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The Foundation of Constantinople and the Beginnings of Byzantine Studies

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Abstract: This essay takes issue with the idea that Byzantium and Byzantine studies are misnamed because the names misrepresent the true identity of the Eastern Roman Empire. It is argued that while Byzantine identity was indeed the invention of Byzantine studies, both developments were internal and native to the culture of the empire. They resulted from research, around the turn of the sixth century, into the origins of Constantinople, which rediscovered the city's past, prior to its refoundation by Constantine as a Roman imperial capital, in the ancient Greek city of *Byzantion*. In using this name to designate Constantinople, local intellectuals did not deny the capital's official status as New Rome, but signalled that it was a Rome with a Greek – Byzantine – difference.

Keywords: Byzantine, Roman, Greek, *Byzantion*, Constantinople, identity

Knowingly or unknowingly, the first International Congress of Byzantine Studies was held in a highly significant centenary year. In September 1924, it was 1600 years since the Roman emperor Constantine decisively defeated his co-emperor and brother-in-law Licinius in a battle by the shores of the Bosporus that ended the last civil war in the breakdown of the Tetrarchy, the imperial system established by Diocletian 21 years earlier. Two months later, on 8 November 324, Constantine raised his second son Constantius to the rank of Caesar, and simultaneously marked the perimeter of the city on the European side of the Bosporus that was to become Constantinople. This event was also commemorated in style by a centenary celebration, an international symposium held on 7-8 November 2024 at the Pera Museum in Istanbul.[1]

[1] The proceedings are being edited by P. Magdalino and B. Pitarakis for publication by the Istanbul Research Institute.

The two centenary commemorations deserve to be considered together, because the events they commemorate were causally connected. The Congress of 1924 is the *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of Byzantine studies as a field of research distinct from classical studies, the moment which marked their coming of age as an academic discipline. The foundation of Constantinople in 324 was the *terminus post quem* for the emergence of the east Roman state and civilization that we still conventionally and conveniently, if now controversially, refer to as Byzantium. In light of the ongoing controversy about the identity of this state and civilization, it is relevant to explore the timeline between the two terminal events, and the Bucharest conference of September 2024 presented an ideal opportunity to do so. By working backwards from 1924 and forwards from 324, we can hope to arrive at the point where Byzantine studies meet Byzantine identity.

To get to this point, however, we have to work through the idea that Byzantine identity was the invention of Byzantine studies. This idea is thoroughly dissected in a volume of essays recently published by Dumbarton Oaks under the title *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe*.[2] The two editors and the thirteen contributors to this volume end up by reaffirming that Byzantium was indeed a construction of western European scholarship in the centuries after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. However, they nuance this conclusion by demonstrating that the construction and the scholarship took shape together in a long process that lasted over four centuries, following the trajectory of the Ottoman Empire from triumphant conquest to humiliating disintegration. As Anthony Kaldellis argues in the final chapter, which is the keystone of the edifice, it was not until the late nineteenth century that Byzantium became identified as such by those who studied it: as the Byzantine Empire, not the Roman Empire (as its inhabitants called it), nor the Greek Empire or the Empire of Constantinople (as the western Europeans and Orthodox Slavs had normally referred to it).[3] This detachment of Byzantium from its historic identities went along with the creation of new institutional structures for the dedicated study of Byzantine history, texts, and monuments: teaching posts, journals, and, we may add, associations of Byzantinists. It would thus be no exaggeration to claim that the invention of Byzantium was the work of the two generations of scholars who prepared the way for the Congress of 1924. To be precise, it was the work of western Byzantinists, because, Kaldellis argues, it answered to a western political need in the decades before the First World War: the need to solve the "Eastern question" by finding an identity for the territorial heritage of the "sick man of Europe", the Ottoman Empire, that would continue to distinguish it from the superior, "real" Roman heritage of Western Europe while not playing into the hands of either Russian imperialism or Modern Greek irredentism.

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[2] N. Aschenbrenner and J. Ransohoff (eds.), *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe*, Washington, D.C., 2021.

[3] A. Kaldellis, "From 'Empire of the Greeks' to 'Byzantium'. The Politics of a Modern Paradigm Shift", in N. Aschenbrenner and J. Ransohoff (eds.), *The Invention of Byzantium*..., p. 349-367.

The originality, and the merit, of Kaldellis' chapter, as indeed of the volume as a whole, is that they relativize the long-repeated cliché that Byzantine studies began and Byzantine identity was coined in the sixteenth century with the Augsburg humanist Hieronymus Wolf, when the title "Corpus of Byzantine history" (*Corpus universae historiae byzantinae*) became attached to his collected translations of the medieval Greek historians Zonaras, Choniates, Chalkokondyles, and Gregoras.[4] Kaldellis reminds us that the "byzantinizing" of East Rome was not only completed four centuries after Wolf, but it had begun at least a century earlier, at the hands of a Greek intellectual, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, one of the historians in Wolf's *Corpus*.[5] Chalkokondyles consistently refers to Constantinople as Byzantion, and introduces its rulers as "kings of Byzantion".[6] So was this the moment when Byzantine studies first met Byzantine identity? It all depends on the reasons for Chalkokondyles' choice. Let us look at what lies behind his decision to call the capital, the "reigning city" (βασιλεύουσα πόλις) of the Christian Greek state, not by either of its official designations, Constantinople and New Rome, but by the name it had borne before its refoundation by Constantine, the name that recalled its original foundation in the mists of archaic antiquity by the mythical figure of Byzas.

From the opening pages of his *Histories*, Chalkokondyles makes it clear that he wants to deny, or minimise, the Roman identity of the state whose last gasp he is narrating. He defines his subject as "the fall of the Greeks and the events surrounding the end of their realm (ἀρχή), and [to] the rise of the Turks to great power, greater than that of any other powerful people to date".[7] He looks forward to the resurgence of the fallen empire in revivalist terms that are reminiscent of Old Testament messianic prophecy as well as traditional Byzantine *Reichseschatologie*,[8] yet his vision of this future state is thoroughly secular and Hellenic. His summary of ancient history, which comes next, is similarly reminiscent of a traditional narrative schema, the Four Kingdoms prophecy in the Book of Daniel (2, 31-48; 7, l).[9] However, its ultimate focus is the rivalry between Greeks and Persians, which culminates in the conquests of Alexander. Coming then to the "greatest world power" of the Roman Empire, Chalkokondyles immediately describes the transfer of power from Rome

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[4] On Wolf, see A. Grafton, "Western Humanists and Byzantine Historians", in N. Aschenbrenner and J. Ransohoff (eds.), *The Invention of Byzantium*..., p. 76-81.

[5] A. Kaldellis, "From 'Empire of the Greeks'...", p. 352-353; see also id., *A New Herodotos. Laonikos Chalkokondyles on the Ottoman Empire, the Fall of Byzantium and the Emergence of the West*, Washington, D.C., 2014, especially p. 171-205.

[6] Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, ed. J. Darkó, Budapest, 1922-1923; emended with English translation by A. Kaldellis, 2 vols., Cambridge, MA, 2014.

[7] Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, I.1, ed. and tr. Kaldellis, vol. 1, p. 3.

[8] On which see G. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reichseschatologie*, Munich, 1972.

[9] For the apocalyptic elaboration of this schema, see L. DiTommaso, *The Book of Daniel and the Apocryphal Daniel Literature*, Leiden, 2005.

to Constantinople, of which he gives a highly idiosyncratic account that is worth quoting in full.

> At that point [after Alexander and his successors] the Romans attained the greatest realm in the world because their virtue was in proportion to their fortune. They entrusted Rome to their great pontiff and crossed over into Thrace under the command of their king. In the land of Thrace, which is the closest to Asia, they made the Greek city of Byzantion for carrying on the struggle against the Persians, at whose hands they had suffered such terrible things. From this point on, the Greeks mixed with the Romans in this place, and because many more Greeks ruled there than Romans, their language and customs ultimately prevailed, but they changed their name and no longer called themselves by their hereditary one. They saw fit to call the kings of Byzantion by a title that dignified them, "emperors of the Romans", but never again "kings of the Greeks".[10]

The *translatio imperii* is thus described as a Roman migration to the east with the objective of establishing a new forward base in the war against Persia. In essence this is the story of the *Donation of Constantine*, the Carolingian fiction appropriated in Rome in order to justify papal sovereignty over Italy, and then adopted in the east in order to deny the legitimacy of the revived Western Empire.[11] The significant difference from the *Donation* is that Chalkokondyles does not identify the migrating and donating emperor as Constantine. He also does not name the new imperial capital either as Constantine's city or as a new or second Rome. The new capital continues to be the ancient Greek city of Byzantion. It is effectively a Greek city under Roman occupation, and its Greek identity is confirmed by its Greek inhabitants, who greatly outnumber the immigrant Roman population. The decision of the "kings of Byzantion" to dignify themselves with the title of Roman emperor, and no longer to be recognised as kings of the Greeks, is therefore entirely arbitrary and, Chalkokondyles implies, a matter of political prestige. The Roman identity of their realm is fictive and artificial.

It is obvious that in deconstructing the Roman emperors of Constantinople as kings of Byzantion, Chalkokondyles is deliberately rewriting and distorting the standard narrative of east Roman history as it was known to his intended readers. It is also not difficult to see a connection between his reinvention of the "national" past and his messianic vision of a "national" future resurgence of Hellenism under a king "who is Greek himself, just like the kings who stem from him"; a dynasty purified from the pretensions to Roman imperial grandeur that had caused the "kings of Byzantion" to spurn their ancestral identity, and thus by implication to fail. This, it seems to me, is why Laonikos insists on calling their capital by its original Greek

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[10] Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, I.5, ed. and tr. Kaldellis, vol. 1, p. 7.

[11] J. Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini: The Misinterpretation of a Fiction and Its Original Meaning*, Berlin, 2007; P. J. Alexander, "The Donation of Constantine at Byzantium and Its Earliest Use Against the Western Empire", *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 8, 1963, p. 11-26.

name, and not by the name of the Roman emperor who had re-founded it, nor by the name of the city which he had left in the hands of the Pope. There was only one Rome, and it belonged, like *Romanitas*, in Italy and the West. To pretend otherwise was only to add unnecessarily to the confusion of identities that Chalkokondyles was trying to untangle. But an identity based on the ancient Greek city of Byzantion offered a clear separation.

So, the *Histories* of Laonikos Chalkokondyles was indeed the place where Byzantine studies first met Byzantine identity after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. But was this their first encounter? In other words, was Byzantine identity created retrospectively in the post-mortem examination of the defunct east Roman state? Or was it inherent in the genetic make-up of the deceased? And did Chalkokondyles invent it as part of his neo-hellenizing agenda, or was it symptomatic of a dissatisfaction with the Roman identity of the state and its capital city which had always been there under the surface?

To answer these questions, we have to revisit the large corpus of scholarship on Byzantine identity published by Anthony Kaldellis, of which his work on Chalkokondyles is only a small part.[12] His publications add up to a comprehensive, sophisticated, and impeccably documented statement that the so-called Byzantine Empire was in fact the Roman nation state, equivalent to the nation states of the modern world with which we are all familiar. This Roman nation originated in the emperor Caracalla's decision to extend Roman citizenship to all freeborn imperial subjects, and the nation even persisted after the Ottoman conquest in the form of the *Rum milleti* and in the self-identification of the Greek Orthodox population who continued to refer to themselves as *Romioi*, not Hellenes. The nation had a defined territory, known as *Romania*, with clear if shifting boundaries. It did not depend for its national identity on the city of Rome, or even Constantinople qua New Rome, nor on the use of the Latin language, which was official until the sixth century but redundant thereafter. Its citizens of all classes, whose only common language and culture were Greek, did not doubt for a second that they were Romans. In fact, the only people who questioned this identity were the western Europeans with a vested interest in the post-Roman institutions of the Latin medieval world, notably the Roman Papacy and the revived western Empire of the Carolingian, Ottonian, Salian, and Hohenstaufen dynasties. Thus, in Kaldellis' view, the essential Greekness of the Eastern Roman Empire was a construct of the western medieval appropriation of the Roman heritage, which grew more assertive as the eastern empire declined and alienated itself by schism from the

[12] I single out the following major monographs, in which references to numerous relevant articles will be found: A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, 2007; id., *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge, MA, 2015; id., *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*, Cambridge, MA, 2019; id., *The Case for East Roman Studies*, Leeds, 2024; id., *The New Roman Empire: A History of Byzantium*, Oxford, 2021.

Roman church. The Hellenic nationalism of Chalkokondyles and his teacher Plethon, with his project for a Greek national state based in the Peloponnese, was a logical outcome of this process. More exactly, it was a Greek appropriation of the Latin narrative, which turned the exclusion of the Greeks from the Roman inheritance into a declaration of national independence, thus pointing the way to 1821. But it was not the "coming out" of a closet identity that had always been lurking under the surface of the Roman status symbols that the political regime had been obliged to wear in order to make a suitably imperial impression on the barbarian world. Still less was it a change of identity that the majority of Chalkokondyles' contemporaries, including the most erudite Hellenists, were willing to adopt, whether they were for or against Church union, pro-western or pro-Ottoman. It did not occur to Bessarion, Scholarios, Argyropoulos or the other historians of the fall to think of themselves as anything but Roman.

All this is very plausible, even true, but it does not mean that the medieval Greek speakers who called themselves Romans did not also think of themselves as Greeks, and that those who lived in Constantinople could not also think of themselves as Byzantines and their city as Byzantion. If Roman identity was the norm, it was not exclusive of other identities, which were not necessarily deviant. If Chalkokondyles adopted a Latin perspective in describing the kings of Byzantion as Greeks in fact and Roman only by name, he derived his positive view of what it meant to be Greek from his reading of ancient Greek literature as mediated by medieval Greek editors and commentators, and taught by a long line of Greek cultural chauvinists, of whom Laonikos' own teacher, Plethon, was one of the most outspoken.[13] He would have been familiar with at least some of the late Byzantine authors who regarded the Latins as barbarians, in full awareness that these same barbarians claimed to be the real Romans. He was not the first Greek intellectual to be painfully aware that national identity and cultural identity could be grossly mismatched.

Kaldellis' idea of *Romanland* is a big advance on previous conceptions of Byzantium, both those which saw it as a universal, multi-ethnic empire and those which saw it as the precursor of the Modern Greek state. The Kaldellis thesis is rapidly becoming the new standard paradigm. As such, however, it is in danger of becoming an obstacle to a properly nuanced understanding of the Roman identity of medieval Greek *Romania*, in which, I shall suggest, Byzantine identity had a real existence, in addition to being an indispensable term of reference for the modern scholar. Kaldellis' paradigm of Greek *Romania* uses a concept of national identity as a standardised, one-size-fits-all model that does not allow for the infinite range of variants and alternatives that exist in reality. Nation states come in all shapes and sizes each of which can change enormously over time: witness the expansion

[13] A. Kaldellis, *A New Herodotos*..., p. 209-216; N. Siniossoglou, "Plethon, Scholarios and the Byzantine State of Emergency", in A. Kaldellis and N. Siniossoglou (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, Cambridge, 2017, p. 633-652.

and contraction of the British Empire, and the long rise and fall of Rome from city state to universal empire to small territorial kingdoms. Nations also come in many colours and textures, far more numerous, shifting, variegated, and permeable than can be conveyed by a political map of a continent or of the world. Yet it is the static, solid colours, and neat lines of these maps that influence our conception of national entities, and distort the picture of the dynamic spatial realities within which national identities operate. In the case of Byzantium, I would suggest that this is exactly what Kaldellis presents us with in his *Romanland*: a homogenized national bloc with all irregularities and unevenness smoothed over. It is a simple cartography that does not allow for gradations of national identity, the possibility that some citizens and some areas of *Romania* looked more Roman than others. It also fails to envisage the extent to which this *Romania*, including the elements that were most integral to its national identity, saw itself as a Rome with a difference – a difference which can best be described as Byzantine.

A national identity is a composite entity, made up of components that may be of widely dispersed and disparate geographical, genetic, and cultural origins. A nation may go under different names, deriving from different elements in its ethnic make-up: the name by which *ein Deutscher* refers to himself is echoed in the Italian *Tedesco*, but in English he is known as a *German*, in French as an *Allemand*, and in the Slav languages as a *Nemets*, without any of these designations being more official than the others. We may add that for centuries the most senior political figure in the German-speaking world, with the best historical claim to represent the German-speaking peoples, was the Habsburg monarch known for a time as the Holy Roman Emperor and ruler of what is now the independent country of Austria. More problematic and controversial, and still dangerously unresolved, are the cases of Serbia and Russia, whose earliest territorial nuclei now lie outside these nations' borders, and the first capital of Rus is now the capital of a different nation from Russia. Even in the less contested national cultures of England and Italy, standard English originated in the kingdom of Mercia and standard Italian in Tuscany, both regions distant from what became the national capitals. In spite of such variations, however, it is probably safe to generalise that a nation's identity and statehood is primarily focused and invested in its capital city – even though the capital city is often the area which has the highest immigrant population. Capitals, like nation states, come in all shapes and sizes. For present purposes, it is perhaps helpful to classify them in terms of a spectrum between two theoretical poles. At one extreme is the capital that predates the formation of the nation state as the most important local city and as the most regular seat of government. At the other extreme is the city that is founded or upgraded to serve as the capital of a pre-existing or newly created state. In the first model, the capital creates or at least shapes the formation of the state; in the second, the state creates the capital, often in defiance of an older, bigger city that is either a former capital or has strong claims to metropolitan status – St Petersburg, Washington D.C., Canberra, Ankara, and Brasilia are the modern examples that come

most readily to mind. In both models, the nation identifies with the capital, but in the second model the identification is weaker because it is not based on a long tradition of myths, customs, historical associations, and a collective sense of local roots and local pride. Of course, metropolitan patriotism and solidarity can develop over time, but this is not always enough to involve the whole country and to make provincials identify with metropolitan society. Indeed, it can sharpen resentment at the very idea that the outlying regions are provinces of a metropolitan centre whose importance is merely political, and that the members of the political elite feel more at home in this shallow, artificial homeland than in the regions from which they come and whose interests they should be prioritizing.

The Roman Empire had the distinction of experiencing both models in the course of its long history. It grew to greatness as the expanded city republic of Rome, but it survived through the foundation of a new capital that was the political creation of a Roman emperor. Constantinople was founded at a time when the coincidence between Roman identity and the city of Rome was at an all-time low. Caracalla's grant of universal citizenship created successive generations of Romans with no affective ties to Rome or Italy, and, in the crisis of the third century, the centre of political gravity shifted from the capital city to the army camps of the frontier legions, as the places where emperors were made, unmade, and spent most of their short reigns. "Rome is where the emperor is", an imperial general is alleged to have said in 180, and by the early fourth century the emperor was likely to be anywhere but Rome.[14] The Roman Empire was a gigantic territorial bloc, in which Roman identity was spread evenly but thinly over the vast surface, and if there were any uneven lumps, they were more likely to be at the military edge than in the civilian centre.

The situation did not immediately change with the foundation of a second imperial capital.[15] It took time for Constantinople to be recognised as the equivalent of Rome and the superior of the great Hellenistic cities of Antioch and Alexandria, which had accepted Roman hegemony with difficulty. It was difficult to feel respect, let alone affection and admiration, for this brash new city that sucked material resources and human talent from all over the Greek east to fund and feed its never-ending building programme, its hungry and violent plebs, its burgeoning bureaucracy, and its blatant political exhibitionism. The Christianization of the Roman Empire added another dimension to the widespread sense of injustice that Constantinople inspired by the meteoric promotion of its church, which was not an ancient apostolic foundation. If the USA, almost 250 years after independence, still has mixed feelings about the "swamp

[14] Herodian I, 6.5; A. Kaldellis, "How Was a 'New Rome' Even Thinkable? Premonitions of Constantinople and the Portability of Rome", in Y. R. Kim and A. E. T. McLaughlin (eds.), *Leadership and Community in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Raymond Van Dam*, Turnhout, 2020, p. 221-247.

[15] A. Kaldellis, "Constantinople's Belated Hegemony", in P. Van Nuffelen (ed.), *Historiography and Space in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2019, p. 14-35.

city" that is its federal capital, this gives us some sense of the ambivalence with which ordinary Romans who had no stake in the central government must have looked at the continued expansion of Constantinople up to the age of Justinian. Was this the natural growth of a vital organ or an unnatural excrescence? It is perhaps indicative of the prevailing mentality that Justinian himself chose to honour his provincial origins by transforming his birthplace into an important new city, Justiniana Prima, with the rank of a major archiepiscopal see.[16]

If Constantinople was slow to develop as symbol and focus of Roman national identity, this was, I suggest, for the same reason that Rome itself had lost its hold over the minds and aspirations of its geographically distant citizens: the Roman Empire was not a national entity but an ecumenical empire. Constantinople could come into its own as a national capital, or in its own terms, a reigning city, only when the Empire it ruled acquired the dimensions and character of a nation state as we would recognise it. This happened in three stages: first with the restriction of the state ruled from Constantinople to what Fergus Millar has called the Greek Roman Empire of Theodosius II;[17] secondly with the extinction of the Roman Empire in the West (476), whereby Rome ceased to be an imperial capital even in name.[18] The third and final stage saw the massive loss of territories in both east and west which deprived the empire of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, the northern Balkans, thus removing the bulk of its non-Greek population as well as the important cities that were regional centres of gravity.[19] In these circumstances, Constantinople made itself indispensable not only to the identity, but also to the defence, survival, and the very existence of the state. It consolidated this centrality by acquiring a sacred dimension as a New Jerusalem that enjoyed the special protection of the Mother of God.[20] The Roman Empire thus became the nation state of *Romania* by returning to the model of the state whose national identity is created by its capital; indeed, by labelling its capital a New Jerusalem, it consciously conformed to the example of the state which has always been the original as well as the most extreme paradigm of capital-first and capital-centred nationalism: the ancient kingdom of Israel.[21]

The conceptual outcome of this transition can be clearly discerned in the treatises on government authorised and largely authored by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. The *De thematibus*, *De cerimoniis*, and *De administrando imperio*

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[16] Justinian, *Novels* 11 and 131; Procopius, *De aedificiis*, IV, 1.17-27; S. Turlej, *Justiniana Prima*, Krakow, 2016.

[17] F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408-450)*, Berkeley, 2006.

[18] A. Kaldellis, *The New Roman Empire*..., p. 214-215.

[19] *Ibid*., chapter 17; J. Howard-Johnston, *Byzantium: Economy, Society, Institutions 600-1100*, Oxford, 2024, p. 3-9, 13-18.

[20] J. Erdeljan, *Chosen Places. Constructing New Jerusalems in Slavia Orthodoxa*, Leiden, 2017, p. 72-143.

[21] S. Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation in Byzantium*, Leiden, 2018.

all present a firmly Constantinopolitan view of the world, in which the notions of east and west are defined in relation to Constantinople, and the topography and buildings of the city are the main points of reference and comparison.[22] Most strikingly, the *De administrando* makes a distinction between the Roman Empire as a whole (ἡ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχή) and, within it, what Constantine calls ἡ καθ᾽ ἡμὰς πολιτεία.[23] By this, he means effectively Constantinople and the coastal hinterland of the Sea of Marmara. The choice of words is interesting; it refers to Constantinople not only as the emperor's city, but also as his state, implying that the capital was a city-state, just as Rome had been at the start.

Over the next three centuries, the fortunes and the frontiers of *Romania* waxed and waned dramatically, but each reversal only confirmed the centrality of Constantinople to the identity of the state. This emerges most clearly in the conquest of Constantinople by the forces of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, and its reconquest from Latin rule in 1261. On the one hand, *Romania* responded to the loss of Constantinople with amazing political resilience, generating three dynamic Greek governments in exile, the Empire of Trebizond, the Empire of Nicaea, and the Despotate of Epiros. The Empire of Nicaea, under the leadership of the highly competent Laskarid dynasty flourished so vigorously that it not only eclipsed its Greek rivals but significantly reversed most of the territorial gains made by the Latins and Bulgarians. By the 1250s, a national existence without the traditional national capital was clearly becoming viable, and the writings of the third Laskarid emperor, the highly intellectual Theodore II Laskaris, who was born and grew up outside Constantinople, suggest that he was thinking along these lines, in terms of a national state based on his homeland of western Asia Minor, which he regarded as the heartland of Hellenism.[24] But among the rest of the ruling elite, the sense of exile remained undiminished, and it came to prevail under the new dynastic regime of Michael Palaiologos, who pushed hard to retake Constantinople and was rewarded when the city fell, almost without a blow, to his troops in 1261. This apparently providential event seemed to offer retrospective confirmation, not only that the Empire of Nicaea had always been the legitimate Roman Empire in exile, but also that Constantinople was the only legitimate source of Roman imperial authority. In the speech which the historian George Pachymeres attributes

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[22] P. Magdalino, "Constantine VII and the Historical Geography of Empire", in S. Bazzaz, Y. Batsaki, and D. Angelov (eds.), *Imperial Geographies in Byzantine and Ottoman Space*, Washington, D.C., 2013, p. 23-41; id., "Constantinople in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus", in N. Gaul, V. Menze, and Cs. Bálint (eds.), *Center, Province and Periphery in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos: From De Ceremoniis to De Administrando Imperio*, Wiesbaden, 2018, p. 39-54, at p. 39-41.

[23] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, tr. R. Jenkins, new revised edition Washington, D.C., 1967, p. 46, 225.

[24] See D. Angelov, *The Byzantine Hellene: The Life of Emperor Theodore Laskaris and Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge, 2019.

to Michael Palaiologos on hearing the news that the City had been recovered, the emperor is presented as saying: now that we have regained our ancestral homeland, our possession of the other cities that we hold is more secure, and our claims to lost territories will be taken seriously by their occupants who previously dismissed us "as stateless (ἀπόλισι) and living far from the imperial throne".[25]

Michael's achievement earned him the designation of New Constantine from his grateful subjects, who initially shared his optimism.[26] Yet this optimism was misplaced, as was already clear to Pachymeres when he wrote around 1300. The New Constantine had failed to deliver a new Constantinian Golden Age, and the new Constantinople under his dynasty had failed to inaugurate a sustained renewal of the state that had collapsed in 1204. The restoration did not put back the clock to the national unity of the tenth to twelfth-century state; instead, it merely delayed the process of centrifugal disintegration that had begun before 1204 and of which all the thirteenth-century Greek states, including the Empire of Nicaea, were symptomatic. It is indicative that the term *Romania* was taken over by the Latins to designate their short-lived Empire of Constantinople and the territories to which it laid claim – which in practice meant the whole politically fragmented Aegean and Black Sea world, divided between Greek principalities, Latin colonial powers, and Turkish emirates. In this world, the political centrality of Constantinople became increasingly meaningless. By the end of the fourteenth century the capital was just one of a few scattered enclaves that recognised the authority of a Greek sovereign, and in one of these enclaves, the so-called Empire of Trebizond, the Greek sovereign was fully independent of the Palaiologan regime in Constantinople.

So we return to the world of Plethon and Chalkokondyles and their futuristic visions of a Hellenic national state, the first envisaging an immediate retrenchment of the Palaiologan empire to the quintessentially Hellenic territory of the Peloponnese, and the second looking forward to an eventual, implied liberation from the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire that was the undeniable reality with which, and perhaps under which, Chalkokondyles was writing. The denial of Roman national identity involved in these visions was not, or not only, the result of adopting a western point of view. It grew out of the detachment of the capital of the eastern Christian empire from the territories that formed the empire's demographic, ethnic, and material core. The denial was the extreme, logical outcome of a mental shift that had begun with the Empire of Nicaea: the "Nicaean experiment", as Hélène Ahrweiler put it, of a state that survived and even flourished, rediscovering its Hellenic roots, in the absence of Constantinople.[27]

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[25] George Pachymeres, *Relations historiques*, II, 30, ed. A. Failler, tr. V. Laurent, vol. 1, Paris, 1984, p. 210-211.

[26] R. Macrides, "The New Constantine and the New Constantinople – 1261?", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 6, 1980, p. 13-41.

[27] H. Ahrweiler, "L'expérience nicéenne", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29, 1975, p. 21-40; D. Angelov, *The Byzantine Hellene*..., chapter 10.

For Constantinople was essential to the Roman national identity of Greek *Romania*, however much Chalkokondyles pretended otherwise by refusing to call the city New Rome or even to refer to it by the name of its Roman imperial founder. Only by deliberately ignoring the essential Romanness of the national capital could he argue for the essential Greekness of the national state that the "kings of Byzantion" decided, arbitrarily and artificially in his view, to rename the Roman Empire.

In fact, Chalkokondyles must have been very well aware of the huge and sustained investment that had been made, over the two hundred years from Constantine to Justinian, to give Constantinople not only the name and status but also the appearance, the image, and the material reality of Rome. There is ample evidence that Constantine intended his city to be a New Rome from the moment of its initial foundation in November 324, although he scrupulously refrained from using the name until the city had received its ritual *consecratio*/ἀποθέωσις in May 330.[28] Naturally the process of acquiring the equivalent dimensions, institutions, monuments, and symbolism lasted well beyond Constantine's lifetime, but his successors remained faithful to his intentions and even improved on them.[29] With the abolition of the western empire in 476, Constantinople could claim to be not just a New or second Rome, but the only Rome in political existence, and the two cities were pronounced to be one and the same by writers of Justinian's reign – in philosophical terms by John Lydus,[30] and poetically by Paul the Silentiary, who personifies Constantinople as Rome supplicating Justinian to rebuild Hagia Sophia.[31] The transfer of empire was accompanied by a real or imaginary transfer of symbolic identity, in the form of the Palladium, the talisman of Rome that Aeneas was supposed to have salvaged from Troy, and Constantine was supposed to have secretly removed from the Temple of Vesta in Rome and buried at the foot of his column in Constantinople.[32] A later legend

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[28] G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale. Constantinople et ses origines de 330 à 451*, Paris, 1974, p. 43-47; John Lydus, *De magistratibus*, I, 30; L. Ramskold and N. Lenski, "Constantinople's Dedication Medallions and the Maintenance of Civic Traditions", *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 119, 2012, p. 31-58, at p. 46-48.

[29] Most strikingly under the Theodosian dynasty, on whose additions to the built environment, see most recently P. Magdalino, "Renaissances d'une capitale: l'urbanisme constantinopolitain des dynasties impériales", *Travaux et mémoires* 22.1, 2018, p. 57-64; A. Kaldellis, "The Forum of Theodosius I in Constantinople: Symbolic Geography and Dynastic Propaganda", in S. Tougher (ed.), *Studies in Byzantine History and Culture: A Festschrift for Paul Magdalino*, Leiden, 2025, p. 11-24.

[30] *Ibid*.

[31] Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia*, lines 145, 219-248, ed. C. de Stefani, *Paulus Silentiarius, Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae, Descriptio ambonis*, Berlin, 2011, p. 8, 14-18.

[32] John Malalas, *Chronographia*, VII, 1, ed. H. Thurn, Berlin, 2000, p. 132; R. Praet, "Re-Anchoring Rome's Protection in Constantinople: The *pignora imperii* in Late Antiquity and Byzantium", *Sacris Erudiri* 55, 2016, p. 277-319; H. Saradi, "Constantine, Constantinople and the Trojan Legends: Byzantine Reactions to the Decline of Rome", in C. P. Christou, P. Katsoni, and C. A. Bozinis (eds.), *Constantine the Great and His Age*, Thessaloniki, 2022, p. 461-477, at p. 472-475.

maintained that the birthing chamber of the Great imperial Palace in Constantinople, where the children of the reigning emperors were "born in the Purple", was built with porphyry stone imported from Rome.[33]

In the transfer of empire from one capital to the other, the view from the Greek east was that Roman identity received an upgrade. The new, transplanted version of Rome was regarded as superior in three ways: (1) Constantinople, being the daughter, was naturally more vigorous and dynamic than her ageing mother;[34] (2) in traditional typological thinking, the new always superseded the old;[35] (3) Constantinople was founded as a Christian city by a Christian emperor, in contrast to the pagan memories, "the Capitoline legends" as Paul the Silentiary calls them, which haunted Old Rome.[36] In other words, the New Rome was more perfectly Roman than the old, and real Romans were more thoroughly at home in Constantinople than in Rome. The force of this logic, and the risk of it backfiring, are evident in two remarks by tenth-century emperors. Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, who never, as far as we know, wrote a word of Latin, nevertheless referred to it nostalgically as "the ancestral and Roman language" of his imperial predecessors.[37] Liudprand of Cremona, Otto I's ambassador to the court of Nikephoros II, records that the emperor said to him over dinner, "You are not Romans but Lombards". To which Liudprand did not give the obvious reply, "You are not Roman but Greek", but instead answered that he, like all the Germanic peoples, was proud not to be Roman, because the Roman nobility, with which "you the world rulers and emperors" identify, descends from the criminal scum of the earth got together by Romulus. "When we want to insult our enemies, we can think of nothing worse than to say 'You Roman!'".[38] The put-down would have been all the more deflating if Liudprand had known that the emperor's family, the Phokades, claimed descent from Roman noble lineages that Constantine had transplanted from Rome to the east.[39]

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[33] G. Dagron, "Nés dans la pourpre", *Travaux et mémoires* 12, 1994, p. 105-142.

[34] Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia*, lines 150-151, 164-167, ed. C. de Stefani, *Paulus Silentiarius*..., p. 8, 10; Theodore Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte*, ed. W. Hörandner, Vienna, 1974, poems I, 104-105, XVI, 175-181, XVIII, 97-99; Constantine Manasses, *Chronicle*, ed. O. Lampsidis, Athens, 1996, lines 3776-3780, 4449-4452. See also E. Chrysos, "Rome as *urbs inveterata?* A Battle of Epithets in the Confrontation of East and West in the 9th Century", in S. Tougher (ed.), *Studies in Byzantine History and Culture*..., p. 181-194.

[35] See P. Magdalino, "The Religious Rhetoric of Political Prophecy", in I. Biliarsky, M. Mitrea, and A. Timotin (eds.), *Religious Rhetoric of Power in Byzantium and South-Eastern Europe*, Brăila, 2021, p. 11-25.

[36] Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia*, line 152, ed. C. de Stefani, *Paulus Silentiarius*..., p. 9.

[37] Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. A. Pertusi, Rome, 1952, p. 60.

[38] Liudprand of Cremona, *Legatio*, XII, ed. P. Chiesa, *Liudprandi Cremonensis opera omnia*, Turnhout, 1998, p. 192-193.

[39] Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. I. Pérez Martín, Madrid, 2002, p. 158-162; cf. N. Leidholm, "Nikephoros III Botaneiates, the Phokades and the Fabii: Embellished Genealogies and Contested Kinship in Eleventh-Century Byzantium", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 42, 2018, p. 185-201.

At least as early as the tenth century, therefore, the Roman identity claimed by the Greek "kings of Byzantion" was beginning to look as artificial as Chalkokondyles found it to be five centuries later. What had sustained it, and continued to sustain it until 1453, was the identity of Byzantion as the New Rome, which Chalkokondyles ignored, but which had been powerfully asserted at the beginning of the fifteenth century by Manuel Chrysoloras in his *Comparison of the Old and the New Rome*, which he composed in the form of a letter sent from Rome to the emperor Manuel II.[40] Chrysoloras characterizes Constantinople as the spitting image of Rome, for "no daughter ever resembled her mother so closely"; if Constantinople was superior – as it had to be in a letter to the emperor –, this was only because Rome had had no model to follow, whereas Constantinople, looking to Rome as its model, was able to improve on the perfection of the prototype. Chrysoloras' text was as original in its way as Plethon's near contemporary manifesto, also addressed to Manuel II, for the creation of a Hellenic nation state in the Peloponnese, but its originality consisted in giving novel expression to the conventional nationalistic cliché that the Greeks were more Roman than the Latins.[41]

Chalkokondyles was of course reacting to this cliché. But he also tapped into a long tradition of reaction against it, a reaction that led ultimately to Plethon's declaration of Hellenic independence, but had long before that manifested itself in more subtle ways, which gave expression to a sense of being Roman with a Greek difference, a difference that was inherent in the original, Byzantine identity of the New Rome. The search for a Greek Roman identity began with Constantine himself. The fifth-century church historian Sozomenos relates that when Constantine contemplated founding his new capital in the area of ancient Troy, he started building it on the site of the Achaean encampment, thus implicitly of identifying it with the Greek besiegers rather than with the Trojan defenders from whom Rome claimed its ancestry via Aeneas.[42] Constantine filled the public spaces of the city with statuary taken mainly from Greek cities.[43] It emerges from the testimony of Zosimos, and from numismatic evidence, that Constantine dedicated his city to two protective deities, building twin temples to them at the NW and NE corners of what had been the upper agora of Byzantion.[44] One was the Fortune of Rome, presumably represented as *Dea Roma*

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[40] Ed. C. Billò, "Manuele Crisolora, *Confronto tra l'Antica e la Nuova Roma*", *Medioevo greco* 0, 2000, p. 1-26; P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople in Byzantine Perspective: The Memorial and Aesthetic Rediscovery of Constantine's Beautiful City, from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Leiden, 2024, p. 82-91.

[41] George Gemistos Plethon, *Address to Manuel Palaiologos on the State of the Peloponnese*, ed. Sp. Lampros, *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, vol. 3, Athens, 1926, p. 246-265.

[42] Sozomenos, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 2-3; the significance of the detail is overlooked in all modern scholarship, e.g., H. Saradi, "Constantine, Constantinople and the Trojan Legends...".

[43] S. Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 50-78.

[44] Zosimus, *New History*, II, 31, 2-3.

with spear, shield, and orb, as on the reverse of a medallion issued in 330. The other deity was the Tyche of Constantinople whose effigy in the other temple, probably the north-western, was according to Zosimos a modified cult statue of the goddess Rhea, the mother of the gods, a.k.a. Cybele, that Constantine had moved from her temple on the mountain above Kyzikos. It is likely that the modifications included not only the removal of the lions which pulled her chariot, but the addition of the attributes that became characteristic of the personification of Constantinople: the turreted crown, the cornucopia that depicted her as "flowering" (Anthousa), and the ship at her feet. It is thus that Constantinople is represented on the reverse in the medallion that forms the companion piece of the silver issue bearing the image of Rome, and this was undoubtedly how she appeared in the other effigies of the Tyche that were set up throughout the city. The significance of this iconography is that it depicted Constantinople as a typical, traditional Greek city, with a strong reminiscence of ancient Byzantion in the form of the ship's prow that symbolized the source of the city's abundance.[45]

Constantinople was thus conceived and founded both as a duplication of Rome and a continuation of Byzantion. In the prodigious expansion that followed over the next two centuries, the Roman element predominated, mainly owing to the huge monumental input of the Theodosian dynasty. In the course of the fifth century, the New Rome became the only Rome with a secure political existence and a viable imperial future. Yet it was precisely this total assumption of Roman identity that provoked an identity crisis as the source of Roman identity, the city of Rome, came under barbarian control with the ending of the western empire in 476.[46] Two historians writing at the time, Malchus and Priscus, chose to entitle their works *Byzantine History*, so as to indicate that they were dealing with events that happened under the hegemony of Constantinople.[47] Marion Kruse, in his important recent analysis, has characterised their choice as "a road not taken",[48] but this underrepresents the extent to which later intellectuals in *fin de siècle* Constantinople were travelling in the same direction, by researching and publishing the pre-Constantinian antecedents of Constantinople in ancient Byzantion.[49] Kruse himself highlights the contribution of one of those

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[45] L. Ramskold and N. Lenski, "Constantinople's Dedication Medallions...", p. 44-47; N. Lenski, "Constantine and the Tyche of Constantinople", in J. Wienand (ed.), *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD*, Oxford, 2015, p. 330-352. It was, however, the temple dedicated to the city personification of *Roma* that survived; see references in P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 33.

[46] For the identity crisis and its resolution, see in general M. Kruse, *The Politics of Roman Memory: From the Fall of the Western Empire to the Age of Justinian*, Philadelphia, 2019.

[47] A. Kaldellis, "Constantinople's Belated Hegemony", p. 27.

[48] M. Kruse, *The Politics of Roman Memory*..., p. 22.

[49] A. Kaldellis, "Constantinople's Belated Hegemony", p. 29-33; P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 14-29.

intellectuals, Hesychius, who in his so-called *Patria of Constantinople* narrates the history of Byzantion in a way that clearly parallels the history of Rome.[50] But he misses the evidence for another such narrative that is to be found in the contemporary or slightly later chronicle of John Malalas, which chops up the history of Byzantion (*Byzoupolis* as he calls it) and the foundation of Constantinople into chronological entries that are inserted at the appropriate points in the broader, universal historical narrative.[51] Kruse – like all scholars before him – also passes over the existence of a third "Byzantine" narrative, possibly the master narrative from which Hesychius and Malalas drew their information. The *Souda*, the classical dictionary compiled at the end of the tenth century, lists among the works of the poet Christodoros of Koptos a *Patria* of Constantinople in twelve books of epic verse.[52]

Any attempt to reconstruct Christodoros' composition can only be hypothetical. But if we put together what the *Souda* entry tells us about his life and works with the evidence of the one work of his that survives, along with the conventions of the *patria* genre, "part historical, part poetical",[53] in which he was writing, and what we can infer from Hesychius and Malalas, the circumstantial evidence is far from negligeable. It allows us to read Christodoros' epic *Patria* of Constantinople as a poetic manifesto for the importance of Constantinople as a normal Greek city with a respectable Greek past, involving traditional origin myths, the constitutional development of a typical Greek *polis*, and privileged relations with Roman emperors before its refoundation as a Roman imperial capital. This was not a denial of Constantinople's identity as New Rome. Rather, it described a grafting of Roman urban identity on to the stock of a Greek civic organism. Indeed, given that Christodoros enjoyed the patronage of the emperor Anastasius I, it is conceivable that he wrote his *Patria* of Constantinople as an imperial commission, intended to characterize Anastasius I's reign as the culmination of Constantine's achievement, and to justify the recent, definitive transfer of empire

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[50] M. Kruse, *The Politics of Roman Memory*..., p. 43-55. Hesychius' text survives in three versions: (1) a freestanding text entitled *Patria of Constantinople according to Hesychius the Illustrious*; (2) a text incorporated into the tenth-century *Patria of Constantinople*; (3) a text incorporated into a medieval *Life of Constantine* (the so-called *Opitz-Vita*). See A. Kaldellis, "The Works and Days of Hesychios the Illoustrios of Miletos", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 45, 2005, p. 381-403, and P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 14-16, 20-22, 25-28.

[51] Malalas, *Chronographia*, VIII, 1, X, 51, XII, 20, ed. H. Thurn, p. 146, 200, 221-222. The fact that Malalas uses the name *Byzoupolis* only in these passages indicates that they all derive from a single source. His account of the voyage of the Argonauts (IV, 8-9, ed. H. Thurn, p. 54-56) also clearly derives from a local narrative. See P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 15-18, 25-26.

[52] *Suidae Lexicon* s.v. Χριστόδωρος, ed. A. Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*, IV, Leipzig, 1935 (repr. Leipzig-Munich, 2001), no. 525, p. 827, tr. P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 22; M. Kruse, *The Politics of Roman Memory*..., p. 58. The following entry, no. 526, on Christodoros the Theban, may also refer to the same person.

[53] G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: études sur le recueil des Patria*, Paris, 1984, p. 11.

from barbarian-occupied Rome by emphasizing the nobility and antiquity of the city in which imperial power had been resettled.

What is certain is that Christodoros' *Patria* of Constantinople presented the New Rome in a Greek cultural idiom.[54] That it walked a fine line between Byzantine and Constantinopolitan, Greek and Roman identity, and that Anastasius I approved of or even shared this ambivalence, can be inferred from Christodoros' surviving poem, his *Ekphrasis of the statues in the baths of Zeuxippos*, which, it has been plausibly suggested, was publicly performed.[55] In choosing the statues to describe, in what sequence, and how to describe them, he plays to both the expatriate Latin Romans and the local Greeks in his audience.[56] In describing the statue of Pompey the Great (vv. 398-406), he makes a significant nod to Anastasius I's claim to be descended from this great Roman hero, but he is less effusive on the subject of Pompey's rival Caesar (vv. 92-96), the founder of the Roman Empire.[57] His focus on the statues of the famous Trojans in the Iliad has normally been read as a conventional celebration of the Trojan origins of Rome – and this was perhaps the original point of the statue collection assembled by Constantine.[58] Yet as Marion Kruse points out, Christodoros subverts their fame by portraying them as total losers, unredeemed by the future glory of their Roman descendants, with whom he simply does not connect them.[59] And to underscore this tacit denial of the Vergilian narrative, he gives the statue of Vergil a place of ambivalent honour in three lines at the end of the poem (vv. 414-416). Vergil is acknowledged to be another Homer, raised in Rome, but the Homer who is placed before him (vv. 407-413) is also another Homer – not the epic poet, but a tragedian from Thrace, "who adorned with his verses his native city of Byzantion".

Like the story of the transfer of the Palladium, which it may well have incorporated, Christodoros' epic *Patria* was constructed to demonstrate that

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[54] L. Focanti, "Looking for an Identity: The *Patria* and Greek Cities in the Late Antique Roman Empire", *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 96.3, 2018, p. 947-968, especially p. 952: "The first aspect we should highlight is the complete absence of *patria* from the Roman west".

[55] The text is preserved as Book II of the Palatine Anthology; H. Beckby, *Anthologia graeca*, Munich, 1957, vol. 2, p. 188-211. For the likely performance context, see A. Kaldellis, "Christodoros on the Statues of the Zeuxippos Baths: A New Reading of the *Ekphrasis*", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 47, 2007, p. 361-383, at p. 368-372; M. Whitby, "Christodorus of Coptus on the Statues in the Baths of Zeuxippus at Constantinople. Text and Context", in H. Bannert and N. Kroll (eds.), *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context II*, Leiden, 2018, p. 271-288, at p. 272, 284-286.

[56] H. Saradi, "Christodorus of Koptus, *The Statuary of the Baths of Zeuxippus*: Virgilian Heroes in a Constantinopolitan Context", *Κυπριακαί Σπουδαί* 68-69, 2016-2017, p. 703-717, at p. 709.

[57] A. Kaldellis, "Christodoros on the Statues...", p. 377-381; M. Kruse, *The Politics of Roman Memory*..., p. 72-76.

[58] R. Stupperich, "Das Statuenprogramm in den Zeuxippos-Thermen. Überlegungen zur Beschreibung durch Christodoros von Koptos", *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 32, 1982, p. 210-235; S. Bassett, *The Urban Image*..., p. 53-54; H. Saradi, "Christodorus of Koptus...", p. 706-714.

[59] M. Kruse, *The Politics of Roman Memory*..., p. 59-70.

Constantinople was both more Roman than Rome, because it was the Rome of the future, and better than Rome because it was a Rome with a Greek difference, this difference being its past in the ancient city of Byzantion. Christodoros and his contemporaries provided the New Rome with the alternative, Byzantine identity that Chalkokondyles would choose to prioritize one thousand years later. Why did it take so long for this alternative identity to come out on top?

In the short term, it had much to do with the political programme and ideological priorities of Justinian, who had no time for traditional Greek civic identities, especially if they involved mythological origins and republican constitutions other than that of the Roman Republic. In the long run, it suited the emperors and people of Constantinople to think of themselves as Romans, especially in their dealings with the barbarian world, which included just about everyone who was not an imperial subject. But things got complicated when the status and sovereignty of the New Rome were challenged by foreigners of Latin culture and religious obedience to the bishop of Old Rome. In these circumstances, the binary opposite of barbarian was not Roman but Greek, and the alternative, Byzantine identity of Constantinople had its uses. It rose to the surface on several occasions in the Middle Ages. It appeared in the local church as early as the sixth century, in what may be regarded as the Christian counterpart of Christodoros' *Patria*: the elaboration of the list of the early bishops of Byzantion and the legend that the first of them, Stachys, was consecrated by St Andrew the Apostle after his missionary tour of the Black Sea.[60] In the eighth century, the *Parastaseis* present the foundation of Constantinople as an act of aggression in which Constantine defeats the founders of Byzantion, who appear variously as Byzas, Antes, and Severus.[61] But it was the violent conquest of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade which decisively alienated the Greek inhabitants of New Rome from the original Romans of Latin Christendom. This sense of alienation is vividly expressed by Niketas Choniates in the appendix to his *History*, his famous *ekphrasis* and lament on the statues destroyed by the Latin conquerors in 1204. He dwells particularly on the fate of a statue of a beautiful female figure whom he identifies as Helen of Troy. The Latins, he says, did not even offer the excuse that they were acting out of patriotic revenge for Helen's role in the destruction of Troy, from which their Rome derived its ancestry.[62]

The inhabitants of Constantinople who were forced or chose to flee the city and set up political regimes in provincial centres likened themselves to the Jews

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[60] C. Mango, "Constantinople's Mount of Olives and Pseudo-Dorotheus of Tyre", *Νέα Ῥώμη. Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche* 6, 2009, p. 157-170.

[61] *Parastaseis*, ed. Th. Preger, *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum*, Leipzig, 1901, §38, 41, 52, 54; G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire*..., p. 78-93.

[62] Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J.-L. van Dieten, Berlin, 1975, p. 647-655, especially p. 652-653; F. Spingou, "Classicizing Visions of Constantinople after 1204: Niketas Choniates' *De signis* Reconsidered", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 76, 2022, p. 181-220.

in Babylonian exile from their Holy City.[63] However, they did not articulate their exclusion from the New Rome with the same typological clarity: if anything, the experience intensified their sense of Hellenic, rather than Roman identity. The Greek regimes in exile sought to repossess Constantinople for the political status and not the national identity that it conferred. After the city was repossessed by the emperor of Nicaea, Michael Palaiologos, the church's spokesman, Manuel Holobolos, hailed the emperor as New Constantine, as well as a New Zerubbabel who had brought the Elect Nation back to the New Zion.[64] But of New Rome, not a word.

The climax of this "de-romanizing" trend came forty to fifty years later in Theodore Metochites' monumental oration in praise of Constantinople.[65] Not only is New Rome never mentioned, but the transfer of empire from Old Rome is entirely written out of the narrative: Constantine simply transforms Byzantion into the world capital that Nature had always destined it to become. Old Rome and the ancient Romans make only brief appearances. Old Rome is a point of unfavourable comparison with Constantinople as a city that has only its ancient ruins to be proud of, and in matters of faith has gone astray. The Romans themselves feature more positively in the passage where Metochites describes the initial settling (συνοικισμός) of Constantinople.

> Immediately it was settled by the pick of the Hellenes and the Roman nobility, which then held sway. So from these two nations which excelled in intelligence and in strength and in the cultivation of great beauty, both by nurture and by nature – from these nations, then, was created and composed the first magnificent and noble establishment. As the natural scientists say, all things that exist consist of form and matter. So it was that the Fortune of Rome produced the form-giving principle, just as in every birth the seed comes from the male, while this land of Hellas, having once received it, provided everything else, that is the natural streams of matter, fine and abundant, or rather uncorrupted and pure, for this noble, universal blending, which resembles the first constitution of the universe. The seed and the material matrix were admirably suited to each other and to the perfect delivery of the whole, in a thoroughly well-tuned and harmonious construction.[66]

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[63] See, e.g., Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, p. 578, 591-592. For other sources and discussion, see D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 99; P. Magdalino and R. Nelson (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, Washington, D.C., 2010, p. 25-26; S. Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation*..., p. 173-179.

[64] Ed. M. Treu, *Manuelis Holoboli orationes*, Potsdam, 1906-1907, p. 43-44, 57, 83-84, 86; D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*..., p. 99; P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 105.

[65] Theodore Metochites, *Orationes*, ed. I. Polemis and E. Kaltsogianni, Berlin, 2019, no. 11, p. 430-552; previously published, with different chapter numbering, in I. Polemis, *Θεόδωρος Μετοχίτης, Βυζάντιος ἢ περὶ τῆς βασιλίδος μεγαλοπόλεως*, Thessaloniki, 2013.

[66] Ed. I. Polemis and E. Kaltsogianni, §58, p. 480-481.

The obvious message of this ingenious metaphor, derived from the Aristotelian theory of conception, is that the Roman, male element in the creation of Constantinople gives the city its form and therefore its identity. Yet Metochites subverts this obvious reading by reserving his lyrical praise for the female contribution from the land of Hellas that provided "everything else". The implication is that Constantinople gets more of lasting value from its gestating, nurturing Greek mother than from its penetrating and inseminating Roman father. And the implication is not contradicted by the title that Metochites gives his work: *Byzantios, or concerning the imperial megalopolis*.

Long neglected by historians of Constantinople because of its total lack of concrete reference to specific buildings and topography, the *Byzantios*, since its critical edition by Ioannis Polemis, now stands revealed not only as the greatest rhetorical work of Theodore Metochites, but also as a major contribution to the urban image of what we may now unashamedly call Byzantine Constantinople.[67] It was, in its way, as significant as Metochites' restoration of the Chora monastery church, which as the Kariye Camii is the most visited Byzantine monument in Istanbul after Hagia Sophia.[68] The *Byzantios* belatedly did for Constantinople, almost a thousand years after its foundation, what the great orators of the Second Sophistic had done for famous cities of the ancient world. Its title consciously echoed the *Panathenaikos* of Aelius Aristides and the *Antiochikos* of Libanius. The *Byzantios* is important to us here because it introduces a number of themes that previously were considered to be innovations of fifteenth-century authors:[69] ancient ruins and comparison with Rome (Manuel Chrysoloras), the mixture of Greek and Roman populations (Chrysoloras, Isidore of Kiev,[70] and Chalkokondyles), and the suppression of Constantinople's identity as New Rome, which is the singular feature of Chalkokondyles' narrative of the transfer of empire.

The *Byzantios* may thus be regarded as the first coherent statement of Byzantine identity. At the same time, it may be seen as the culmination of a Byzantine tradition of Byzantine studies, a local tradition of writing about Constantinople's past that distanced the New Rome from the Old by justifying and contextualizing Constantine's decision to upgrade the ancient Greek city of Byzantion into a new imperial capital. Metochites' oration was the last of three major literary compositions that celebrated Constantinople, the others being the lost epic *Patria* of Christodoros of Koptos and the anonymous so-called *Patria* of the late tenth century. The relationship of these texts

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[67] P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 109-143.

[68] On which, see most recently M. Studer-Karlen (ed.), *Biography of a Landmark: The Chora Monastery/ Kariye Camii in Constantinople/Istanbul from Late Antiquity to the 21st Century*, Leiden, 2023.

[69] For the authors and the political and intellectual context of their work, see in general F. Leonte, *Imperial Visions of Late Byzantium: Manuel II Palaiologos and Rhetoric in Purple*, Edinburgh, 2020.

[70] For Isidore's praise of Constantinople, see F. Leonte, *Imperial Visions*..., p. 86-88; P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 141-143.

to the *Byzantios* does not concern us here.[71] What matters is that the Byzantine studies that invented Byzantine identity did not begin with Chalkokondyles, with Renaissance humanism, or with the Latin denial that the Greeks were really Romans. Byzantine studies existed long before the fifteenth century, and they were made in Byzantium. We do not need to refer to the one or the other by any other names.

[71] For some remarks relating and comparing them, see P. Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople*..., p. 51, 136-137, 143-149.