

Anthony Kaldellis, Niketas Siniossoglou, eds.. *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 798 pp. \$150.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-04181-3.

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This latest addition to the Cambridge Histories collection fills an important gap in the modern historiography of Byzantine intellectual history. Concise summaries and frank discussions are sorely needed in the field, as is an updated foundation on which to build future studies. This volume provides all of these, and Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniossoglou have produced a collection that should prove to be exceptionally useful to the general reader and specialist alike.

In their introduction, the editors lay out their vision for the volume in clear terms. They argue that intellectual history is “probably the least developed subfield” within Byzantine studies, an accurate assertion that is repeated several times throughout the collection. The editors therefore describe the volume as “a preliminary step toward rectifying this imbalance” in a statement of purpose that deserves repeating in full: “first, to provide the resources with which more integrated cross-cultural, diachronic, and analytical narratives may one day be written, and, second, to spur the growing interest in Byzantine intellectual history as a more or less distinct discipline” (p. 1). As the rest of this review will argue, they have largely succeeded in these aims.

The editors’ introduction is excellently crafted to deliver to the reader not only a vision for the volume itself but also a more general introduction

to the state of the field, problems, obstacles, and hopes for the future of Byzantine intellectual history. It begins with a brief discussion of “Why Byzantine intellectual history is important,” which gives several reasons designed for the “utilitarian world” in which we live (p. 1). While the five reasons offered by the editors are generally compelling, this portion of the introduction feels rather superfluous, especially for the reader who has already taken the time to pick it up and read its introduction.

After a general discussion of the meaning of the term “intellectual history,” the broad outlines of the development of the modern field of intellectual history and its Byzantine iteration are sketched. Both cases are especially fraught with complications and suffer from a lack of clear boundaries and fluid definitions. As the editors themselves point out, modern intellectual history exists somewhere in between a “pure history of ideas and concepts” and a perspective that tends to view intellectual production and discourses solely as the products of larger sociocultural trends (p. 8). Byzantium in particular has long suffered due to the perception that the empire produced little original thought of its own and, instead, primarily served simply to preserve the wisdom of the ancients. The editors display an impressive ability to summarize both fields and of-

fer a clear overview of the parameters, assumptions, and difficulties that lie at the center of the intellectual history of Byzantium.

The introduction then moves on to untangle several major problems in this modern subdiscipline, most of which are only partially addressed in the scholarship to date. Certain well-known but difficult-to-resolve issues are touched upon, including the nontextual (i.e., oral) component of Byzantine thought and the loss of an unknown number of texts and authors, a favorite complaint among Byzantinists of all stripes, before the text moves on to the topic of theology and philosophy in a Byzantine context.

The inclusion of philosophy in a volume dedicated to intellectual history is unsurprising, but both the introduction itself and several of the volume's contributions (especially chapter 16) address the particular problems associated with the study of Byzantine philosophy. This includes the thorny issue of what is meant by "Byzantine philosophy," something that remains notoriously difficult to define in both the Byzantine and modern contexts. Theology, on the other hand, has been comparatively well covered by modern scholars, but has often been colored or even monopolized by the "confessional bias" of the scholars themselves, who have tended to approach the subject from within Orthodox Christianity. Despite this, however, the field has made great strides in recent years. While the editors rightly place theology squarely within the realm of Byzantine thought and, hence, intellectual history, due to the subject's relative strength in existing scholarship, it does not receive the amount of attention some might have liked or expected to see.

The well-known tendency among modern scholars to homogenize Byzantine society and to reduce individual actors to little more than the products of cultural trends and social norms is singled out as particularly problematic in a field like intellectual history. It is partially for this reason that several chapters are devoted to the life

and work of important individuals in the history of Byzantine thought.

The introduction concludes with a brief overview of the contents of the volume, including the rationale behind its chronological focus. For while several contributions draw upon earlier works and authors, the real focus of the volume is on the period after the seventh century. This, according to the editors, both serves to limit the scope of the volume and is a response to the violent transition from antiquity to the medieval period in Byzantium, which is reflected in the dearth of intellectual production between the mid-seventh and early ninth centuries.

The sizeable volume is divided into six parts (with three additional subheadings under part 4) and thirty-eight chapters. Contributors include many well-established names, but some younger scholars also make appearances, offering the reader a healthy combination of perspectives. The book also includes a brief, but helpful timeline of major personalities and events in a pull-out attached to the back cover.

Part 1, "The Transmission of Knowledge," offers five foundational chapters, laying the groundwork for the rest of the collection. This is especially the case with the first two chapters, "Institutional Settings: The Court, Schools, Church, and Monasteries" by Jonathan Harris and "Byzantine Books" by Inmaculada Pérez Martín. Both contributions will prove useful to students and experts alike as they introduce the reader to the settings in which much of Byzantine thought was produced and the method of its dissemination and preservation. Eleanor Dickey's chapter, "Classical Scholarship: The Byzantine Contribution," serves as a much-needed corrective to views of Byzantium as little more than a transmitter of more ancient works. It reminds the reader that a much more complex process lay behind the reception of "classical" texts and authors in Byzantium, and that such a process calls for a much more critical eye among modern scholars.

The final chapter in part 1, “Intellectual Exchanges with the Arab World,” stands out among the others, not because of any shortcomings in the others but because of this chapter’s uniqueness. Representing the combined efforts of Dimitri Gutas, Anthony Kaldellis, and Brian Long, the contribution delivers a brief, yet insightful overview of intellectual exchanges between Byzantium and the Arab-Islamic world from late antiquity to the turn of the twelfth century (the Palaiologan period, 1261 to 1453, is covered separately in a later chapter). It is noted in the general introduction to the volume that the purpose of the collection is to lay the groundwork for future studies that might bring a more interdisciplinary or cross-cultural approach to the field, and this chapter does exactly that. Together with Teresa Shawcross’s chapter in a later section (chapter 36), these assessments of Byzantine and Islamic thought will prove invaluable to anyone interested in either sphere.

Part 2, “Sciences of the Word,” includes four chapters covering various aspects of the written word in Byzantium, as its title indeed suggests. A volume dedicated to Byzantine intellectual history would be incomplete if it did not provide a section devoted to the “sciences of the word,” as such knowledge and training not only played a pivotal role in the intellectual formation of nearly every Byzantine author who has left his/her work to posterity, but it also underlies every aspect of the only transmitter of Byzantine thought to the modern world: the written word. Such a foundational significance, of course, means that most contributions in this section might well be required reading for anyone approaching Byzantine studies in any of its aspects, intellectual history or otherwise. Stratis Papaioannou’s chapter, “Rhetoric and Rhetorical Theory,” for example, surveys the rhetorical training and norms that lie at the heart of most Byzantine writings. Without at least a basic understanding of these rhetorical principles, it is nearly impossible to appreciate any written

source originating in Byzantium to its fullest extent.

It is refreshing to see the inclusion of Charles Barber’s contribution in part 2. Entitled “Theories of Art,” the chapter assesses especially Byzantine approaches to art, including an acknowledgement of the difficulties associated with defining that term, and aesthetics. Considering it is only through the writings they have left us that we can approach such Byzantine ideas, the relatively short chapter acts as a bridge between the visual and literary worlds, a bridge that is given additional weight by its thoughtful inclusion in a section devoted to the “Sciences of the Word.”

The volume moves from the “Sciences of the Word” to the so-called “Sciences of the World” in part 3. This section contains individual chapters dedicated to astronomy, astrology, magic and the occult sciences, alchemy, and medical thought and practice, as well as a chapter by Dominic O’Meara entitled “Conceptions of Science in Byzantium,” which serves as a kind of introduction to the part as a whole.

O’Meara’s contribution provides an excellent discussion of categories of thought and disciplines in a Byzantine context, which is particularly important in a volume dedicated to Byzantine intellectual history. It serves as an important reminder of the discordance between modern and Byzantine conceptions of intellectual pursuits and their classification. O’Meara’s chapter pairs well with the first chapter of the following section, in which Dimitri Gutas and Dimitri Siniosoglou tackle the many issues inherent in the term “Byzantine philosophy.” Together, they not only problematize fundamental concepts within Byzantine intellectual history, but they also provide a place from which students or other scholars might move forward in their own work while acknowledging the complex nature of such seemingly simple categories as science or philosophy.

Timothy S. Miller’s chapter, “Medical Thought and Practice,” is likewise a welcome addition to

the volume. This is especially true since many of the sources of Byzantine medical knowledge, including the works of those like Galen and even Aristotle, were read alongside other philosophers in a Byzantine context and were thus accessed by a relatively broad range of individuals. Such knowledge was not solely the preserve of medical doctors, and medical thought rightly finds a place in this volume.

Part 4 is given the title “Philosophy and Theology in Middle Byzantium,” but the focus is much heavier on the former. The section is divided into three subsections, dedicated to “Platonic Themes,” “Aristotelian Themes,” and “Individuals in Context” respectively. Predictably, the chapters dedicated to “Platonic Themes” cross over into what we might categorize as Byzantine or early Christian theology, as the link between formative Christian thinkers and (Neo-)Platonism are well established, both among modern scholars and Byzantine intellectuals. While the first two chapters in this section offer comprehensive overviews of Platonic thought in Byzantium and its development over time, chapter 20, “Fate, Free Choice, and Divine Providence from the Neoplatonists to John of Damascus,” provides a much more focused discussion of themes specific to the Platonic legacy which were adopted and adapted by Christian thinkers. Ken Parry situates these themes within a broader context, including both the medieval West and the Arab-Islamic world, and argues that the ideas singled out in the chapter can be useful markers of the transition from ancient to medieval modes of thought.

Under the heading of “Aristotelian Themes,” there are chapters devoted to an overview of the place of Aristotle/Aristotelian logic in Byzantium, the influence of Aristotle in Byzantine theology, and what might be termed the reception of Aristotle among Byzantine thinkers. Christophe Erismann’s chapter, “Logic in Byzantium,” not only serves as a solid introduction to the topic and to the section itself, but could also be paired with the

earlier chapters discussing the institutional settings of Byzantine intellectual production (chapter 1) and rhetoric (chapter 6) to form a kind of introduction to education in Byzantium.

The third subsection of part 4, “Individuals in Context,” includes four chapters, three of which focus on a selected individual and his intellectual activities (Maximos the Confessor, John of Damascus, and Michael Psellos, respectively). These come mostly from the early and middle periods of Byzantium, as the later period is the focus of the following section. Of course, cases might be made for the inclusion of other figures in place of or alongside the three chosen here, but no one could argue that the selected figures are not deserving of their own chapter or at least did not have a major influence on Byzantine thought in a number of fields. The figures who receive special attention in these chapters likewise make several appearances throughout the volume, reflecting their importance within the field of Byzantine intellectual history as it currently stands. The final chapter in the section, Michele Trizio’s “Trials of Philosophers and Theologians under the Komnenoi,” offers a concise summary of the notorious trials under the Komnenian emperors (1081 to circa 1185), especially Alexios I, in the name of Christian orthodoxy. The chapter’s aims and methods differ considerably from the others in the section, providing the context for the other chapters’ individuals, but the narrative Trizio supplies is useful nonetheless.

Part 5, dedicated to “Philosophy and Theology in Late Byzantium,” contains more overtly theological content than any other part of the volume, including contributions on theological debates with the West, Hesychasm (mystical contemplative prayer), Orthodox mystical theology, Kabbalah, and the reception of Thomas Aquinas in Byzantium. Moshe Idel’s chapter on “Kabbalah in Byzantium” provides an intriguing look at an aspect of Byzantine religious life seldom discussed outside of specialists’ circles. The chapter is mostly a survey of known personalities and texts asso-

ciated with kabbalistic Jewish thought with some connection to late Byzantium. Though not immediately apparent, the contribution might also belong to those describing exchanges between Byzantium and the wider world (including chapters 32 and 33 in this part), as the people and texts discussed were by no means limited to Byzantium's borders. In fact most were simply passing through or had other forms of contact, especially with contemporary Spain/Catalonia.

Chapter 33, "Theology, Philosophy, and Politics at Ferrara-Florence," by Marie-Hélène Blanchet, is another rather unique contribution to the volume. While the inclusion of a chapter focusing on the Council of Ferrara-Florence is not entirely unexpected, Blanchet takes the position that the meeting between representatives of the Latin and Byzantine churches leading to the Union of Florence (July 6, 1439) was itself "a significant stage in the history of Byzantine thought" (p. 557). Unlike those chapters whose focus is on an individual Byzantine thinker, a methodology that few would question, the idea that a single moment should be understood as pivotal in the intellectual history of Byzantium is slightly more surprising. Blanchet's execution is excellent and readily convinces the reader of the validity of her approach.

The volume concludes with five chapters presented under the heading "Politics and History." This section both covers general, introductory topics and also offers unique, new arguments, especially for Byzantine thought during periods of political decline or emergency. Arguably most of the chapters in this section could have found their place in a volume dedicated to the literary history of Byzantium, but they certainly do not feel out of place here. Paul Magdalino's "*Basileia*: The Idea of Monarchy in Byzantium, 600-1200" is a very welcome addition, to be read alongside the works of Gilbert Dagron and Anthony Kaldellis in the search for a comprehensive understanding of the Byzantine state and its theoretical underpinnings,

which remain elusive and complex.[1] Teresa Shawcross's contribution, "Theories of Decline from Metochites to Ibn Khaldūn," is especially interesting, masterfully showcasing the implementation of the editors' call to acknowledge the individuality of authors of primary sources while simultaneously using them to recreate something of their contemporary intellectual realities, as well as being cross-cultural in its nature. The final chapter, which addresses Nicolae Iorga's concept of "Byzance après Byzance" in the political thought among Christian communities in Europe until the Age of Revolution, brings the volume to a fitting conclusion, as the history of Byzantine thought (especially politically theories) is taken from the Palaiologan period into the post-Byzantine world.[2]

Of course, any single volume that attempts to tackle such a massive and still ill-defined topic as Byzantine intellectual history could never hope to cover every aspect of that history in full, and it is not difficult to find areas in which the current text is seemingly lacking. Most of these deficiencies, however, are addressed more or less explicitly in the editors' introduction, and the finished volume remains true to their vision.

Even a cursory perusal of the table of contents quickly reveals the relatively short shrift given to Byzantine theology. This is especially noteworthy if one considers that, of all the many facets of what might be considered under the umbrella of intellectual history, it is in the field of theology and its related disciplines that Byzantine studies has traditionally been most advanced. This apparent issue, however, is singled out and explained by the editors. Feigned piety and methods of intellectual subversion in a religiously and intellectually unfree society are in desperate need of more attention, but few chapters in the volume address these problems directly. At the same time, it is often arbitrary to draw a strict dividing line between philosophical and theological thinkers or works in a Byzantine context, as indeed acknowl-

edged by several contributors to the volume. Numerous chapters dedicated to ostensibly philosophical or non-theological topics venture into the realm of religious thought and/or include the work of Byzantine thinkers within the church for exactly this reason.

A great number of trends in Byzantine writing beyond both the church and philosophy, in all their forms, have not received much attention. One might plausibly argue, however, that such discussions would belong in a volume on Byzantine literature or written culture, rather than intellectual history per se. In fact, the editors acknowledge that the recent growth in the study of Byzantine literature and the adoption of literary-critical methodologies in Byzantine studies has, if anything, served to complicate the picture within the field of Byzantine intellectual history. While such growth is not an entirely unwelcome development, the occasionally overlapping interests of the two subfields with very different aims and methods has moved some scholarship in ways that “do not always serve the needs and interests of intellectual history” (p. 18). The numerous contributions in the volume that touch upon issues relevant to both subdisciplines deal with these problems admirably.

Most chapters are explicitly designed to offer a “state of the field” and to serve as general introductions to their respective topics. In general, they are very successful in this purpose. And while the volume is generally most useful as an introduction to the subdiscipline for students or outsiders, several chapters present original arguments that will be of interest even to specialists (e.g., chapters 5, 31, 32, and 36). And for those whose interests are not exactly aligned with Byzantine intellectual history, a number of chapters offer valuable insights into a wide range of other aspects of Byzantine studies. Such topics include, but are by no means limited to, Byzantium and its neighbors (chapters 5, 28, 32, 33, and 36), Byzantine literature and written culture (chapters

1, 2, 6, and 35), the classical heritage in Byzantium (chapters 4, 7, 18, and 21), and politics and political ideology (chapters 34, 35, and 38). In addition, chapters on topics ranging from “Legal Thought” to “Medical Thought and Practice,” from “Astrology” to “Astronomy” offer useful introductions to often difficult branches of Byzantine thought that can otherwise be rather intimidating for young scholars or nonspecialists.

In general, the volume succeeds in its stated purpose. It brings a great deal of clarity to a murky field, especially for an outsider, and should indeed serve as an excellent platform from which the growing field of Byzantine intellectual history might expand. The volume as a whole feels well thought out and well rounded in its execution. It is a most welcome addition to the corpus of modern Byzantine studies and should remain both a useful reference and an excellent teaching tool for years to come.

Notes

[1]. Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[2]. Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance: continuation de “L’histoire de la vie byzantine”* (Bucharest: Institut des études byzantines, 1935).

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