Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 40 (1) 17–26

Forty years on: the political ideology of the Byzantine empire

Paul Magdalino
University of St Andrews
pm8@st-andrews.ac.uk

Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies was launched in the middle of a decade that saw many landmark events in Byzantine scholarship. I remember them well, because this was the decade when I became a Byzantinist, and attended my first two international congresses of Byzantine Studies, the 14th in Ceauşescu's Bucharest (1971), and the 15th, in post-Junta Athens (1976). Apart from the acts of these congresses, the 1970s produced many memorable publications that shaped our field. It would take too long to list them all, and it would be invidious to make, and justify, a small selection. I have chosen to focus my retrospective look on one small monograph of 1975 that makes a comprehensive statement about Byzantium and is therefore a representative illustration of where Byzantine studies were forty years ago and how far they have come, or not come, since then. My book of the decade is *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin* by Hélène Ahrweiler (Paris 1975).

The book was an original synthesis of conventional opinions formed mainly in the first half of the twentieth century. The influence of Ahrweiler's Parisian mentor, Paul Lemerle, is never far below the surface, and neither is that of the Greek secular tradition of Byzantinist historiography, then led by Dionysios Zakythinos, under whom Ahrweiler had studied in Athens. Her debt to other Byzantinists of her teachers' generation, particularly Franz Dölger and George Ostrogorsky, is also recognisable, and not only from her footnotes. No less apparent, however, is her own independent reading of the primary sources, particularly of the middle Byzantine period, and her sharp eye for the unusual, arresting reference. If her periodization of Byzantine history is familiar from most textbooks, her characterization of each period was fairly distinctive, and she succeeded as well as any historian before or after her in constructing a narrative of change and evolution out of the recognition that Byzantine political ideology was essentially programmed from the beginning by the Roman emperor who imposed Constantinople and Christianity on the hellenistic world of east Rome.

DOI: 10.1017/byz.2015.3

Ahrweiler's working definition of Byzantine political ideology was and remains far from banal. It was not primarily, as one might have expected, about Byzantine political thought: about the cult of the ruler, the ideal constitution, and the theoretical justification of monarchical absolutism. The author does devote her last chapter to this subject, and she revealingly numbers it as 'chapitre unique,' thus avoiding the suggestion that it is secondary or supplementary to her main theme. However, the preceding seven chapters concern the status, function and purpose of the Byzantine state as conceived and idealised by those who identified with it — the articulate Byzantines whose writings have been preserved. Although the word 'identité' hardly ever appears, the theme of collective political identity is the thread that guides the narrative over the eleven centuries from the foundation of Constantinople by Constantine to the Ottoman conquest. The story is neatly formulated in terms of a progression from 'universalisme' to 'nationalisme' to 'impérialisme' to an increasingly complex 'patriotisme' that finally fractures into multiple, increasingly conflicting and utopian patriotisms before going underground as a Great Idea of Greek national restoration.

The story begins with the reshaping of the Roman Empire by the foundation of Constantinople and the adoption of Christianity as the state religion. The long-term result was that, 'the eastern Empire became from now on the bastion of Christianity and the refuge of Greco-Roman culture' (p. 16).

> The diplomacy, military and administrative organisation, intellectual orientation and spiritual aspirations — in short, the whole life and history of the eastern Roman Empire, of Byzantium, will from now on be inspired by two opposite and contradictory principles. The one, realistic and oriental, insists on the maintenance of the remaining Roman territory and the development of the Byzantine peoples within its borders. The other, idealistic and western, aspires to the reconquest of the Roman West from the barbarians and to the return of the subjected western brethren to the great Roman national fold. The dream of the universal great idea, now incarnated in the *Reconquista* of the ancient Roman world, will from now on be opposed to the wise, conservative policy that requires writing off the Empire's losses and the consolidation of its eastern part, the source of its prosperity and the basis of its military strength (p. 17).

The expansionist wars of Justinian overstretched the empire's resources and alienated the peoples of the eastern provinces, thus facilitating the Arab conquests. Accordingly, the ideology forged by the iconoclast emperors of the eighth and early ninth centuries was one of national defence based on the militarised, rural society of Asia Minor. Iconoclasm was just the religious aspect of a programme of social and administrative reform aimed at inciting the national army to fight for faith and fatherland against the infidel invader.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.3 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Thus Byzantium turned away from the grandiose Roman ideal to embrace the defence of its soldiers' native soil and homeland coveted by its adversaries, who are the enemies of the Byzantines' state and faith. In other words, they are the enemies of the Byzantine nation born out of the danger that hangs over the Empire from the infidels, the Arabs (p. 33).
>
> From now on the Byzantines normally consider themselves to be the new 'Chosen People', their Empire is the appointed defender of Christendom, their state and army are God's instrument against his infidel enemies ... It is not an exaggeration to say that Byzantine nationalism was exactly the Byzantine response to the holy war of Islam (p. 35).
>
> This notion of a noble war, that is of a war waged for the defence of Christendom, will take over from the war for the reconstitution of the Roman Empire, which had formerly motivated the universalist Byzantine Empire. To put it more simply, in its supreme effort for survival, the Empire drew its strength from its 'right belief'; henceforth, it is *orthodoxy* ('right belief'') that it will determinedly defend against all enemies, internal or external (p. 36).

In the course of the ninth century, this defensive nationalism mutated, according to Ahrweiler, into an aggressive imperialism, as the Empire shifted its priorities from an orthodoxy of iconoclasm to one of icon veneration, from the militarised rural world of inner Anatolia to the towns and trade of the Mediterranean coastlands, from defending the eastern frontier of Christendom against Islam to a strategy of recovering lost influence and territory in Europe, where the enemy was more often Christian than Muslim. While not abandoning the universalist yearnings of the past, this new imperialism adapted itself to the Empire's reduced circumstances. Its programme of territorial expansion coincided with the hegemony of the 'Macedonian' dynasty (867–1056), and its ideology was summed up in the opening chapters of the law code attributed to the patriarch Photios, who is otherwise best known for his opposition to the Roman papacy.[1] The *Epanagoge/Eisagoge* underlined the emperor's duty to recover lost imperial territories, and even to extend them, while it envisaged a complementary role for the patriarch in the reintegration of heretics and the conversion of unbelievers. In Ahrweiler's view, it was during this period of mainly successful expansionism, and increasing wealth, that the Byzantines developed their sense of being a 'Chosen People' into a superiority complex with regard to all other peoples, whether Christian or not, whom they dismissed or patronised as barbarians.

> One can say that the multi-ethnic and multinational Empire that Byzantium used to be has given way to one that is Greek Orthodox and mono-cultural,

1 When Ahrweiler wrote, the text was still universally known under the title *Epanagoge*. It was subsequently demonstrated that the correct title is *Eisagoge* (i.e. *Introduction*): A. Schminck, *Studien zu mittelbyzantinischen Rechtsbüchern* (Frankfurt 1986) 12–13.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.3 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> and therefore intolerant and intransigent in its attitude to peoples and nations governed by different ideals (pp. 51–2).

The material basis of Byzantine imperialism and superiority was rapidly eroded by the political and military collapse of the Empire in the late eleventh century, but the cultural mentalities that had sustained them survived and flourished in the twelfth century as a bundle of patriotic identities. One was the intellectual Hellenism derived from the reading and imitation of ancient Greek literature; another was religious Orthodoxy, which despite their initial incompatibility, made common cause with Hellenism against the Latin West, increasingly seen as the main external threat. Greek Orthodoxy located its patriotism in Constantinople, whose exceptional wealth and splendour made it a magnet for Byzantines and foreigners alike. Finally, the accession of Alexios I Komnenos (1081) gave supreme power to the patriotism of a military aristocracy, which, like the iconoclast emperors of the eighth century, made a priority of national defence. But the national revival this produced was compromised by the impact of the crusades, the economic concessions to the Italian trading republics, and the imperial ambitions of Manuel I Komnenos. 'It was in fact Manuel Komnenos who wanted to put into effect the foolish and grandiose idea of reuniting once again under the aegis of Constantinople, but with the support of the pope, the worlds of West and East Rome' (p. 85).

Manuel's 'utopian dream' and 'megalomania,' which he pursued by befriending the Latins, cost the Empire dear, and provoked a reaction against the western-oriented, Constantinople-centred, and aristocratic ideology of his dynasty.

> The aristocratic patriotism of the Komnenoi, which wanted to make Byzantium the prestigious empire of yesteryear and Constantinople the centre of the civilised world, will be abandoned; a passionate and popular patriotism, fed by hatred of the Latins, and a provincial patriotic spirit, modest in its ambitions but firm in its desires, will henceforth dictate the ideological policy of Byzantium, which, blinded by anti-Latin passion, and threatened by both East and West at the same time, will never regain its breath that had made it great (p. 87).

Byzantium at the end of the twelfth century was marked by 'a strong centrifugal movement' (p. 90) of the provinces away from Constantinople, which had alienated them by its fiscal exploitation, corrupt and licentious lifestyle, and disdainful neglect of provincial interests. Thus the diversion of a large part of the Fourth Crusade against Constantinople met with no concerted resistance from the Empire as a whole: 'in the Byzantine world at that time, living in a climate of "everyone for himself", patriotism had vanished, or, at most, it took on the guise of regional defence under the leadership of local lords, distancing itself from the corrupt and perverted world of Constantinople' (pp. 98–9). It took the outrageous sack of Constantinople by the crusaders, and their appropriation of the city as the capital of a Latin Empire, to 'reawaken the national

conscience' and 'national unanimity', and 'give birth to the new Byzantine patriotism which will now crystallise on the fate of Constantinople and the struggle against its conquerors' (p. 101) ... 'The Orthodox and Constantinopolitan passion will motivate the 'holy war' of the Greeks, of the Byzantines as a whole, not against the Infidels, the Turks, but against their former brothers, the Latins' (p. 103).

The task of expelling the Latins from Constantinople fell to the three Byzantine 'governments in exile': most marginally the Empire of Trebizond, more importantly the western Despotate of Epiros that briefly became the Empire of Thessalonike, and most conclusively the Empire of Nicaea. Ahrweiler presents 'l'expérience nicéenne'[2] as decisive not only for the recovery of Constantinople, but also for the development of Byzantine nationalism, since it brought together two different social groups with different expectations of their common anti-Latin cause: the exiled Constantinopolitan elite, and the local society of western Asia Minor.

> The fundamental requirement of recapturing Constantinople, the main objective of the unified anti-Latin ideology, will be understood by the former as the necessary condition for recuperating their lost possessions and restoring their power, while the latter will see in it the ultimate hope for the renewal of the Greek spirit and of Orthodoxy that were both threatened by the Latins. In other words, the former hoped to find in reconquered Constantinople an universal and imperial New Rome, while the others saw in it a New Jerusalem and a veritable anti-Rome. It was on this ambiguity that the Constantinopolitan dream of the Greek people was founded just after 1204, the dream that gave birth to a separate ideology, that known by the evocative name of the "Great Idea". It is this ideology that lies at the basis of Modern Greek patriotism, which sustained the Byzantines for a long time and to our own day has not ceased to galvanise the minds of extremists who want to see the cross of the Hellenic flag flying on Hagia Sophia. It is an irony of fate that this chauvinistic ideology, the Great Idea, was born as a riposte to the Christian imperialism of the West and not against the Turks (pp. 110–1).

The decisive ascendancy of the Constantinopolitan elite through the *coup d'état* of Michael Palaiologos (1258) ensured that it was the provincial patriotism that became marginalised when, three years later, the forces of the Nicaean Empire retook Constantinople. This had disastrous consequences both for Byzantine national unity and for the defence of Asia Minor, which Michael VIII sacrificed to his strategy of regaining imperial territory in the Balkans and preventing a western counter-offensive to restore the Latin Empire of Constantinople. Once more, a 'grandiose', western-oriented and Constantinople-centred policy of imperial renewal brought the empire to the verge of collapse and left its ideology in disarray.

2 The author also published an article with this title: 'L'expérience nicéenne', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975) 23–40; note that a French 'expérience' can also be an experiment.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.3 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> The Empire, caught once more between the East and the West, will be obliged to reconsider its objectives, to revise its policy and to abandon its dreams. Its ideology will take on aspects that presage a bitter reality; the present will be fleeting and the future uncertain. Fear and doubt henceforward dominate the Byzantine world, confined to its Balkan territory before becoming imprisoned and asphyxiated within the walls of its ever-legendary capital (p. 119).

> In this climate of national distress the Byzantines will react, but each one according to his social condition, his cultural level, and his own interests; in other words, the disenchanted citizen will be replaced by the individual. Everyone according to his strength and aspirations will look for personal solutions, whose only common trait will be the lack of all hope in the future of the Byzantine state (p. 121).

Byzantine society became increasingly polarised into two 'courants': a cultural, mainly aristocratic elite who took comfort in the study of the ancient Greek past and nourished the utopian dream of a Hellenic renaissance, and a fanatical religious mass who put their faith in apocalyptic prophecies and the promise of an ultimate, messianic deliverance. The former found refuge and recognition in the West, while 'those of the popular and ecclesiastical current, blinded by their anti-Latin passion, had no hesitation in siding with the Turks' (p. 123).

The diachronic narrative of the 'national' aspects of Byzantine political ideology is followed by a synchronic analysis of the working of the imperial system, to which Ahrweiler devotes her final section. This, intriguingly, not only constitutes a 'chapitre unique' with the title 'Les principes fondamentaux de la pensée politique à Byzance', but comes under the heading 'problèmes de recherche' — as if the research for the preceding chapters was entirely problem-free. After a short discussion of the relationship between church and state, in which she rejects the idea of Byzantine caesaropapism, the author identifies two governing principles in the imperial constitution: order (*taxis*), meaning above all the hierarchical ordering of society, and management (*oikonomia*), by which order was adjusted to make it work in practice.

L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin does not explicitly or obviously pursue a Greek nationalist agenda. Yet the way that Hélène Ahrweiler, *née* Eleni Glykatzi, approaches Byzantine political ideology places her firmly in a Modern Greek historiographical tradition of defining Byzantium as the medieval Greek state. The teleology of her approach is apparent in her critique of the Great Idea, quoted above, and her implication that all Byzantine attempts at imperial restoration, from Justinian to Michael Palaiologos, were precursors of this chimeric pursuit that went against the national interest. It makes no difference that she locates the national interest in Asia Minor rather than the Greek peninsula and the Aegean islands; this goes back to Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, from whom she ultimately derived her notion that Byzantine nationalism was forged by the reform programme of the iconoclast emperors. One might suspect, moreover, that in locating the real Byzantium east of the Aegean, in the eighth as again in the thirteenth century, she was affected by her own background in a Greek refugee family from Asia

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.3 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Minor displaced by the debacle of the Great Idea in 1922–3. Other contemporary events in Greek politics that might have played their part behind the scenes of the book were the military dictatorship of 1967–1974, with its plans for the annexation of Cyprus and its slogan of 'Hellas for Christian Hellenes',[3] and the prospect of Greece's accession to the European Community, which was its reward for the country's return to democracy. Certainly, the question of Byzantium's European identity was one that exercised Greek Byzantinists, including Ahrweiler, as well as Greek politicians, in the following decades.[4]

Ahrweiler's evaluation of Byzantine political ideology in terms of national teleology echoed, at least for the period after 1204, the narrative of a book that had recently appeared in English translation: Apostolos Vakalopoulos' *Origins of the Greek Nation*.[5] For some reason — its greater sophistication, its coverage of the whole Byzantine period, its avoidance of a simple equation between Hellenism and nationalism? — her thesis did not draw the same criticism from western Byzantinists. Neither, however, did it particularly resonate with scholars outside Greece, for whom the concept of Byzantine political ideology remained elusive, and difficult to disentangle from Byzantine political pragmatism. The introduction to a volume of essays on *Byzantium and the West*, published in 1988, memorably stated, 'Byzantium's handicap was too little, not too much ideology.'[6] The issues of nationalism, imperialism, Orthodoxy, Hellenism, and patriotism that Ahrweiler highlighted, as well as the imperial *taxis* and *oikonomia* of her 'chapitre unique', have all been treated piecemeal in various publications. There has also been in recent years a sustained attempt, by Anthony Kaldellis, to deal systematically with questions of Byzantine identity, both the Hellenic cultural identity of the educated elite,[7] and the Roman political identity of Byzantine society as a whole, which Kaldellis designates 'the Byzantine republic'.[8] Ahrweiler's book features sporadically in the footnotes and bibliographies of these works, but none of them engages with it frontally, either to criticise or to approve. A partial exception is the book that comes closest to it in theme and in title; but Dimiter Angelov limited his study to the thirteenth and

3 There is an oblique reference to the military Junta in the comment that the national symbol of the phoenix rising from the ashes is 'souvent ... galvaudé' (p. 125).

4 She wrote the introduction to the volume *Byzantium and Europe, First International Byzantine Conference, European Cultural Center of Delphi (Delphi, 20–24 July 1985)* (Athens 1987), ed. A. Markopoulos, which had contributions from eight other Greek Byzantinists. They included Evangelos Chrysos, who ensured that Byzantium was energetically represented in the 'Transformation of the Roman World' project that was financed by the European Science Foundation. The volume *Byzance et l'Europe* (Paris 2001) was published by the Greek Embassy in France. Ahrweiler also wrote the preface to M.-F. Auzépy (ed.), *Byzance en Europe* (Paris 2003).

5 A. Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation: The Byzantine Period, 1204–1461* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1970).

6 J. Howard-Johnston, introduction to *Byzantium and the West c. 850–1204* [=*Byzantinische Forschungen* 13 (1988)] 24.

7 A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge 2007).

8 A. Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic. People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA–London 2015).

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.3 Published online by Cambridge University Press

early fourteenth centuries, and focused on a type of source material, imperial panegyric, that Ahrweiler had had no room, or no inclination, to consider.[9]

The retrospective reviewer is thus left wondering whether the book should be regarded as a period piece of outmoded historiography that has been quietly re-shelved, or whether it has not been seriously challenged because it has basically remained valid. The book's great merit, which also carries its main defect, is that its narrative is clear and schematic to the point of oversimplification. The factors contributing to this cannot entirely be explained as specific to the 1970s and earlier. The book's small format left no room for extensive theoretical discussion or empirical analysis. The tendency to rhetorical and dramatic exaggeration is an enduring feature of French academic prose that makes it difficult to render in English, as the translated excerpts above may show. This leaves us with the author's slick methodology, which puts the plodding reader on his guard. A flagrant example is the elision of the 'realistic East' of the pre-seventh-century, 'universalist' empire with the eastern core of the 'national' state of the iconoclast eighth century, even though in the earlier period 'the East' consisted primarily of Syria and Egypt, while after the Arab conquests it was confined to Anatolia. Another remarkable sleight of hand is the unapologetic use of the *Taktika* of Leo VI, a text of c. 900 from Ahrweiler's period of Byzantine 'imperialism', as evidence for the 'nationalist' ideology of the preceding period.[10] It would be hard to claim that tricks like this are no longer a part of our trade. On the other hand, the author's general tendency to take her cherry-picked sources at face value and quote them, out of context, as positive proofs of contemporary attitudes was still, in the 1970s, a fairly standard practice that has become increasingly unacceptable in our postmodern age.

Since the work does not take on board all the relevant publications prior to 1975,[11] one cannot be sure how much the author would have been affected by later scholarship in the field. The cumulative effect of this scholarship, however, has been to nuance, and sometimes to contradict, every generalisation in her book. A book written today on the same subject could not have made a coherent, let alone a credible argument in such a rapid romp over eleven centuries; no self-respecting Byzantinist, however impatient to have done with 'Late Antiquity', could get away with dealing with the 'universalism' of the period 330–641 in a mere thirteen pages.[12] To look at what Ahrweiler does say rather than what she omits, I would just point to two instances where a more balanced knowledge of the historical situation leads to a more accurate reading of the evidence. Both instances concern the author's idealisation of the East.

9 D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330* (Cambridge 2006).

10 *L'idéologie politique*, 33–4. Leo VI was 'inspiré sans doute des traités militaires des époques précédentes'.

11 Notable omissions are H.-G. Beck, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Munich 1966); Beck, *Res Publica Romana. Vom Staatsdenken der Byzantiner* (Munich 1970); and F. Tinnefeld, *Kategorien der Kaiserkritik in der byzantinischen Historiographie von Prokop bis Niketas Choniates* (Munich 1971).

12 Byzantinists have been taken to task for much less summary treatment than this: see Averil Cameron, *Byzantine Matters* (Princeton and Oxford 2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.3 Published online by Cambridge University Press

It has been proved that iconoclasm was not a religious movement confined exclusively or primarily to the eastern provinces,[13] and recent research has highlighted the strategic and economic importance of Sicily to the empire in the seventh and eighth centuries.[14] It is therefore implausible that the iconoclast emperors privileged the nationalism of inland Anatolia at the expense of the capital and the coasts; indeed, the main sources for the period provide ample evidence that the main iconoclast emperor, Constantine V, invested heavily in the regeneration of Constantinople and its maritime links with the Aegean and beyond.[15]

In the context of the thirteenth century and 'l'expérience nicéenne', Ahrweiler contends, as we have seen, that the success of the Empire of Nicaea was based on a tense and fragile co-operation between a provincial aristocracy and the aristocratic refugees from the Latin occupation of Constantinople. The one concrete example of this tension that she cites is the murder of the Mouzalon brothers, after the death of Theodore II Laskaris, by the faction that favoured the usurpation of Michael Palaiologos (p. 113).[16] Yet if the Mouzalons were associated with Asia Minor in the thirteenth century, the family had produced a patriarch of Constantinople a century earlier;[17] whatever their geographical origins, what we see in this episode is not so much a conflict between Constantinople and the provinces, as a division, which had its roots in the Constantinople of the Komnenoi, between a princely nobility and an administrative elite at the imperial court.[18]

13 Ahrweiler tacitly altered her position (pp. 28–9) in a subsequent publication: 'The geography of the Iconoclast world', in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham 1977) 21–27.

14 V. Prigent, 'Le rôle des provinces d'Occident dans l'approvisionnement de Constantinople (618–717). Témoignages numismatique et sigillographique', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Moyen-Âge*, 118/2 (2006) 269–99.

15 Constantine V repopulated Constantinople with families from central Greece and the islands, he married his eldest son and heir into a family from Athens, and two generations later the shipowners of Constantinople could afford major capital investments: Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig 1883) 429, 444, 487; trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford 1997) 593, 613, 668. Cf. P. Magdalino, 'Constantine V and the Middle Age of Constantinople', in P. Magdalino, *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople* (Aldershot 2007), no. IV.

16 For the episode see R. Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History* (Oxford 2007) 24–8, 339–43.

17 For Nicholas IV and his career, see the introduction to the recent edition of the poem in which he justified his resignation from the archbishopric of Cyprus: ed. and trans. G. Strano, *Nicola Muzalone, Carme apologetico* (Acireale - Rome 2012).

18 This emerges from the prosopographical analysis of A. P. Kazhdan, *Sotsialnyi sostav gospodsvuyushkego klassa Vizantii XI-XII vv.* (Moscow 1974); Italian edition with S. Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia bizantina dal principio dell' XI alla fine del XII secolo* (Palermo 1997). For commentary, see P. Magdalino, 'Byzantine snobbery', in M. Angold (ed), *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series 221 (Oxford 1984) 58–78 [repr. in P. Magdalino, *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Byzantium* (Aldershot 1991), no. I]; Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge 1993) 187–90.

A retrospective assessment, forty years on? It depends what we expect of our works of historical scholarship. Are they to be pieces of academic journalism — provisional bulletins of information, arguments in a passing debate, ephemeral statements of opinion — to be discarded when read and replaced as soon as possible? Or should they aspire to be classics in their genre, works of literature that endure as works of reference? Few academic historians can afford to opt entirely for one or the other: like the authors of both their primary and their secondary sources, they are constantly pulled in both directions. Hélène Ahrweiler and her book are a case in point. *L'idéologie politique* succeeds brilliantly as academic journalism, while lacking the depth and the subtlety to be a classic. Yet it contains many classic statements for which it is worth re-reading. There is no better formulation of the relationship between *taxis* and *oikonomia*. No-one has yet come much closer to cracking the enigma of the alliance between Hellenic culture and Orthodox ideology, or mapped much more precisely the contours of the grey area where they overlapped. Although the ideological limits of Hellenism have been well defined,[19] the jury is still out on the cultural penetration of Orthodoxy.[20] The book is also an indispensible starting point for reflection on the tension between centre and periphery, both in Byzantium and in the post-Byzantine Greek world. We may still ask, with Ahrweiler, why has Constantinople been so essential for the identity of the nation, and so fatal to its political viability? The distinct notions of universalism, nationalism, imperialism and patriotism remain useful tools, which contemporary research on Byzantine political ideology would do well not to ignore, although it may be helpful to study them as occurring in parallel rather than in sequence. Finally, *L'idéologie politique* is worth revisiting for an eloquent reminder of the greatest paradox of all: 'that the notion of the West ... was born in Byzantium' (p. 81); that medieval Greek *Romania* ultimately built its national ideology on hatred of the Latin West, on the 'definitive divorce between these two worlds which, however, as Sophocles would say, "were born to love and not to hate each other"' (p. 102).

19 Kaldellis, *Hellenism*.

20 At issue is the degree to which Orthodoxy constituted a set of shared, identifying values beyond theological definitions. Independently of Ahrweiler, Beck formulated the idea of a 'political orthodoxy' based on 'ritual orthodoxy', and I identified this as the essential marker of the Byzantine cultural elite: H.G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich 1978) 87–108; Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel*, chapter 5, especially 316–20; Magdalino, 'Orthodoxy and Byzantine cultural identity', in A. Rigo and P. Ermilov (eds), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Byzantium*, Quaderni di *Νέα Ῥώμη* 4 (Rome 2010) 21–40. The essentialism of Byzantine Orthodoxy has been challenged from very different quarters: Cameron, *Byzantine Matters*, 87–111; Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, xi.

https://doi.org/10.1017/byz.2015.3 Published online by Cambridge University Press