

Byzantium and the Other: Relations and Exchanges

Review Number:

1386

Publish date:

Thursday, 28 February, 2013

Author:

Angeliki Laiou

ISBN:

9781409432067

Date of Publication:

2012

Price:

£90.00

Pages:

344pp.

Publisher:

Ashgate

Publisher url:

http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&calcTitle=1&title_id=11092&edition_id=11435

Place of Publication:

Farnham

Reviewer:

Scott Parker

This rich volume, *Byzantium and the Other: Relations and Exchanges*, is one of three collections of essays designed to bear testament to the legacy of the late Byzantine scholar Angeliki Laiou. The other two volumes are entitled: *Women, Family and Society in Byzantium* and *Economic Thought and Economic Life in Byzantium*. Together, these three volumes ably demonstrate Laiou's intellectual abilities and scholarly interests in Byzantine social and economic history. The present volume begins with an introduction by David Jacoby followed by 14 essays derived from various edited volumes and journals dating from 1982 to 2012. They are divided into three sections: 'Byzantium and the Other' (three essays); 'Byzantium and the Crusades' (four); and 'Long distance trade and relations (seven).

In the first article, 'The foreigner and the stranger in 12th-century Byzantium: means of propitiation and acculturation', Laiou concentrates particularly on the Byzantine concept of the 'foreigner' in 12th-century Constantinople. She asks the important questions of what defines a foreigner? How does this concept develop? Conversely, how was the concept of 'self' understood by the Byzantines? The primary foreigners considered are the Crusaders and Venetians, while Laiou especially relies upon Anna Komnene and Nicetas Choniates in her discussion of both 'perceived exclusion' and the means of inclusion. Rather than defining foreigners in religious terms, secular definitions evolved from 'Romans' ('Helenes') and non-Romans ('Barbarians') and other factors became more important 'based on a language, a shared classical past, an appreciation of the classics and the virtues of the Greeks' (p. 78). The Hellenisation process and the binding by treaties, oaths, and mechanisms such as marriage helped in the assimilation of the foreigner. Laiou concludes her essay by noting that the rural and common people probably had a much weaker self-

identification and could be less hostile to new Turkish and Latin rulers than to the imperial rulers themselves.

The themes of this first essay are complemented by the next: 'L'étranger de passage et l'étranger privilégié à Byzance, XIe-XIIe siècles'. Laiou here analyses the self-perception of foreigners dwelling within the Byzantine Empire. Foreigners such as Armenians and Georgians – both Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians, often in imperial service – generally acculturated well into Byzantine society even if still identifying themselves by their foreign origin. The late 11th-century Georgian Gregorios Pakourianos is a primary example. In contrast to this successful assimilation, however, are the Franks, who came into contact with Byzantium at this time especially via the Crusade. Whether a conscious difference of understanding or a subconscious cultural conflict, the Crusaders largely did not assimilate as did the Armenians and Georgians. Whereas the Byzantines understood the legal relationship of the Crusader nobles as necessarily subordinate to the emperor, the Crusaders themselves understood their relationship with the emperor as feudal in nature with consideration of their special position as warriors of the Faith. Cultural differences such as this bred distrust and led to various degrees of conflict throughout the 12th century.

The final essay in this section, 'Institutional mechanisms of integration', approaches this discussion of integration and assimilation within the Byzantine Empire by analysing the methods utilised by the Byzantine state and church for this purpose. These include the more obvious means such as Christian conversion, Greek language, imperial service, and intermarriage. Here, however, Laiou looks at the role of the judicial system as a mechanism for integration and, also in this context, at taxation. She discusses self-consciously separate communities (for example, Jews) and foreign merchants, summarising government pragmatism by quoting the jurist Demetrios Chomatianos that 'sometimes it is necessary to permit even barbarian, foreign customs' (p. 166). Privileges granted to Venetian, Genoese, and other merchants from the tenth century grew invariably to the detriment of the Byzantines. By the end of the 12th century, as Laiou concludes, 'the loss of jurisdiction over ... the foreign merchants ... was an institutional defeat; and it went hand in hand with the declining authority of the state over its own subjects in terms both of justice and of finance, with the growth of private jurisdictions and financial immunities' (p. 178).

The second section of this collection begins with an article entitled 'Byzantium and the crusades in the twelfth century: why was the Fourth Crusade late in coming?'. As the title suggests, Laiou here examines why a century passed before Latin Christians attacked Constantinople proper despite a spirit of antagonism having existed from the 11th century. Normans from Sicily and southern Italy – especially Robert Guiscard (1081) and Bohemond of Taranto (1101) – attacked Byzantine lands and this led to fears of an attack against the imperial city. Indeed, such plans were considered after Crusader failures against Muslims following the First and Second Crusades. Laiou argues that there were three primary reasons that this did not occur, however. Firstly, the Crusade leaders lacked the determination, especially when facing a confident empire under the Komneni dynasty. Secondly, as fellow Christians and potential supporters of the Latin Kingdom, there was opposition to an attack against Byzantium. Finally, the Komneni actively worked to divide their Latin enemies and to counter any support for such an attack, especially via propaganda and diplomacy. Much had changed by 1204, however, with the loss of Jerusalem, a new and generally incompetent Byzantine dynasty in the Angeli, and, of course, an increased suspicion of the Byzantines as treacherous schismatics following a century of contact, the massacre of the Genoese and other Latin residents of the Golden Horn in 1182, and, most recently, open provocation of Frederick Barbarossa's crusade army in 1189–90.

The fifth essay treated by Laiou is 'On just war in Byzantium'. Just war theory is a topic featured more specifically in Latin sources, of course, but Laiou's primary reliance on the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene provides a late 11th- and early 12th-century setting where neighbouring concepts of 'holy war' and *jihad* were prevalent, if evolving. Was there a concept of 'just war' in Byzantium? Based upon the military history of Alexios I ('the master of the science of government', per Anna Komnene, p. 165), Laiou argues that war was fought and justified as a means of obtaining peace. It was, in effect, fought (1) in self-defence; (2) for the recovery of lost territory; (3) when agreements or treaties were broken; (4) to avert a greater evil; and (5) in pursuit of peace. Laiou demonstrates that Anna Komnene's and other Byzantine authors' justification for war was centred in Aristotelian and Roman thought. Thus, while Latin Christianity reconciled the Christian

ideas of peace and the Greek and Roman concepts of war via 'holy war' and just war theory, in the Byzantine world these two contrasting ideas were squared by the argument that the 'Empire and emperor sought peace but were forced into war' (p. 166).

The next essay in this section, 'The just war of eastern Christians and the Holy War of the crusaders', complements the preceding paper. Laiou makes the case here that war as understood in the Byzantine and Eastern Churches was a secular concept and thus the domain of the state. Even if necessary, of a defensive nature, and 'just', war was still sinful in that men fought and killed other men, and was not, therefore, compatible with 'holiness'. In contrast, the idea of 'holy war', as developed by the Latin Church during the Crusader period, centred around the idea of a Christian army fighting for Christ and the Church, directed by the Church, and rewarding death in battle with automatic forgiveness of sins. Laiou argues that 'elements' of the concept of 'holy war' might be found in Byzantine rhetoric of the seventh and tenth centuries, but in no way was this a fully developed ideology. For the 12th century, the foreignness of the two concepts of war in many ways reflects the nature of the two societies, one bureaucratic with power devolving from the emperor and the other feudal with wealth and power derived via warfare. Indeed, the incompatibility between these two ideologies – argues Laiou – was an underlying cause of the breakdown in the Latin-Byzantine alliance during the 12th century and, in effect, led to the Fourth Crusade and thence to the permanent hostility between the Byzantine East and the Latin West over succeeding centuries.

In the final essay in the second section, 'The many faces of medieval colonization', Laiou reflects upon what she terms the 'first phase' of European expansionism in the late 11th century (the 'second phase' being to the Americas from the late 15th century). This movement had two underlying and not unconnected facets: economic and religious, the latter especially realised in the Crusades. Her concern in this essay is with the development and institutionalisation of the Latin perception of 'the Other', 'of a particular way of looking at the enemy, and of a particular concept of how to deal with those who did not wish to become a part of the Christian commonwealth' (p. 15). 'The Other' was necessarily evil, and the papacy consciously sought to substitute wars against the evil foreigner for domestic Western European wars. Thus, at different times and places, Jews, Muslims, Slavs, and others filled this definition. In contrast to this intolerant approach was the missionary effort, revived again in the 13th century, and a movement not unconnected to that of exploration. As for colonisation, Laiou identifies three general approaches towards the indigenous population: assimilation, eradication, or separation. Colonisation that was trade-based – such as that generally practised by Venice and Genoa – tended to be more integrative and assimilative, as illustrated by the example of Venetian Crete. In stark contrast is the example of Germanic expansion into Slavic lands, where an uncompromising religious ideology led to a mixed response of annihilation, expulsion, and assimilation of the indigenous Prussian tribes. Finally, Laiou's third model is illustrated in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, in which the Frankish immigrants created a closed society separated from the indigenous population in order to preserve their Latin identity.

The third section of this collection deals with economic matters and begins with 'Byzantine trade with Christians and Muslims and the crusades'. In this article, Laiou seeks to analyse the effects of the Crusades and the Crusader states on Byzantine commercial relations, primarily prior to 1204. What economic changes – if any – did the Crusades have upon the Empire? She begins by considering the problems of provisioning the vast Crusader armies while utilising various currencies during their journey across Byzantine territory. In the near term, this was remedied by imperial donations, the localised purchase of provisions via free enterprise, and through plunder. The longer term effect of the Crusade passage was a re-orientation of Byzantine trade with Muslim Anatolia and Egypt, a topic Laiou considers into the 14th century. Regarding the Italian mercantilism that became so dominant in Constantinople, the Byzantine response developed over time. Finally, as to international economic institutions (such as exchange and negotiation mechanisms and the law of salvage), Laiou argues that Italian merchants and Frankish residents of Outremer were fundamental to their establishment across the Eastern Mediterranean.

The ninth entry in this collection is entitled 'Venice as a centre of trade and of artistic production in the thirteenth century'. Laiou's focus here is on Venetian commercial relations with the Levant and with Byzantium in particular. Additionally, she discusses cross cultural exchanges, especially Byzantine-

influenced minor arts in Venice in connection with the creation of the Venetian commercial empire. Rapid Venetian expansion into Byzantine lands after the Fourth Crusade led to their dominance in this sphere vis-à-vis Genoa, but also in their chief importance as a conduit of Byzantine artistic influence upon Western Europe. Venetian Crete is held up as a key example of an integrated economic and artistic society, while the growth of the production of luxury items (e.g. glass and crystal) by Venice was at the expense of Byzantine industry.

The next article, 'Italy and the Italians in the Political Geography of the Byzantines (14th Century)', is a historiographical inquiry (based upon the Byzantine historians George Pachymeres, John Cantacuzenus, and Nikephoros Gregoras) into the question of how much – if anything – contemporary Byzantines know about Italy as a geographical and political area outside of its classical context. Whereas Pachymeres refers to Western Europeans and Roman Catholics as 'Italians' and seems to know some of the inner political and commercial workings of the maritime cities (especially Genoa), 50 years later Kantakuzenos and Gregoras tend to generalise all Italians as 'Latins'. This is particularly interesting in context, given that Byzantine Anatolia had completely fallen and Constantinople, in particular, was dependent upon Genoese support for its very survival despite the fact that in many ways much of Genoa's dominance of Black Sea trade was at the direct expense of Byzantium. Indeed, all of these authors blame the dissolution of the Byzantine navy in 1285 (on the promise of Genoese-Venetian peace) for the ultimate inability to defend Byzantine lands and Constantinople itself from aggressive Italians and Turks alike. Byzantine interest in Italy and the Italians was in direct correlation to their own weakness as a vanishing state as well as to the colonisation of the old Byzantine Empire. Constantinople now orbited Italy, whose maritime republics were the centre of the Mediterranean world.

The 11th contribution complements the preceding essay and is entitled: 'Monopoly and privilege: the Byzantine reaction to the Genoese presence in the Black Sea'. While the early Palaiologan emperors supported and even assisted Genoese expansion into the Black Sea, many Byzantine merchants and others resented their presence. It is upon this resentment that Laiou focuses, followed by an examination of the extent to which the Byzantine government addressed the issues raised. As evidence, she introduces a letter of George of Cyprus, Patriarch of Constantinople in the 1280s, in which he complains how Byzantine merchants engaged in the Black Sea trade are forced by Genoese onto their ships along with all of their goods in an overt effort to establish a monopoly on this trade. Additionally, the Genoese prevented the Byzantine fleet from its regular patrols in the Black Sea, intimidating them into inaction. The Patriarch's complaints are twofold: (1) a lack of respect for the imperial dignity and (2) a concern for safeguarding the rights of the Byzantine merchant. It is this latter point that Laiou argues is novel and demonstrates a new trend, as reinforced by a letter of another patriarch, Athanasios I, 20 years later. He argued that the government should protect the grain trade for the benefit of citizens against a potential Italian monopoly. Later attempts in the 1340s attempted to lower the trade tax for Byzantine merchants in an effort to even the playing field vis-à-vis Italian privileges. These efforts on behalf of the Byzantine merchant are noteworthy, even if in the end they were unsuccessful.

'Monopoly and Privileged Free Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean (8th-14th century)', the next essay, complements the previous entry while covering a much expanded period. As trade in the eastern Mediterranean dramatically increased from the 11th century, new mechanisms and institutional arrangements were needed to facilitate the further development of international trade. Laiou here seeks to follow this process and interplay of monopoly, protected trade, privilege, and free trade, arguing that 'Mediterranean exchange in the East took place in conditions where the restrictiveness imposed by political entities ... played an important role, there occurred a liberalization in the term of trade ...' (p. 511). The Byzantine state acted as a restraining agent until the 11th century (e.g. the silk industry), while in the 12th century it yet maintained a protectionist policy on certain commodities in the interest of its citizens. In the 13th and 14th centuries, however, the increase in trading privileges and a common law of the seas promoted an increasingly integrated Mediterranean market. This emphasis on freed trade and competition eventually eroded national sovereignty by the middle of the 14th century.

The 13th essay is entitled 'Regional networks in the Balkans in the middle and late Byzantine Period'. As

the title suggests, this study is concerned with the local commodities trade within the regional area of the Balkans, a subject Laiou considers particularly neglected. Specific attention is paid to Thrace and Macedonia and their respective primary cities of Constantinople and Thessalonike, as well as the Peloponnese and adjacent Greece. The land route of the Crusade armies and their economic effects upon the surrounding regions (including Serbia and Bulgaria) is considered, as is the establishment of Venetian trading posts. Imperial chrysobulls issued to the Venetians provide an important source for trade in this period, while Laiou also depends upon the foundational charter (1083) of the Monastery of the Theotokos near Philippopolis and analyses the distribution of ceramics throughout the Balkans. Laiou concludes that 'regional trade occupies a nodal place in a society's economic development. It is the point where both demand and production become differentiated and specialisation sets in; where the productive forces of a large segment of the population become active; where demography, urbanisation, and monetisation meet and reinforce each other; it is the point at which products become commodities' (p. 34).

The final essay in this collection is 'Byzantium and the neighboring powers: small-state policies and complexities'. Laiou's focus is upon the Palaiologan period, arguing that even though there was a Byzantine state with 'more or less discernible boundaries' between 1261 and 1340, under the surface fragmentation was already occurring. This fragmentation had begun in the late 12th century and was 'accelerated' by the Fourth Crusade. At the same time, an economic unification was effected in the eastern Mediterranean, largely due to the Italian trade networks and for their benefit. Byzantine and Balkan discord advanced through the 14th century and increased instability and the probability of war to such a degree that the small states became economically unviable. Marriage alliances were formed between Byzantium, Serbia, Trebizond, and others, but in the end they were not enough to stop the fragmentation process. Conversely, economic integration was furthered by the lack of a large political entity (until the Ottoman conquest), while in the end Genoa and Venice profited the greatest of all.

As this collection of papers worthily represents, Angeliki Laiou's scholarship deserves wide dissemination and readership for those interested in Byzantium, the Crusades, and Mediterranean economic history. Her insightful interaction with numerous sources both Byzantine and otherwise coupled with her originality of approach make for both interesting and essential reading. The editors, Cécile Morrison and Rowan Dorin, as well as Ashgate, deserve our gratitude for bringing these articles together and making them accessible.

Source URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1386>

Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/51681>