In Romanland, Anthony Kaldellis details ethnicity in the Byzantine Empire from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries. In seven chapters, he argues that ethnicity (ethnos) and nation (genos) played a role in the Byzantine imagination. He notes that these “Romans” could see and distinguish themselves by a “Romanness.” In fact, according to Kaldellis, they differentiated themselves from their neighbors, and even other subjects of their empire. This, Kaldellis argues, was both an empire and a “national state” (p. xiv). Thus, one could be both a subject of the empire and not be a “Roman” (Romaioi). As Kaldellis writes, “sometimes it was their religion, sometimes their language, and sometimes it could even be their hats” that the Byzantines used as indicators by which to distinguish themselves from other groups (p. 9).

This argument builds off Kaldellis's previous work, “adding an ethnic dimension” to his previous conclusions that the “Byzantines” were in fact “Romans” (p. 3). In the past, his basis for this conclusion was inter alia the political reality and continuation of political institutions in the Roman east throughout the Byzantine period.[1] Herein, Kaldellis brings his newly expanded framework to new sources and new possibilities of analysis, breaking with other studies that view the Byzantine Empire as being “Roman” only insofar as “nothing more than a literary game” played by the Constantinopolitan elite (p. 11). Thus, he makes the case that there was a continuity of identity from late antiquity into the Middle Ages in what we term “Byzantium.” While Hellenic in language, Orthodox in religion, and medieval in outlook, this was still a distinctly “Roman” state, Kaldellis argues. It is in this argument that we can see where Kaldellis departs from previous historiographic understandings of the Byzantine state.

This amorphous but well-reasoned notion borrows from contemporary ethnic studies and is the predominating lens that is used in this book. Kaldellis makes his case over the course of seven chapters. In chapter 1, he offers a “critique of Roman denialism” and a historiographical survey of the denial of the “Romanness” of the Byzantine Empire. In chapters 2 and 3, he contends “that the Romans of Byzantium were, and knew that they were, an ethnic group” (p. xiii). It is these chapters that prove the most convincing. They are punchy, make liberal use of primary sources, and echo Kaldellis's past work. In the latter half of the book, Kaldellis turns his eyes to coverage of the other in Byzantine sources. This second part of the monograph carries with it all the benefits of its author. It is well researched, thorough, and poignant; however, it could have benefited from being expanded. While these chapters make up the largest part of the book, it is also the section in which Byz-
antinists and the general reader might raise the most questions. These questions stem from the density of material being covered and the novelty of Kaldellis’s notion of empire. These could have been put to rest by a more detailed discussion.

The use of sources is the most interesting aspect of this work overall. Kaldellis draws on a body of accounts that run the gamut from documents by pseudonymous monks to the handiwork of emperors. This is creative, effective, and compelling as Kaldellis allows the *Romaioi* to tell us their notion of being a “Roman.” For example, in chapter 1, over the course of seven examples that have been gracefully translated from the Greek, Kaldellis allows his sources to speak in their own words. He then expands and explains how these “Romans” were just that: Romans. Another example can be found in chapter 6 in which Kaldellis uses travelers’ accounts to describe the ethnic makeup of southern Italy.

Kaldellis is a master of his craft. Any Byzantinist or anyone interested in Byzantium should endeavor to read this well-researched, meticulous work. While some may disagree with the chosen ethnonyms, structure, or argument Kaldellis makes, it is unquestionable that this is a well-researched and thorough project. For that reason alone, it should be recommended greatly.

Note


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