

## *The Making of Byzantinism*

*Dimiter G. Angelov*  
*Harvard University*

The foundations of Byzantine studies were laid during the Age of Absolutism in France, when Byzantium became a fashionable academic subject because of its perceived similarities with the French monarchy. The Enlightenment, in turn, brought about an almost universal condemnation of Byzantine civilization which was thought to embody exactly what the Age of Reason opposed: an authoritarian political system; a culture permeated by blind religious belief; and a society fervently hostile to any notion of reform. While modern Byzantine scholarship has progressed in the study of the complexities and continuous transformation of Byzantine institutions, economy and culture, there still exist a simplistic and negative assessment of Byzantine civilization and of the Byzantine legacy in southeastern Europe by historians, political scientists and publicists.

I use the term Byzantinism to designate a representation of Byzantine civilization as an antipode and an imperfect reflection of Western historical experiences and values. In my view, Byzantinism shares common characteristics with the Balkanist discourse as defined by Maria Todorova, since both Byzantinism and Balkanism try to present a variation within the construct of European civilization and to portray the other “within.” Byzantinism is both a specific discourse about Byzantium with a long history stretching back to the Middle Ages and a reductionist approach which essentializes Byzantium through the application of analytical categories derived, explicitly or indirectly, from Western historical experience.

Two main elements of Byzantinism are the notions of caesaropapism and of the unlimited absolutism of the Byzantine emperor. The concept of caesaropapism is based on the subordinate position of the Byzantine patriarch, which differs from the relative independence of the papacy from political authority. A simplistic interpretation of caesaropapism could lead to a conclusion about the lack of division of Church and state in Byzantium. This conclusion fails to take into account, however, numerous evidence pointing to the existence of division of the religious and the secular spheres in Byzantium: the frequent conflicts between patriarchs and emperors; the continuous tradition of Roman law, secular courts and secular learning; the lack of Holy War ideology in Byzantium, as opposed to the West and to Islam, etc. The essentialization of Byzantium as an autocracy ignores the development of representative assemblies of in late Byzantium in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in a way parallel to England and France at exactly the same period.

Byzantinism has also been interpreted as a historical legacy in southeastern Europe. Such an interpretation posits a cultural and historical obstacle for the Balkan orthodox countries for building modern civil societies.

*Dimiter G. Angelov*

Born in 1972 in Sofia, Bulgaria, I finished the Classical Language High School in Sofia in 1991. I received my undergraduate education at Oxford University and at Wabash College, from where I graduated with distinction in 1995. Since then I have been a graduate student, currently a Ph.D. candidate, in the field of Byzantine history at Harvard University. I have also been a Bliss Fellow of the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies in Washington. My dissertation is on “Byzantine Imperial Power and Ideology in late Byzantium (1204 - ca. 1300).” My interest in the history of southeastern Europe stems naturally from my personal and academic background.

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The history of the medieval Balkans is closely related to that of the Byzantine empire, which dominated southeastern Europe in the course of more than a millennium, at times politically, but always culturally as the center of an orthodox commonwealth of Greeks and Slavs. Ever since Byzantine studies developed as an academic discipline, scholars, thinkers and others have often been tempted to seek the essence of Byzantine civilization and to pass judgements on a society which did not reach the modern age.

The stimulus which prodded me to discuss the construction of Byzantinism was Maria Todorova's observation that the Balkanist discourse has sometimes accompanied by and superimposed on a Byzantinist discourse which functions along the same principles<sup>1</sup>. Byzantinism is a complex problem which is connected to the very origins of Byzantine studies and to the intellectual history of Europe in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By Byzantinism, I understand the presentation of Byzantine civilization is an imperfect and incomplete reflection or an antipode of Western historical experiences, institutions and values. Like Balkanism, and unlike Orientalism, Byzantinism aims at presenting the "other" within the common cultural construct of European civilization.

This definition of Byzantinism reinterprets a term which began to be used during the nineteenth century in both western Europe and Russia. By the word "Byzantinism," nineteenth-century intellectuals tried to encapsulate the essence of Byzantine civilization as they saw it, and this term became a part of an intellectual debate regarding Byzantium. Modern historians have considered it necessary to respond to earlier definitions of Byzantinism, while themselves essentializing Byzantium. Thus, Romilly Jenkins in 1963 reused an old definition of Byzantinism by the notorious nineteenth-century German historian Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer (1790-1861). Writing during the period of the Cold War, Jenkins pointed out that Byzantinism had acquired a new relevance for understanding the state ideology of the Soviet Union. For Jenkins, the essence of Byzantinism was "its theocratic and monolithic structure, its divinely sanctioned claim to world domination, its instinctive hatred and mistrust of the West."<sup>2</sup> Two years later, C. Mango saw in Byzantinism also a conservative state ideology, "a gloomy philosophy" which boiled down to the belief in a single Christian, Roman empire.<sup>3</sup> To seek the essence of a civilization which existed for more than a millennium is a problematic approach which stands at the very heart of Byzantinism.

Byzantinism, as I see it, has two different, but interrelated aspects which feed into each other: on the one hand, it is a traditional discourse and, on the other, it is an epistemological approach to

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<sup>1</sup> M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 132-3, 162.

<sup>2</sup> R. Jenkins, *Byzantium and Byzantinism. Lectures in Memory of Louis Taft Semple* (Cincinnati, 1963), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> C. Mango, "Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism," *Journal of the Warburg and Courland Institute*, vol. 28 (1965), pp. 30, 32.

Byzantine civilization. First, Byzantinism consists of a traditional set of stereotypes and images about Byzantium. These stereotypes became very prominent already during the Middle Ages at the time of the Crusades and were based partly on the ancient Roman stereotypes of the Greeks. New religious dimensions were added to them after the Eastern schism of 1054. According to these stereotypical views, the Byzantines were perfidious, wealthy, effeminate and unwarlike. The instability of their polity was explained through Byzantine perfidy, which also served to justify the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204.<sup>4</sup> The history of these stereotypes during the Middle Ages and their afterlife in Western intellectual history is an interesting, though unexplored, subject which merits a separate study. Hegel in his *Lecture on the Philosophy of History* 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 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 abominations of all kinds.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting that Napoleon should say before the French Parliament during the Hundred Days in 1815: "Let us not follow the example of the Byzantine Empire, which being pressed from all sides by the barbarians became the laughing stock of posterity because it was preoccupied with petty quarrels while the battering-ram was breaking through the city gates."<sup>6</sup> The adjective "Byzantine" with the specific meaning of "scheming" and "treacherous" is still used in the English language.

In the second place, Byzantinism is a reductionist approach to Byzantine society and civilization. This second aspect of Byzantinism seems detached from the age-old stereotypes, and yet in trying to find the essence of Byzantium, it is too easy to fall in the trap of Byzantinist discourses. This approach to Byzantium involves a methodology which applies simplistic analytical categories derived from the western experience to an essentialized Byzantium. In its rather crude version, this methodology juxtaposes the imputed "essence" of Byzantium to the "essence" of an ahistorical West. It is self-evident that such an approach ignores the changes within Byzantine society and limits the inquiry to a limited number of questions. In simple words, this is a methodology which predetermines the answers to its own questions. It is my purpose to show how two traditional conceptualizations of church-state relations and of imperial power in Byzantium --"caesaropapism" and "autocracy"--have served to simplify a complex and variegated picture, which in some ways corresponds to the situation in the medieval West, and in others it does not.

The methodological fallacy of Byzantinism is not unique in itself. It is also the fallacy of reductionism and of simplistic comparative history, which both tend to prejudge issues.

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<sup>4</sup> See Geoffroy de Villehardouin, *The Conquest of Constantinople in Chronicles of the Crusades*, tr. M. Shaw (London, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> G. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree (London, 1857), p. 352.

<sup>6</sup> See A. Vassiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, vol. 1 (Madison, 1964), p. 7; quoted from H. Houssaye, *1815*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1893), pp. 622-23.

Comparisons are part of the cognitive process of historical reconstruction; moreover, it seems natural to compare Byzantium and the Medieval West, two sibling societies which shared the common historical heritage of late Antiquity. Why, however, should the basis of comparison, i.e. the medieval West, provide models for explanation and also posit norms and prescriptions? A good example of such a methodology are comparisons with Western feudalism. Regardless of the different definitions of feudalism, feudalism has become a somewhat “magic” concept. Both “feudalism” and the lack of “feudalism” have been considered as causes for the political fragmentation and eventual demise of late Byzantium.<sup>7</sup> The very notion of feudalism implies comparisons with Western society. In an effort to find “feudalism”, some scholars have imposed on Byzantium a social structure alien to Byzantine society.<sup>8</sup> A reductionist approach to Western history would see in feudalism, defined as a “reciprocal” and “contractual” relationship between rulers and subjects, the origins of a “civil society.” Since eastern Europe did not have feudalism in this sense, its failure to develop a “civil society” in the modern era may be explained with its lack of feudalism.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Byzantinism as an approach involves methodological pitfalls inherent in comparative and reductionist history. Any yet, the essentialization of Byzantinism as a polar opposite, or an imperfect reflection, of the West has been a tradition within Western intellectual history. The foundations of Byzantine studies were laid during the Age of Absolutism in France, when Byzantium became a fashionable academic subject because of its perceived similarities with the French monarchy. A Byzantine mirror of princes written under Justinian circulated widely in the court of Louis XIV. The first collection of the works of Byzantine historians, the Paris Corpus, was published during this period. The Enlightenment, in turn, brought about an almost universal condemnation of Byzantine civilization which was thought to embody exactly what the “Age of Reason” opposed: an authoritarian political system; a culture permeated by blind religious belief; and a society fervently hostile to any notion of reform. For Voltaire, Byzantine history was nothing but “a worthless collection of declamations and miracles, “a disgrace for the human mind.”<sup>10</sup>

During the nineteenth century, both Russian and Western intellectuals began to use the term Byzantinism, and it is noteworthy that they found the essence of Byzantium in a specific form of church-state relations and in the absolutism of the Byzantine emperor. The German scholar and publicist, Jacob Philip Fallmerayer denounced the autocratic emperors of Byzantium who dared to meddle in theology, and saw Byzantine autocracy reborn in Moscow. He was horrified at the

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<sup>7</sup> Feudalism has been interpreted as an internal disease in Byzantium by G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, tr. Hussey (New Brunswick, 1968 sec. ed.). The opposite view has been argued by A. Kazhdan, *Sotsialnyii sostav gosподstvuishchego klassa Vizantii XI-XII vv.* (Moscow, 1974), pp. 264-5, and in general in A. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power un Byzantium* (Washington, 1982). The two scholars define the characteristics of feudalism in different ways.

<sup>8</sup> See A. Laiou, “On Individuals, Aggregates and Mute Social Groups: Some Questions of Methodology,” *Symmeikta*, vol. 9, *Mneme D. A. Zakythenou* (Athens, 1994), pp. 381-83.

<sup>9</sup> Ph. Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe. From Prehistory to Postcommunism* (New York, 1997, sec. ed.), p. 288.

<sup>10</sup> Voltaire, *Le pyrrhonism de l’histoire*, chap. XV.

prospect of Russian restoration of a Greco-Slavic “Byzantine” empire on the Bosphoros.<sup>11</sup> As a German liberal, Fallmerayer saw Byzantinism as *Nivellierungsprozess* of the human spirit incompatible with the individualism of the German soul.<sup>12</sup> The essentialization of Byzantium was wholly in tune with the intellectual tradition of German romanticism; it is noteworthy, however, that Byzantinism was the polar opposite of the German *Volksgeist*. On the opposite side, a Russian diplomat and fervent orthodox believer, Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891) defined Byzantinism as a body of religious, political, philosophical and aesthetic ideas, which ran contrary those of the West. He saw Byzantinism in part as the principle of autocracy, yet he viewed it positively as an alternative to Western bourgeois liberalism.<sup>13</sup>

The question of the relation between church and state loomed large in the definition of Byzantinism by the famous nineteenth-century cultural historian of the Italian Renaissance Jacob Burckhardt. In his *Reflections on World History* and in his biography of the emperor Constantine the Great, Jacob Burckhardt saw Byzantinism as a “spirit compounded of Church and politics” which “had developed analogously to Islam.”<sup>14</sup> As a Swiss Protestant disappointed from the results of the revolution of 1848, Burckhardt viewed Constantine the Great as an unscrupulous dictator who had made political use of religion to further his own power. Byzantium was for Burckhardt an antithesis to spirit of the Renaissance, and his vision of Byzantium was at the same time its condemnation. It is indeed ironic that scholars nowadays recognize the contribution of Byzantium to the Renaissance, which its greatest historian had denied. Burckhardt saw the spirit of Byzantine civilization in the following way:

At its summit was despotism, infinitely strengthened by the union of churchly and secular dominion; in the place of morality in imposed orthodoxy; in the place of unbridled and demoralized expression of the natural instincts, hypocrisy and pretence; in the face of despotism there was developed greed masquerading as poverty, and deep cunning; in religious art and literature there was an incredible stubbornness in the constant repetition of obsolete motives.<sup>15</sup>

When Burckhardt referred to the union of “the churchly and the secular dominion,” he was alluding to a concept about Byzantium that had already been formulated, and is still with us: “caesaropapism.” It had been coined in 1738 by a German Protestant Professor at the University of Halle within a polemic context as a denunciation of both the political methods of the papacy and of the control which the Byzantine emperors exercised over the church. In the nineteenth century, caesaropapism received wide currency, and was used as theoretical concept and as a

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<sup>11</sup> J. Ph. Fallmerayer, “Rom und Byzanz” *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1861), pp. 376-81; repr. in idem, *Europa zwischen Rom und Byzanz* (Bozen, 1990), pp. 369-72.

<sup>12</sup> J. Ph. Fallmerayer, “Über die weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung der byzantinischen Monarchie in allgemeinen und der Stadt Konstantinopel insbesondere,” *Fragmente aus dem Orient*, ed. G. Thomas (Stuttgart, 1887), repr. in idem, *Byzanz und das Abendland* (Wien, 1940), p. 287.

<sup>13</sup> K. Leontiev, *Vizantinismyt i slavyanstvoto* (Sofia, 1993), pp. 5-20.

<sup>14</sup> J. Burckhardt, *Force and Freedom. Reflections on History*, tr. J. Nichols (New York, 1943), p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> J. Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, tr. M. Hadas (New York, 1949) p. 345.

slander against orthodoxy. Caesaropapism served to explain both the divergence of East and West and the schism between the orthodox and the catholic churches.<sup>16</sup>

Caesaropapism, then as well as nowadays, refers to a political system, in which the head of state is also the head of the church and supreme judge in religious matters. Max Weber saw the "caesaropapistic ruler" as the one who "exercises supreme authority in ecclesiastic matters by virtue of his autonomous legitimacy."<sup>17</sup> As it has been recognized by many Byzantine scholars, the term does not describe accurately the position of the emperor vis-a-vis the church, nor does it pose in a meaningful way the question about the relation between the secular and religious spheres in Byzantium. The control of the emperors over the church involved the appointment and dismissal of patriarchs, changes in ecclesiastical administration and convocation of ecumenical councils, but the Byzantine emperors had little power to introduce new dogma, and their liturgical privileges were insignificant.<sup>18</sup> Patriarchs did at times oppose and even excommunicate emperors, and the Byzantine emperor had much less control over bishops and monks than he did over the patriarch.

The concept of Caesaropapism reduces church-state relations in Byzantium mainly to the position of the Byzantine emperor vis-a-vis the church. The moment when the inquiry is broadened beyond role of the emperor in religion, secularism appears to permeate Byzantine society. There was a continuous tradition of secular learning, secular courts and Roman civil law in Byzantium. Indeed, in comparison with the Medieval West, Byzantium appears as the more secular society--it preserved, for example, a tradition of secular learning in the early Middle Ages, when it had disappeared from the West. Unlike the medieval West, warfare in Byzantium remained a prerogative of the Byzantine emperor, and not of the Church. There was no ideology of Holy War in Byzantium comparable to those of the crusades or of Islam.<sup>19</sup>

The question of imperial autocracy has been prejudged in a similarly simplistic way. The statement that Byzantium was an authoritarian polity is undoubtedly a correct one, since the Byzantine emperor was the supreme commander-in-chief, legislator and judge. According to the official ideology, the power of the emperor, like the power of Western kings, came directly from God and this divine connection was emphasized through propaganda.<sup>20</sup> Crusaders who passed through Byzantium in the Middle Ages were impressed by the personality cult centered on the

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<sup>16</sup> G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le "césaropapisme" byzantine* (Paris, 1996), p. 291

<sup>17</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, tr. E. Fischoff et al, vol. 3 (New York, 1968), p. 1160.

<sup>18</sup> D. Geneakoplos, "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of the Problem of Caesaropapism," *Byzantine East and Latin West* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 55-83; G. Ostrogorsky, "Otnoshenie tserkvi i gosouidarstva v Vizantii," *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, 4 (1931), pp. 121-132.

<sup>19</sup> A. Laiou, "On Just War in Byzantium," *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, vol. 1: *Hellenic Antiquity and Byzantium*, eds. J. Langdon et al (New Rochelle, 1993), pp. 153-77.

<sup>20</sup> For Byzantium, see O. Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell vom oströmischen Staats- und Reichsgedanken* (Darmstadt, 1956). For the Medieval West, see M. Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges* (Strasbourg, 1924).

Byzantine emperor.<sup>21</sup> And yet, the Byzantine political system was much more complex than the simple concept of an autocracy would suggest. According to the late Roman tradition, the Byzantine emperors were to be elected by the senate, the army and the people. Although this age-old principle served to sanction an already proclaimed emperor, it persisted as a theory and implied a certain degree of interdependence between emperors and subjects. The elective principle provided a justification for rebellions against emperors who were considered not to have carried out their moral and political duties. As one modern scholar has put it, the subjects of the Byzantine emperor thought themselves entitled to rebel against an unjust ruler.<sup>22</sup> This instability inherent in the Byzantine political structure struck Western observers during the Middle Ages, who were prone to speak about the intrigues and perfidy of the Byzantines.

Byzantine autocracy did not remain detached from wider European trends during the Late Middle Ages, when representative government and parliaments began to develop in England and France. Apart from the senate, which persisted as a largely powerless institution throughout the Byzantine period, there were 25 popular assemblies in late Byzantium which convened between 1254 and 1351.<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that the emperors called some of the assemblies in order to garner approval for new taxes, which mirrors the western principle of “taxation vs. representation” developing at the same time.

The complexities and changes in Byzantine society, economy and culture have received a just treatment by modern Byzantine scholars during our century. And yet, there still remains an undercurrent of Byzantinism seen in textbooks, popular history books, works of political scientists, journalists etc. It is enough to open any textbook on Western Civilization to discover that Byzantine society is characterized as caesaropapist in opposition to the West.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the gruesome ghost of the Byzantine legacy has often been raised from the grave to explain contemporary events in the Balkans and in Russia, especially in relation to their political structures. It is remarkable that the Byzantine contribution to Balkan backwardness is seen in terms of church-state relations and a political culture favoring authoritarianism: the two main characteristics of Byzantinism. When after the Second Balkan War a British diplomat, Sir George Young, was commissioned by the Carnegie Endowment for World Peace to investigate the causes that led to conflict in the Balkans, he blamed the failure of the Ottoman empire to modernize on Byzantinism. “The failure of the Turks”, he wrote, “is due to Byzantinism.” The British diplomat saw in Byzantinism a “decadent social system” with “no democracy, no simple virtues, and no sound vitality.” “The decadence of the Turk,” he wrote, “dates from the day when Constantinople was taken and not destroyed.” Byzantinism as an imperial principle of statehood

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the impressions of Robert of Clari in 1204 in Robert of Clari, *The Conquest of Constantinople*, tr. E. McNeal (New York, 1936; repr. Toronto, 1996), p. 118.

<sup>22</sup> I. Karayannopoulos, *He politike theoria ton Byzantinon* (Thessaloniki, 1988), pp. 35-37

<sup>23</sup> C. Tsirpanlis, “Byzantine Parliaments and Representative Assemblies from 1081 to 1351,” *Byzantion*, 43 (1973), pp. 432-81.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, D. Kagan, S. Ozment and F. Turner, *The Western Heritage*, (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1998), p. 208.



was the antipode of European nationalism, which he, writing shortly before the onset of World War I, viewed in very positive terms.<sup>25</sup>

Later, the Communist Revolution in Russia was seen as the result of the workings of a Byzantine authoritarian and imperialistic ideology. Now that communism has vanished for good, the Byzantine heritage is called upon to explain events in today's Balkans. Byzantium and its legacy do not only serve to define the cultural specificity of the Balkans, but they are held responsible for crippling the road of the Balkans to modernity. According to this analysis, the incompleteness of the historical experience of the Balkans during the Byzantine period posits a cultural and historical factor for their present-day backwardness. A general survey of the history of Eastern Europe published in 1998 underscores the role of caesaropapism as the historical experience which differentiates the Balkans and Russia, on the one hand, and Western Europe, on the other. Byzantium had missed the formative experiences of the Investiture Contest, the Reformations and the Renaissance. Furthermore, Byzantine caesaropapism is credited with impeding the "separation of the secular and the spiritual spheres" in southeastern Europe.<sup>26</sup> For Samuel Huntington, the Slavic-Orthodox world did not benefit from "the separation and the recurrent clashes between Church and State" and therefore deserves to be classified a separate civilization.<sup>27</sup>

Another survey of the history of Eastern Europe remarks that the impact of Byzantine "political culture on the mentalities of Eastern Europeans was strong and long lasting." According to this analysis, Byzantium and Orthodoxy have misled the Balkans peoples to "confuse politics and morality, to seek unanimity rather than decisions by a majority, to view political leaders as sources of salvation."<sup>28</sup> A new history of the Byzantine empire concludes that the Byzantine legacy, together with the Ottoman and Communist heritages, has discouraged the development of democratic institutions in the Balkans. The tendency to depend on the government and to distrust businessmen and politicians is yet another aspect of the Byzantine legacy in the Balkans at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that this notion of a Byzantine legacy posits a cultural obstacle for the modern development of the Balkans. Apart from doing an injustice to Byzantine civilization, this idea of Byzantine heritage views and explains present phenomena in the Balkans within the perspective of a very distant and complex past. The effects of the "Byzantine legacy" ignore the very real economic devastation which most of the region experienced due to nationalist warfare and communism during the twentieth century. Certainly, the two main legacies of Byzantium--orthodox Christianity and the Cyrillic alphabet--are still with us today. However, the other legacies of Byzantium are, to a great extent, a matter of historical memory, of self-perception and of outside imputation. In other words, the perception Byzantine heritage is a malleable identity

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<sup>25</sup> Sir George Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East (By a Diplomatist)* (London, 1915), p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> R. Bidelaux and I. Jeffreys, *A History of Eastern Europe. Crisis and Change* (London, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996), p. 70.

<sup>28</sup> Ph. Longworth, *op.cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>29</sup> W. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997), p. 853.

which can be easily refashioned and redefined. It is an imputed identity from outside, but is also a self-realized identity in Orthodox Christian countries.

The construction of Byzantinism in the nineteenth century provides an example of the making of such an identity. Byzantinism was then seen as a universalist and imperialistic ideology, whose chief heir was the Russian empire and later the Soviet Union. A twentieth-century Byzantinist, Romilly Jenkins, wrote during the Cold War in 1966:

As in the development of species, so in the development of ideas or moulds of thought, sudden and radical change is unknown. The ultimate hope of Russians, before or after the Revolution of 1917, is to find the empire of the Third Rome in the seat of the Second.<sup>30</sup>

The theory about this Byzantine ideological heritage in Russia have been based on the famous letter of the monk Filofei (ca. 1510-40) to the Grand prince of Muscovy, which proclaims: “two Romes have fallen, the third endures, and a fourth there will not be.” And yet, as John Meyendorff has shown again recently, this theory was formulated in an apocalyptic context and had little practical application. There was no direct continuity in Russia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of an official ideology of Moscow as the “Third Rome.”<sup>31</sup> During the nineteenth century, nationalist ideologues in Russia, and their Western opponents, turned this perception of a Byzantine legacy into a pseudo-Byzantine caricature of Byzantine political ideology. In a similar way, the Byzantine legacy in today’s southeastern Europe and Russia seems to me to be an artificial construct and a perception rather than a tradition stretching back to the Middle Ages. Yet, this construct has a surprising vitality after the end of Communism. The well-known Bulgarian-born literary critic living in France, Julia Kristeva, published a few years ago in the Bulgarian edition of *Lettre Internationale* a curious essay, in which the economic and social troubles of the country were set against the background of a Byzantine and Orthodox cultural heritage in morality and church-state relations.

The notion of Byzantinism and the Byzantine heritage have become a part of the burdensome intellectual baggage that we all carry at the end of the twentieth century. Byzantium ceased to exist as a state in 1453, but its afterlife in the intellectual history of the West has been with us ever since. The negativism of the Ages of Enlightenment and Romanticism had brought into being categories and terms that came to characterize Byzantinism. They still have a wide popular currency, despite the progress made by Byzantine scholarship. If not qualified and historicized, such categories become mere labels and have little historical relevance for a state which never reached the modern period. They serve to reaffirm an age-old perception and, when misused, pose a bleak future for a region that has suffered greatly during our century.

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<sup>30</sup> R. Jenkins, *Byzantium. The Imperial Centuries A.D. 610-1071* (New York, 1966), pp. 3, 295.

<sup>31</sup> J. Meyendorff, “Was there ever a ‘Third Rome’? Remarks on the Byzantine Legacy in Russia,” *The Byzantine Tradition after the Fall of Constantinople*, ed. J. Yiannias (Charlottesville/London, 1991), pp. 45-60