution*, published in 1797, present a similar hybrid case superimposing different worldviews. Their phraseology is of unmistakable Western aspiration: Rigas spoke of a 'Hellenic Republic'

³¹ Tabaki 2007: 90–1; Politis 1998: 7.

³² Koubourlis 2005: 59–60. As Koubourlis adds, 'from this point of view, what separates "us" from the ancient "Hellenes" is more essential than what links "us" to them' (60). See also Kitromilides 1989: 153–4 and Kostantaras 2015: 173–7, emphasising the hybrid nature of Katartzis's thought.

³³ Phillipides and Constantas 1791: 121, cited in Koubourlis 2005: 65.

whose constitution would be modelled on the French constitutions of 1793 and 1795, and of the 'People descended from the ancient Hellenes', not of *Romaioi*. But this republic was to include 'Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean islands, [and] Vlachobogdania'—in other words, the space of the one-time Byzantine empire—in a unitary, not federal, state and its official language was to be Greek. Byzantine religious ecumenism was replaced by the universalism of human and citizenship rights—'a somewhat dechristianised Byzantine democracy'.³⁴ Byzantinism and the 'new ideas' thus sat side by side without apparent tension.

The peaceful coexistence of the Hellenes and the Byzantines did not last long, however, and from the early 1790s, with the Enlightenment anti-medievalist indictments and the national ideas resonating ever more strongly, the 'decline' of Byzantium proceeded alongside the 'rise' of the ancient Greeks. For about half a century, the ideal of national purity eclipsed that of historical continuity. Following an anonymous translation of Montesquieu's *Reflections*, Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), a major figure in the Greek Enlightenment, issued in 1798 – the year Napoleon landed in Egypt – a furious denunciation of the lawlessness, greed, bloodiness and theological dependency of the 'Grecoroman kings'. 'The despots transplanted from ancient Rome [the Byzantine emperors]', he wrote a few years later, 'after frittering away, by an administration that was as stupid as it was tyrannical, all the resources of society, hindering the influence of the best climate, defiling and shattering their throne by the most frightful crimes, ended up delivering you to even more stupid and more ferocious tyrants.'³⁵ What Korais actually did was to transform the Byzantine state into 'a medieval version of the Ottoman empire'.³⁶

The 'orientalising' of the Byzantines reached its peak during the Greek war of independence (1821–30), when Korais castigated the disastrous Byzantine emperors for adopting the trappings of the Persian and Parthian courts and establishing a court of truly Asiatic luxury. The 'church of the monks' was for him a resort for idlers and the patriarchs of Constantinople cynical manipulators just like his contemporary Phanariots. Indeed, Byzantine emperors, patriarchs and clergy, Ottoman sultans and Phanariots were lumped together in a single parasitic group that sapped the material and mental resources of the Greek nation. The

³⁴ Velestinlis 1797, cited in Clogg 1976: 149; Mango 1973: 57; Tabaki 2007: 91–2. For a somewhat different interpretation of the evidence, see Myrogiannis 2012: 131–66.

³⁵ Quoted in Zakythinis 1966: 92. Korais, a philologist by vocation, spent most of his life in Paris, which augmented his impact on the intellectual life of his home country.

³⁶ Agapitos 1992: 238.

Turks, however, were credited with having saved the Greeks from both the Byzantine nobles and the papal yoke.³⁷ All this, on the other hand, fit well not only with the heroic neoclassicism disseminated by the Greek war of independence but also with its social undertones and the democratic and anti-clerical leanings of many Greek intellectuals at the time. For the only true but very powerful remnant of Byzantium in the life of the Greeks (and the other Balkan populations) at that time was the Constantinople-based Orthodox Church, which formed an integral part of the power elite of the Ottoman state. The multi-ethnic character of the empire (hence the 'impure' language of Byzantine literature) was another feature distasteful to the father of Greek liberal nationalism.³⁸ The anti-clericalism and nationalism of the rationalist enlighteners thus logically led them to deplore Byzantium and its legacy.

In the end, Korais's writings rendered the Byzantines oppressors of the Greeks, as were the Macedonian kings before them, because they had 'relegated the Greek nation to barbarism'. By imitating the barbarian Orient rather than the classical Hellenes, the Greco-Roman emperors paved the way for Byzantium's ultimate surrender to a wholly oriental conqueror. The name *Romaioi* (or *Romioi*), which the modern Greeks commonly used to designate themselves, was a shameful testimony to their centuries-long enslavement by the (Eastern) Romans, so it had to be eliminated and replaced by *Graikoi* – a name that was, according to Korais, older even than 'Hellenes' and one by which the Greeks were known in Europe. Significantly, it was Gibbon whom Korais amply cited to verify his polemic against the Byzantine oppressors.³⁹

Korais set the tone for a series of writings where Byzantium was presented as the antithesis of ancient Hellas – an embodiment of corruption, debauchery and decadence, of foreign domination and tyranny by Roman emperors, church hierarchs and wealthy notables. In a speech on the Acropolis in 1841, Iakovos Rizos Neroulos (1778–1849), president of the Athens Archaeological Society and a government minister, portrayed Byzantine history as 'a very long and almost uniform series of foolish and shameful violations of the Roman empire transplanted to Byzantium. It is the ignominious exemplar of the extreme wretchedness and debasement of the Greeks.'⁴⁰ Most of the Greek intelligentsia in the first half of the nineteenth century were committed to divulging the ancient roots of the modern Greeks and the links

³⁷ Mackridgē 1998: 50. ³⁸ Mackridgē 1998: 52.

³⁹ Fassoulakis 1993: 169–73. The suggestion to use *Graikoi* rather than *Romaioi* or *Ellenes* was first made by Evgenios Voulgaris in 1768 for the same reasons.

⁴⁰ Cited in Gazi 2000: 68.

between modern and ancient Greece, almost completely obviating the Byzantine and Ottoman past. Official historiography squarely confronted popular 'myth-memories' of the Byzantine past bequeathed by a long-standing religious tradition.⁴¹ Parallel to these intellectual efforts, place names were changed from medieval to (often allegedly) ancient ones, medieval monuments and Byzantine churches were destroyed and 'the language question' emerged, to remain unresolved for the next century and a half. Ancient history thus directly moulded Greece's modern identity.

As we have seen, however, the immense symbolic value of *Hellas* and the myth of an eternal Greece were not of the Greeks' making: they were Western cultural constructions, inculcating the image of ancient Greece as the original and indigenous 'Ur-Europa' imbued with the key values of modernity, and which were communicated to the Ottoman realm by 'Hellenised' diaspora intellectuals. While the other European nations had to create their own national symbols, stories and monuments, the Greeks on the contrary received their national identity from western Europe as a ready-to-use package.⁴² The indigenous reception of philhellenism had momentous consequences for the emerging Greek state and identity. European philhellenic thought had led the Greeks to believe that they were different from the other ethnic groups with whom they had been living for centuries, in that their nation had a universally accepted civilised status which set them apart not only from the Ottoman 'barbarians' but also from the other Christian communities in the Balkans. Cultural Hellenisation of these other nations meant, in this sense, their taking the side of progress, rationality and truth.⁴³ On the other hand, the philhellenic Europe's essentialist interpretation of its cultural origin in ancient *Hellas* and disdain for the Byzantine empire meant that Greece's self-identification involved, more dramatically than in other cases, a choice between the 'West' and the 'non-West', 'Europe' and 'Asia', progress and decadence. Much as the aura of grandeur surrounding Greekness was imported from abroad, so was the horror of being 'oriental'. Next to the effort to dissociate the new state from its Ottoman past, the reception of the Western model of cultural history, juxtaposing a glamorised ancient Greece with the East, determined modern Greece's wholesale initial self-identification with classical antiquity and the West. 'By accepting Western

⁴¹ Hatzopoulos 2013: 219–29. ⁴² Mackridge 2009: 63.

⁴³ Tsoukalas 1999: 7–14. In his famous 1844 speech on the 'Great Idea of Hellenism', Ioannis Kolettis spoke not only of liberating 'our still oppressed brothers' but also of the necessity for the Greeks to 'civilise [again] the East' on the one-time example of Alexander the Great – a popular formula of contemporary colonialism (Koubourlis 2005: 28).

culture', Markos Renieris wrote in 1842, 'Greece does not renounce its national spirit but rather fulfils it.'⁴⁴ There was thus a striking convergence of the exigencies of the Greek national emancipation, state-building and legitimisation – in brief, Greek nationalism—the indigenisation of Western philhellenism as a national ideology (a process that some had described as 'self-colonisation', but which carried the glamour of exceptionalism that was instrumental in securing national statehood for Greece against all political odds) and the intellectual dispositions and political values of the late Enlightenment.⁴⁵ These different threads were woven together in a historical narrative featuring a resurrected 'progressive' Greece after twenty centuries of slavery and darkness and infused with strong anti-Byzantine sentiments.

Ever since the Enlightenment, interpretations of the relations with Byzantium have stood at the heart of the Bulgarian historical narrative. This is not hard to explain, since for seven centuries the medieval Bulgarian *ethnos*, statehood and culture were being formed in constant close interaction and frequent political confrontation with the Byzantine empire.

The Bulgarian state emerged at the end of the seventh century as a result of the Bulgars, a relatively small but well-organised nomadic tribe of Turkic background hailing from the Eurasian steppes, who subjugated the Slav inhabitants of the eastern Balkans. This was the first durable barbarian and essentially monarchical polity set up on the lands of the Byzantine empire. Already before their Christianisation, the Bulgarians managed to expand their territory, taking over large areas of formerly Byzantine possessions.⁴⁶ In 864, after a lost war with the empire, Prince Boris I (852–89) was compelled to adopt Christianity from Constantinople rather than Rome – a decision that paid off with the setting up of an autocephalous Bulgarian Church and later patriarchate but that also opened the way for the penetration of Byzantine temporal and ecclesiastical influence. Under Boris's son, Simeon (893–927), the spread of Byzantine culture continued through the introduction of church services in the Slavic language (Old Church Slavonic) and the proliferation of Slavic versions of Byzantine-derived writings, which crowned the work of

⁴⁴ Agapitos 1992: 236.

⁴⁵ On European philhellenism as a form of 'Orientalism', see Gourgouris 1996: 140; as 'self-colonisation' carried out by a diaspora cultural elite, see Calotychos 2003: 38–53; as 'crypto-colonialism', Tziouvas 2014: 2–3.

⁴⁶ In a relatively short time the numerically preponderant Slavic population in the new state assimilated their 'state-creative' conquerors demographically and culturally but kept the latter's ethnic name and that of their state.

the Byzantine missionaries Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius and their disciples, and were championed by the (increasingly byzantinised) Bulgarian court. The Christianised South Slavs (Bulgarians and Serbs) thus gained an important instrument for establishing permanent states and sustaining individual identities. At the same time, Simeon engaged in a protracted struggle with Byzantium for hegemony over southeastern Europe and, by claiming the title of *basileus kai autokrator* of the Bulgarians and the Romans, made plain his intention to take over the empire.

The Byzantine *reconquista* of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries led to the conquest of the Bulgarian state, turning it into a province under the direct military and administrative control of Constantinople for almost two centuries. In 1185 an uprising against the weakened Byzantium led to the formation of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185–1396). However, waning Byzantine political control did not mean fading political and cultural influence: feeding on the conditions created during the long Byzantine rule, this influence continued to expand almost until the very end of the Bulgarian state (1396) under the onslaught of the Ottoman Turks.

Predictably, therefore, medieval Bulgarian culture and much of the modern Bulgarian identity – religion, literary heritage, state and historical traditions, art – bears imprints of the civilisational entanglement with Byzantium. In both politics and culture, the empire was an overwhelming presence and a powerful standard-bearer for the medieval Bulgarian state. Indeed, Byzantium has shaped the Bulgarians' historical canon and self-perception as much as it has shaped those of the Greeks. 'Our close proximity to Byzantium', wrote an eminent Bulgarian historian, 'charted the directions of our entire medieval life; its influence on us determined, as regards both state and culture, our historical destiny.'⁴⁷ But the interpretations and valuations of this key presence by the Bulgarian and the Greek historiographies are very different.

The national movement of the Bulgarians, it should be remembered, was directed not only against the Ottomans as political masters but also against the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the high clergy, who were (linguistically) either Greek or Hellenised. To the Ecumenical Patriarchate's position as an integral part of the Ottoman system of administration – the common ground not only for the Balkan enlighteners' but also some lower clerics' critical attitude to it – was added, in the age

⁴⁷ Mutafchiev 1987: 24.

of nationalism, its imputed 'anti-Bulgarian', 'Greek' character. The Bulgarian national 'Revival' began largely as a reaction against 'Hellenism' and evolved into a struggle against the 'Greek' Church and cultural assimilation. The notion of the 'double yoke' – political (Turkish) and spiritual (Greek) – became a common trope in the crusade for national mobilisation.

The early modern Bulgarian historical narrative of the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, still largely anchored in traditional (providentialist) visions, was similar in its treatment of Byzantium to that of the contemporary Greek enlighteners but for very different reasons. For monk Paisiy Hilendarski (1722–73), later hailed as the first Bulgarian national 'awakener', the Bulgarians' chief enemy during their historical peak in the Middle Ages was the 'Greeks' that is, the Byzantines. His primary aim was to discredit Greek insinuations that the Bulgarians had always been an amorphous ethnic mass subjugated to the Greeks, to demonstrate that they had had their own state, church and high culture and to show that the military might of Byzantium and the brilliance of its culture were fraudulent. In his *Slavobulgarian History* (1762), Paisiy presented the 'Greek emperors' as deceitful and ruthless; they had often been overpowered by the Bulgarian tsars and forced to pay a tribute. Their domination over the Bulgarians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, won by deceit rather than valour, was branded a 'Greek yoke'. Paisiy also blamed them for the Ottoman conquest, as they called on the Turks to fight the Bulgarians.⁴⁸

Paisiy made no effort to discriminate between the Byzantines and the contemporary Greeks and referred to the 'Eastern Greek empire', 'Greek emperors' and 'Greek land' when writing about Byzantium. That was a convenient conflation. Paisiy and his followers reproduced the medieval Slavic and Latin convention of using 'Greek' as a synonym for Romans (*Romei*, i.e. 'Byzantines') but they gave it a national meaning that it originally lacked. This re-signification was instrumental in mobilising the Bulgarians' resentment towards the contemporary Greeks by pointing to the age-old confrontation between the two nations.

Why was King Simeon Labas illustrious? Because he waged a severe and unremitting war against the Greek kings and always beat them. Four times he went to Constantinople with an army and seized and burned many areas. During his reign for thirty-five years Bulgarians and Greeks had no peace.

⁴⁸ Hilendarski 1972: 43–4.

From that time much enmity and condemnation remained between Greeks and Bulgarians – and [it continues] until this day.⁴⁹

The anxieties of the present provided the view of the past: the cultural (and political) role of the ‘Greek Church’ was identified with that of Byzantium, and the ongoing nationalist strife with the Greeks was seen as the legacy or the extension of the confrontation between the medieval Bulgarian state and the Eastern Roman empire.

In hindsight, it can be argued that Paisiy’s rather simplistic and crude representation supplied the matrix for the subsequent historical accounts. In its fundamentals, especially in portraying Byzantium as the eternal nemesis of the Bulgarians, it proved remarkably stable. The next, Romantic period in Bulgarian history would add new aspects without changing it.

In many ways, the Serbs’ relations with Byzantium were no less crucial to their medieval history. But in addition to the relatively late foundation of a Serbian state, hence political confrontation with the empire, there was one more important difference. Byzantium was not the only gravitational centre for the Serbs; much more intensely and palpably than medieval Bulgaria, the Serbs experienced the rival political and cultural impact of Rome.

Between their settlement in the western provinces of the Balkans (in parts of today’s Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Montenegro and western Serbia) in the first half of the seventh century and the Byzantine subjugation of the Bulgarian Kingdom in the eleventh century, the Serbian tribes’ contact zone with Byzantium was reduced to the Adriatic coast. For about three centuries the empire had practically no direct control over the interior of the Balkan peninsula, while the Bulgarian Kingdom (which included the lands of present-day Serbia) barred land access to the western provinces. As a result, the Christianisation of the Serbs came about only gradually, over more than a century, and was carried out primarily by Byzantine missions but also by the Dalmatian bishoprics administered by Rome. The ‘Byzantine’ traits that the Serbs had taken on since the late ninth century, most notably the spread of Orthodox Christianity and the Slavic church service, were largely mediated by the Bulgarians. After the defeat of the First Bulgarian Kingdom in 1018, Byzantium regained its effective control on the peninsula, whereby the Serbs acquired a long frontier with Byzantium for the first time and much of the territory

⁴⁹ Hilendarski 1972: 234–5.

inhabited by Serbs came under the jurisdiction of the 'Greek' archbishops of Ohrid appointed directly by the emperor of Constantinople. In political terms, until the second half of the twelfth century, local Serbian military leaders, *župans*, had made several attempts to establish more consolidated polities but the results proved ephemeral. Of these 'proto-states', only two endured for somewhat longer periods – Serbia (later also called Raška) in the interior and Zeta (Montenegro) on the Adriatic seacoast. Both felt the political impact of Constantinople, yet the grand *župan* of Zeta received his royal title from Rome (1077). The second half of the twelfth century saw the rise of the Nemanjić dynasty, canonised in Serbian historiography as the quintessentially 'national' dynasty of the Middle Ages, under which the Serbian medieval state reached its political pinnacle. Serbian medieval state-building, similar to that of the Bulgarians, took place in a context of alternating alliances and wars with Byzantium, although most of the time Serbia was in a vassal relationship with Constantinople. But the Latin south (centred on Dubrovnik) and west posed a greater threat to the Serbian centralisation and the Orthodox ecclesiastical structure that the Nemanjić sought to foster.

From around the mid-twelfth century, taking advantage of the major conflict between Byzantium and Hungary, the Nemanjić dynasty extended its power over a large territory in the western Balkans, including Raška and Zeta (but not Bosnia). As in Bulgaria a few centuries earlier, the new ruling dynasty embarked on a continuous effort to attain as much independence and legitimacy as it could wrest from Constantinople and Rome.⁵⁰ In this it went down a well-worn path: following the Crusaders' capture of Constantinople in 1204, the Patriarch (then residing in the Empire of Nicaea) endorsed the founding of an autocephalous Serbian Church (1219), while the first king of Serbia – Stefan the First-Crowned (*Prvovenčani*) – received his title from Rome (1217). Medieval Serbia reached the height of its political power and territorial expansion under Tsar Stefan Dušan (1331–55), whose empire incorporated large tracts of formerly Byzantine lands (Epirus, Thessaly, Macedonia, Albania). Dušan claimed that the Nemanjić dynasty originated with Constantine the Great, proclaimed himself emperor of the Serbs and the Greeks (*car Srba i Grka*) while elevating the Serbian Church to the rank of a patriarchate, strove to imitate the Byzantine emperor in every respect and opened the doors of his court wide to Byzantine influence. At the hands of his heirs and

⁵⁰ Throughout the twelfth century, despite its attempts to get rid of Byzantium's tutelage, Serbia remained a vassal state to the empire, whose rulers were treated by the emperor as his administrators.

contenders, this loosely knit and heterogeneous empire quickly disintegrated into a number of short-lived states.⁵¹

Within this framework, charted mainly by political events and institutional evolution, various interpretations of the actual place of Byzantium in the Serbian history and culture emerged, often in conjunction with a corresponding treatment of the role of the 'West'. For the Serbian enlighteners, this was not yet a central issue: in addition to the paucity of information for the period until the thirteenth century, this first generation of national awakeners was busy attesting to and emphasising above all the strength and achievements of Stefan Dušan's empire. The major adversary in this story was Byzantium; Rome, the 'Latins' and the Muslims followed suit. Yet, unlike the Bulgarians, it was long believed that the Serbs in the Middle Ages 'were at different times allies, vassals, rivals and opponents of the Byzantines, but never direct subjects of the emperors of Constantinople'.⁵² And since in the formation of the modern Serbian identity the confrontation with the Greeks played a far lesser role, Byzantium never acquired the explicitly negative features and harmful role it was assigned in Bulgarian historiography. The overriding theme in the Serbian historical narrative during not only the Enlightenment but also the Romantic period was different: the capacity of the Serbs' rising and fresh forces to take over the decaying Eastern Roman empire and found on its ruins their own Serbian (or Greco-Serbian) empire. In this scenario, the Serbs were endowed with the potential to lead a new 'Serbian Byzantium' that would fuse Byzantine imperial and historical traditions with Slavic vitality and energy.

Jovan Rajić (1726–1801), considered the 'founder of Serbian historiography', wrote the *History of the Various Slavic Peoples, Particularly the Bulgarians, the Croats and the Serbs* (1794–5). This 2,000-page work followed the medieval religious historiographical tradition and was influenced by, among others, Caesar Baronius's *Annales Ecclesiastici* and Mavro Orbini's *Il regno de gli Slavi*. Using Byzantine sources but in Latin translations, Rajić's *History* chronicles the political relations between Byzantium and the South Slavs, treated as a particular entity. Next to the importance of Byzantine sources for Serbian history, the latter's close connection with Byzantium was thus acknowledged from the dawn of Serbian historiography. However, before the second half of the nineteenth

⁵¹ Ćorović 1989: 97–211, 251–62.

⁵² Jireček 1922. Later historians would disprove this statement (see Ćirković 2004: 21–2).

century, the nature and effect of these relations, and the empire's influence in general, failed to attract the interest of the Serbian historians.

The Latin origin of the Romanians was as central to their modern historical consciousness as the Hellenic extraction was to the Greeks. And, like the Greeks, the Romanians thus developed a claim to a privileged position in the community of civilised peoples and to partake in the groundwork of European civilisation.

The Romanians discovered their Latin origins over a century before the modern Greeks discovered their Hellenic roots. Since the seventeenth century, the question about the formation of the Romanian people had 'become a constant, and even obsessive, preoccupation of Romanian historiography'.⁵³ Its mythological point of reference was Rome, which fused the two major components of the European tradition – the imperial and the Christian – and lent the Romanian lands nobility and prestige. The story behind it was simple: at the beginning of the second century AD, Emperor Trajan had conquered ancient Dacia and his armies had colonised it, annihilating or else completely assimilating the indigenous Dacian population. Byzantium within this framework was seen as an extension and perpetuation of the Roman model – a powerful yet derivative symbol overshadowed by Rome.

The humanist writers of seventeenth-century Romanian principalities Moldavia and Wallachia, Grigore Ureche (c.1590/5–1647), Miron Costin (1633–91), Nicolae Costin (c.1660–1712), Radu Popescu (c.1658–1729), Constantin Cantacuzene (c.1640–1716) and 'the most brilliant of all humanists', the Moldavian prince Dimitrie Cantemir (1673–1723), are considered to be 'the real founders of national Romanian historiography'.⁵⁴ They were the first to emphasise the greatness of the early Romanians and to engage in the process with Byzantine sources on Romanian history and the Romanian-Byzantine relations. The attitude to Byzantium that transpires from their writings is one of attachment to the memory of the empire and its civilisation. They remained faithful to the view of Byzantium as the lawful continuation of the Roman empire, the guardian of the Orthodox faith and the possessor of political legitimacy. In the same breath, they would stress the formative connection of Romanian history with that of Byzantium in order to assert the 'nobility' of the Romanians and the legitimacy of their political autonomy. Cantemir, later acclaimed as the first Romanian byzantinist and *intellectuel byzantinisant*, created the myth of the Byzantine ancestry of the Romanian states

⁵³ Boia 2001b: 31–2. ⁵⁴ Tanaşoca 2002: 50.

and dynasties and of their primordial attachment to the Orthodox faith. 'In the spirit of the Romanian humanists of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries', Romanian medievalist Nicolae-Şerban Tanaşoca writes, 'the idea about Orthodox solidarity and the nostalgia for the Byzantine empire goes along with a very strong feeling of national identity that acquires an important Byzantine dimension.'⁵⁵

The Latinist orientation of Romanian historiography broke radically with this humanist tradition. Its heyday, like that of the Hellenic orientation of Greek historiography, was during the Enlightenment era and was epitomised by what was known as the Transylvanian (or Latinist) School (*Şcoala ardeleană*) – an intellectual and political movement whose purely Romanian project dominated Romanian history writing from the late eighteenth century through the 1860s. The three great historians of the Transylvanian School, the Uniate (Catholic of the Eastern Rite) clergymen Samuil Micu (1745–1806), Petru Maior (1761–1821) and Gheorghe Şincai (1754–1816), took up the task of demonstrating the Latin purity of the Romanian race. Much like the neo-Hellenic enlighteners around the same time, their aspiration was to rehabilitate Romanian culture and Romanian ethnicity as ancient, native, established and respectable. In Dacia and the area south of the Danube, the Romanians were *the* Romans of the one-time empire of Trajan. Samuil Micu began the history of his people (1800) with the foundation of Rome, and many after him also presented it as a continuation of Roman history.⁵⁶ The dominance of the Latinists in the historiographical canon-building not only in Transylvania but also in Wallachia and Moldavia until the last quarter of the nineteenth century set the framework for the interpretation of Byzantine history during this period.

Despite some nuances, Micu, Şincai and Maior shared essentially the same ideas about the identity of Byzantium, its civilisation and its relations with the Romanians. These ideas were informed by Enlightenment nationalism and a determination to substantiate the Latin origins and continuity of the Romanians. Gheorghe Şincai's *Chronicle of the Romans and of Other Peoples* (1807–9) and Petru Maior's *Early History of the Romans in Dacia* (1812) articulated clearly the new image of Byzantium emerging through these lenses, which would dominate Romanian thought in the subsequent decades. For Şincai, a 'Byzantine empire' properly speaking never existed: neither the transfer of the capital from Rome to Constantinople nor the division of the empire into western and eastern parts nor even the fall of the

⁵⁵ Tanaşoca 2013: 269–71; Tanaşoca 2002: 54. ⁵⁶ Boia 2001a: 85–9.

Western empire had marked the beginning of Byzantium and its proper history. The event that, according to Şincai and Micu, marked a decisive break in the history of the Roman empire was the seventh-century invasions of the Bulgarians and the formation of their state. The latter had separated the Latin-speakers (the Romanians) from the body of the eastern part of the empire and made the Greeks its only masters. From that moment on, Şincai wrote, the empire based on Constantinople became a ‘Greek state’ – ‘Romaic’, not Roman:

After the conquest of the Dacias [*sic*] and Lower Moesia by the Bulgarians, many authors stopped calling the emperors in Constantinople ‘Romans’ [*ai romanilor*] and began calling them ‘Romaics’ [*ai romaichilor*], as the present-day Greeks call themselves, because without the help of the Romanians, the Greeks would not have succeeded in inheriting the glory and grandeur of our ancestors . . . The Greeks . . . without any justification had given and are giving to themselves the name Romans only because they later managed to capture the Roman empire of the East and to destroy it.⁵⁷

The transformation of the Roman empire into the ‘Byzantine empire’ in the seventh century, therefore, meant Greek usurpation of the name ‘Roman’ and of the role of custodians of the empire – usurpation that provoked the angry reactions of the Romanian national historians. The Greeks, Şincai held, had dubbed Latins the peoples of the left bank of the Danube and those of the West in order to pose as Romans, whose subjects, instead of blood descendants, they actually were, unlike the Romanians and the Italians, from whom they stole the empire by deceit.⁵⁸ The name and identity the Romanian Latinists bestowed on Byzantium was that of an ‘Eastern empire’ or simply ‘the East’, ‘kingdom of the Greeks or the Romaic’ or ‘the Greeks’. Following a different route, the Romanian enlighteners thus came to a view identical to that of their Bulgarian counterparts which underscored the allogeneic, culturally and ethnically Greek character of Byzantium.

Like their Bulgarian compeers, the Transylvanian enlighteners held in low regard the ‘Greek Church’ and post-Byzantine and contemporary Greek culture, and they saw the Phanariots as remnants of Byzantium. The national underpinnings of this anti-Greek attitude were similar: resistance against both the contemporary Phanariot regime in Wallachia and Moldavia and the budding Greek nationalism.⁵⁹ The narrative method was also similar – projecting on a distant past controversies unfolding in the present, occasionally through absurd fabrications: ‘It is not surprising that Saints Cyril and Methodius refused to submit to Patriarch Photius,

⁵⁷ Tanaşoca 2003: 189–91. ⁵⁸ Tanaşoca 2013: 272. ⁵⁹ Tanaşoca 2003: 198.

since he was a Greek, while they, as genuine Romanians, descendants of the colonists of Trajan . . . who were associated with the Bulgarians, could not bear to have the Greeks as their masters.’⁶⁰ Against this backdrop the fall of Byzantium was portrayed as a just punishment for the Greeks, who had sinned by usurping the Eastern Roman empire at the expense of its legitimate heirs – the Romanians. The rupture with the erstwhile humanist tradition was complete.

The Latinist historiographic school deserves our attention for yet another reason directly linked with Byzantine history: the important role it attributed to the Romance-language-speaking population south of the Danube. This focus was largely forced upon them by the paucity of sources referring to the area north of the river (the territory of the future principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia) between the withdrawal of Roman rule in 271 and the foundation of the Romanian states in the fourteenth century. During this ‘dark millennium’, the focus of Romanian history shifted to the territory of the ‘New Rome’ and, after the seventh century, to that of the Bulgarian Kingdom. The national Romanian historians held that Romanians and Bulgarians enjoyed a political symbiosis in the Middle Ages: both the First Bulgarian Kingdom (seventh to tenth centuries), which incorporated territories to the north of the Danube, and the Second one (twelfth to fourteenth centuries) were said to be ‘Romanian-Bulgarian kingdoms’. For Micu, the Romans who fell under the influence of the Bulgarian state and Slav civilisation were transformed into ‘Vlachs’ – a name given to them by the Greeks, who wanted to preserve for themselves the name Romans as a symbol of political legitimacy, denying it to the Romanians and Italians. Şincai, Micu and Maior discovered a multitude of ‘crypto-Romanians’ hiding in the Byzantine sources ‘under the name of Bulgars, Coumans, and Pechenegs’, as well as Scythians. The situation with the term ‘Vlachs’ was completely different, though. As Petre Maior put it, ‘the name of the Vlachs never meant anything else but Romanians, that is Romans, Latins, Italians’.⁶¹ They were widely dispersed under these various names across the whole Balkan peninsula, from Thessaly and Pindus to ancient Dacia and beyond. Their political force, Micu argued, was displayed by the numerous Vlach uprisings against the Byzantines, the most consequential being those of the eleventh and twelfth centuries which led to the creation first of a number of autonomous ‘Dacias’ and then of the (second) ‘Vlacho-Bulgarian

⁶⁰ Şincai as cited in Tanaşoca 2003: 211.

⁶¹ Boia 2001a: 114–15; Tanaşoca 2002: 59–65; Tanaşoca 2003: 166–85, 204.

Kingdom' – the actual *translatio imperii*. Once again, the Transylvanian historians could assert that the Romanians, not the Greeks, were the bearers of the authentic imperial tradition.

It should now be obvious that the negative interpretation of Byzantium that the Romanian enlighteners shared with their Western counterparts had different grounds and pursued different goals. It was not driven by a philosophical critique of oriental despotism, religious fanaticism and corrupted mores; it was driven by Latin self-identification and the aspiration to reclaim the history of the Vlachs as an integral part of the Romanian nation. Rather than a debauched continuation of the Roman empire, justified by natural right, Byzantium was the result of a felony, a theft from the Romanians, the rightful heirs of the Roman glory.⁶²

⁶² See in this sense Rados 2005: 372–3.