Pınar Üre, *Reclaiming Byzantium: Russia, Turkey and the Archaeological Claim to the Middle East in the 19th Century*. London: I B Tauris 2020. Pp. 212
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There was once a time when Russian nationalists envisioned themselves celebrating the first Orthodox Liturgy in the Hagia Sophia in almost five hundred years.

The man who made such grand plans, Fyodor Uspensky (1845–1928), was not only one of the most energetic Byzantinists of his time and an important pioneer in Russia in the study of the Byzantine Empire, but also a dreamer with passions ranging from pan-Slavism to pan-Orthodoxy. Furthermore, Uspensky spent twenty years heading the Russian Archaeological Institute in the very heart of the old Byzantine capital, and when he envisioned the reconversion of the Hagia Sophia into a church, it was in the middle of a war in which Russia seemed closer than ever to its century-long dream of wresting the capital from the Ottomans.

Pınar Üre's study of the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople – founded shortly before the accession of Tsar Nicholas II in 1894 and closed upon the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 – operates exactly at this intersection of politics and scholarship and shows how intimately intertwined they were for nineteenth-century imperialists. It is a book that nicely illustrates how science, religion, economic interests and territorial claims all worked in the service of retrieving, examining and preserving Byzantine heritage in Ottoman territories.

In the nineteenth century, European powers were beginning to establish archaeological institutes around the Mediterranean, mainly for the purpose of classical studies, although later periods were also taken into consideration. Such institutes simultaneously staked out geographical and historical claims by showcasing the patron countries' physical presence in, and ideological identification with, the lands of the ancient Mediterranean.

Constantinople or Istanbul was not the obvious spot to choose when proposals were made to found a Russian archeological institute by the Mediterranean; some argued that Athens would be a more practical location. Several factors tilted the decision in favour of the Ottoman capital, and it was probably not so much a particular Russian identification with Byzantine history and heritage (which, as Üre shows, was far less developed and articulated than is often assumed) as a mixture of political and religious interests that settled the matter. As events leading up to the Crimean War (1853–6) had already shown, Orthodoxy provided Russia with a foothold in the Middle East – manifested in the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society founded in 1882 – and Constantinople was a main hub for Russian pilgrims. In the Balkans, however, it was pan-Slavism rather than Orthodoxy that seemed to hold the greater promise for Russia to increase its influence over the Ottoman territories stretching from Macedonia to Thrace. Under the guise of scholarly interests, an institute in the Ottoman capital would support Russian efforts in both directions. It is no coincidence that such plans took shape in the wake of the 1875–78 Eastern Crisis, as waning British support for the Ottomans

rekindled Russian hopes of gaining control over the Bosporus and the Dardanelles, or that the Institute, during the twenty years of its operation, received direct funding from Tsar Nicholas II himself.

The Ottomans were of course aware of this, and made it clear to their Russian guests from the outset that they were keeping a watchful eye and had the legal means to obstruct it if they so wished. As tensions grew in the early years of the twentieth century, the Institute found its activities increasingly circumscribed: excavation permits were refused and the acquisition of antiquities was closely supervised. One remarkable quality of this book is that it shifts effortlessly between the Russian and Ottoman sources and contexts. Highlighting how the Ottomans pursued their own imperial project of integration and consolidation while one territory after another fell under the sway of European powers, Üre shows how they became painfully aware of the political dimension of archaeology in the process. The man who set the tone here was the renowned Ottoman polymath, Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910), state official, legal scholar, archaeologist, art historian, painter, and founder of the Istanbul Archeological Museum.

Uspensky, whose career followed the history of the Institute from beginning to end and who vainly tried to push for its restoration in the Soviet era, is the book's protagonist; but the book also presents the reader with an impressive gallery of influential scholars and intellectuals who were connected to the institute in various ways – Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925), Pavel Milyukov (1859–1943), Michael Rostovtzeff (1870–1952), and, not least, Alexander Vasiliev (1867–1953), to mention but a few. The political dimension should not be allowed to overshadow the Institute's significant scholarly accomplishments, and it is a great shame that the outbreak of war in 1914 not only put an end to its activities, but ended its plans for a more thorough survey of the Great Palace grounds, or the ruins of the Stoudios monastery, than those that would later be conducted in early Republican Turkey. Strangely, something that the book does not discuss at all is the physical location of the Institute in Istanbul. When it was vacated in great haste in the autumn of 1914, the institute left behind an impressive library and museum, collections that were scattered after the war. Also noteworthy is that in 1916, its exiled scholars managed to make a survey of the Byzantine heritage in then Russian-controlled Trabzon.

For a book of such scholarly quality, it is irritating to see that the publishing house has not taken greater care to review the language and proofread the text. Articles are frequently missing, even in conspicuous places like chapter titles, and it feels somewhat surprising to read that the institute was opened with a religious ceremony in 1985! Someone should have copy-edited sentences like 'neither did Russian policymakers unrealistically tried to grasp Ottoman territories' or references to mosque calligraphy as 'Muslim signs', because they ill serve an otherwise highly commendable work.

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