

»Byzance après Byzance« – Nicolae Iorga's Concept and its Aftermath

The »Voltaire of Romanian Culture«, an »overwhelming personality« – these characterisations by the literary critic and critical contemporary George Călinescu already indicate the problem: How can one approach Nicolae Iorga (fig. 1) with his many and diverse activities, which not only include a large number of tasks in public life, but also concern his first profession, history? It appears indispensable to refer to just one of his numerous fields of historical interest, namely his studies of Byzantium. Even to restrict oneself to just this topic leaves a vast body of work to deal with: 24 publications of separate sources, including editions, 19 general works, 95 specialist monographs and articles, as well as 120 book reviews¹. It may thus help to concentrate on the idea of Byzantine continuity after the fall of the Empire, which is already articulated in Iorga's early works, notably his two-volume »Geschichte des rumänischen Volkes im Rahmen seiner Staatsbildungen« (History of the Romanian People Within the Context of its State-Formations), which appeared in Gotha in 1905, or his five-volume »Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches« (History of the Ottoman Empire), also published in Gotha between 1908-1913. Several other studies, which deal more intensively with the concept of »Byzantium after Byzantium«, are dated to the years of the Balkan Wars 1912/1913. The basic lines of the concept and, by the way, also the title, were presented by Iorga finally at the Congress for Byzantine Studies in Sofia in 1934. A year later the book »Byzance après Byzance« appeared in French in Paris².

As the reason for his consideration of the history of Byzantium in general, Iorga once cited the great – not least the geographic – span of the topic. But then his main concern was a reevaluation of this history: The East was not an appendix, not a periphery of the West, went Iorga's plea against the positions of Western European historians. Throughout his entire work the question »What is Byzantium?« preoccupied him. In the foreword to his book »Byzance après Byzance«, he does not equate Byzantium with a dynasty or a ruling class. For him Byzantium meant a complex of institutions, a political system, a religious formation, a type of civilisation, the intellectual Hellenic inheritance, Roman Law, the Orthodox religion and

art. This Byzantium, according to Iorga, »did not disappear, it could not disappear with the fall of its capitals, Constantinople, Mistra and Trapezunt in the 15th century«³.

His definition of »Byzantium« finally appeared in a contribution published in French in the »Byzantinische Zeitschrift« of the year 1929/1930, in a special issue dedicated to the German Byzantinist August Heisenberg, who died in 1930. In it, Iorga states: »Byzantium is a synthesis of very different elements which come from everywhere, and which always remain open until the Byzantine idea in the end itself disappears«⁴. Byzantium was explained, as it were, as an »open [i. e. by no means closed or even concluded] structure« that possessed the continuous possibility of assimilation and synthesis.

In the following discussion, at first I shall turn to the structure and argument as Iorga develops them in his book »Byzance après Byzance«. Finally, I shall look at some of its after-effects in the Romanian scholarly context.

Iorga first makes clear the continuing expression of the Byzantine idea in emigration. The steady advance of the Ottoman Empire and finally the conquest of Byzantium, drove numerous scholars of Greek language and culture to the West, to Venice, Paris, Geneva and to various regions of the Holy Roman Empire. They brought with them not only their ideals, including their love of Byzantium, but also shaped Western European culture. Iorga gives a whole series of examples, referring, among other things, to the German philosopher and historian of the 16th century, Martin Crusius. Yet his is far from being the only name cited:

Manuel Chrysoloras, former Byzantine ambassador to Venice, who has spread Greek language and literature during the »lifetime« of the empire in the lagoon city; the humanist Johannes Argyropoulos, who travelled through Italy after 1453, taught Greek philosophy and drew attention to the fate of the Greeks among the Ottomans; Konstantinos Laskaris, a student of Argyropoulos, who wrote a Greek grammar. They were followed by the humanist Andreas Johannes Laskaris, who also taught in Italy. Educated at Byzantine schools, they all spread the Greek language and culture.

1 Pippidi, Bibliografia 235-250. The entire anthology is also fundamental: Stănescu, Nicolae Iorga. See also Zub, Nicolae Iorga; Zub, De la istoria critică. – On Iorga's life and writings see Theodorescu, Nicolae Iorga; Netea, Nicolae Iorga; Valota-Cavallotti, Nicola Iorga; Zamfirescu, N. Iorga; Nagy-Talavera, Nicolae Iorga; Oldson,

The historical and nationalistic thought; Pearton, Nicolae Iorga; Ţurlea, Nicolae Iorga; Maner, Die Aufhebung des Nationalen 239-263.

2 Căndea, Postfață 256-260.

3 Iorga, Bizanț 5.

4 Iorga, Ce e Bizanțul 16.

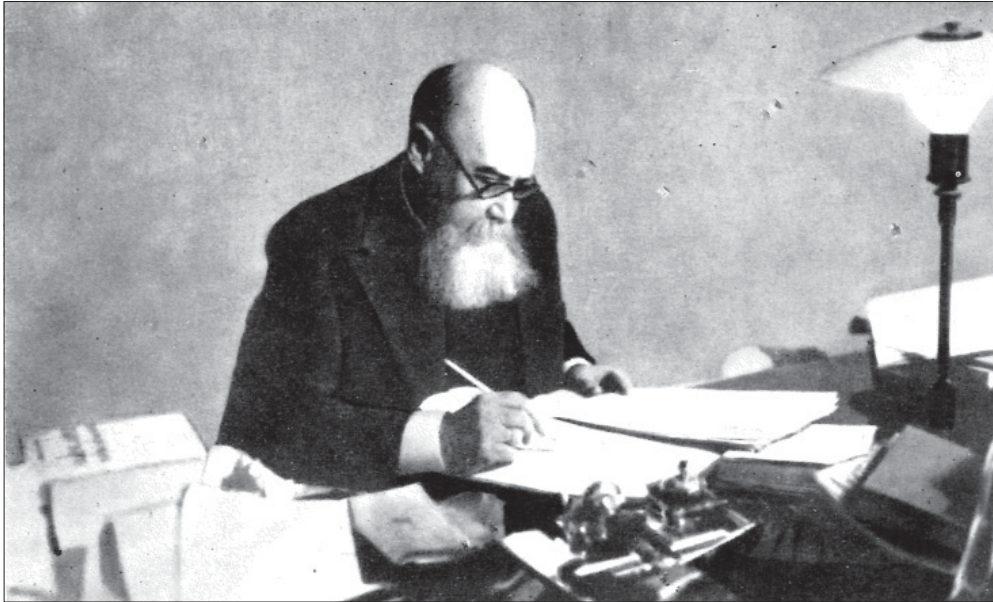


Fig. 1 Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940). – (After Pippidi, Nicolas Iorga 404-405.

Even later, there were artists who gained fame among them. As an example, Iorga cites the Cretan icon painter Dominikos Theotokopoulos, who became famous in Toledo in the 16th century under the name of »El Greco«.

What united many of them was hatred of the new Ottoman rulers and a love of Byzantium. From these circles came the tireless call to a new Crusade. This widespread mood prevailed, e. g. in the writings of Crusius in the 16th century, who published *Turcogræciæ* and *Germanogræciæ* in Basel in 1584 and 1585 respectively. From the latter, Iorga quotes as follows: »We sorrowfully owe you, Athens, now oppressed by unlawful and cruel Barbarians. The free spirit no longer exists: neither schools nor scholarship; The old treasures have disappeared«⁵. In the dedication of *Turcogræciæ* to the Landgraves of Hesse, Crusius expresses the wish that the Greek Empire still existed and flourished⁶.

The next thing Iorga did was to take a look at Constantinople, the centre and capital of the Byzantine Empire. After the conquest, Mehmed II had striven to repopulate the city and did so, among other things, by inviting Greeks who had previously gone into exile. Constantinople remained or became once again a very mixed city in which lived, apart from Syrians and Arabs, a considerable number of Jewish residents, as well as Italians and other western Europeans. It is true that imperial Constantinople had been plundered, though it was »destroyed to a lesser extent«⁷, thus a series of churches with their frescoes had remained standing. Iorga presented several sultans of the 15th and 16th centuries as protectors of the Christian population; in addition, they had used the Greek language in contacts with the Balkan provinces under Western influence. Furthermore, the Ottomans had left Byzantine

basic structures, such as local autonomy rights, intact where they existed, for instance in the islands of the Aegean, the colonies in Italy or on Mount Athos.

The Ottoman Empire was regarded by Iorga as the restorer and ultimately the continuation of the Byzantine Empire. This »Turkish world« was nothing other »than a new edition of former Byzantium, with another religion, with other dignitaries and with the support of a different military class«⁸. In his history of the Ottoman Empire, one encounters this continuity again and again. In many fields the Ottomans had adopted Byzantine terms. This topic would require a paper of its own, which is why I must here restrict myself to these comments.

In the further course of the book, apart from the monasteries, Iorga saw the ecumenical patriarchate in particular as the institution in which a Byzantine life of its own continued in the 15th and 16th centuries, including all its machinations: »Despite all the patriarchs' intrigues and catastrophes, the church retained its high standing«⁹. And Iorga described the relations with the new rulers in the 16th century as a »friendly life together«, in which the patriarch even had a chancellery, similar to that of a head of state¹⁰. Terms such as »the Byzantium of the Church« or »Patriarchal Byzantium« are used here. The patriarchy had thus taken the place of Byzantium, something which was also shown in foreign relations, e. g. with Western Europe. »It was not possible to drive out the memory of imperial Byzantium: Its eagle was on the patriarch's chest; it was still possible to see the pictures of the emperors on the walls of the Pammakaristos church«¹¹.

Under the heading »Archontes«, the fifth of a total of ten chapters examines Greek families and persons who all occupied outstanding social positions in the Ottoman Em-

5 Iorga, *Bizant* 33.

6 *Ibidem*.

7 *Ibidem* 43.

8 Iorga, *Ce e Bizanțul* 17.

9 Iorga, *Bizant* 85.

10 *Ibidem* 89. 92.

11 *Ibidem* 97.



Fig. 2 Bogdan Lăpușneanu (1553-1574) at Dochiariou monastery, Mt Athos, 16th century. – (After Iorga, Bizant, 135).



Fig. 3 Ruxandra Lăpușneanu (1538-1570) at Dochiariou monastery, Mt Athos, 16th century. – (After Iorga, Bizanț 127).

pire: the families Kantakuzenos, Palaiologos, Argyropulos, Skarlatos, Dukas, Mavrokordatos or Rosetti with their various branches. This Byzantine aristocracy, which still had great wealth at its disposal, had not come to an end, Iorga emphasised. These great Byzantine families had »emigrated to the Romanians«¹².

Iorga thus manages the transition to the heart of his story, which is to be found again in chapter headings such as »The imperial Byzantine idea through the Romanian rulers«, »The protection of the Byzantine Church and civilisation by the Romanian rulers«, »Phanar« or »The end of Byzantium«.

Initially, Iorga establishes that the Archontes »in their wildest dreams were perhaps striving for the imperial crown, though they would never attain it«. Therefore, they sought for support, in order to help towards a »truly Byzantine Church«, to quote Iorga.

»But where could monarchs »crowned by God« be found in accordance with the strict rules of a thousand years of Orthodoxy?«¹³ That was the historian's main question. And the answer, so to speak as the thesis of the study, follows swiftly:

»Under these conditions, the Orthodox world turned to the Romanian rulers, whose authority over their subjects was of imperial character and who were depicted in ecclesiastical

frescoes with the crown on their heads using the formula »by the grace of God« in their documents«¹⁴.

Particular attention is paid to the close connections of the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia to the monasteries of Athos and Metéora, as well as to the Phanar quarter of Constantinople. This is illustrated by the portrayals of two frescoes of Mother and Son Lăpușneanu from the Athos monastery of Dochiariou (figs 2-4). In this connection the close connections and links of the rulers or the future rulers of the principalities in the 16th century to Constantinople or to the former Byzantine empire are emphasised. From their, in part lengthier, enforced stays in areas formerly under Byzantine rule, Iorga concludes that these present and future rulers were imbued with »everything that constitutes Byzantine tradition«¹⁵. Thus Iorga is of the opinion that the appointment of the first prince of Wallachia by the Sultan in Constantinople in 1535 had taken place using the imperial ceremonial. Radu Paisie (as the monk Paisie or Petru de la Argeș) had left »Constantinople in an imperial manner, together with the Turkish head groom, 50-60 companions and with his five flags, as well as almost 1500 soldiers in his personal service«¹⁶.

Further parts of the ceremonial in Constantinople involved the new prince going from the Grand Vizier in a solemn pro-

12 Ibidem 117.

13 Ibidem 124.

14 Ibidem 126.

15 Ibidem 132.

16 Ibidem 134.



Fig. 4 View from Docheiariou monastery, Mount Athos, Greece. – (Photo Kočev; Wikimedia commons CC BY-SA 4.0).

cession to the Patriarchate's church. In the second volume of his »History of the Romanian People«, which appeared in Gotha in 1905, Iorga expresses this as follows: »In the church, the Romanian prince, who is the only Christian ruler embellished with a crown and sceptre remaining in the Orient subjugated by the heathens, is received with the honours to which the emperors of the Orthodox East used to be entitled«. Iorga continues by giving more detail: »A throne had been erected for the prince, and when he crossed its threshold, – just like once for the long since vanished Christian *basileus* – prayers for him, for his victory, the long period of his reign, health and salvation [...] were spoken; as for that Caesar of the East in his honour the Polychronion, the Byzantine »God preserve you«, was sung from the practised psalters of the *Patriarcheion*«¹⁷.

Several of the princes, Iorga sums up in his »Byzance après Byzance«, were »truly crowned monarchs with imperial manners that had been formed in the Empire and in particular in Byzantium, who had brought social practises with them from there, who had adopted certain fashions from the capital, who spoke Greek in their families and were married to Greek or Levantine women«. These »brought into their country, apart from the habits adopted of course from the Turks,

traditions that were not Greek, neither from a national nor a popular point of view, but Byzantine, imperial. The items of information, which we have from this period, prove this sufficiently«¹⁸.

After the »givers«, i. e. those who brought the imperial, Byzantine idea with them to the principdoms, Iorga turns to the »protectors«, among which he first concentrates on Michael the Brave, the prince of Wallachia at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century (fig. 5). As the son of a Greek woman, Teodora, as a friend of Archbishop Dionysios of Trnovo, and coming from the milieu of the patron Andronic Kantakuzenos, Michael, according to Iorga, brought together »all the Byzantine trends of that time«, namely those handed down by the Church, as well as those that came from the secular Constantinopolitan milieu of the great families, and finally those that came from the West. The so-called »Long Turkish War« of 1593-1606, in which Michael fought on the Hapsburg side against the Ottomans, was really, according to Iorga, a matter of the restoration of the Byzantine Empire. The historian quotes from various sources that Michael was striving to get to Constantinople in order to place himself as emperor at the head of the Empire. In addition, he was compared with Alexander the Great¹⁹.

17 Iorga, *Geschichte des rumänischen Volkes* 40f.

18 Iorga, *Bizant* 134.

19 *Ibidem* 144-146.

according to Iorga, the Romanian principalities adopted the »Byzantine« precedence from politics and applied it to schools and to cultural policy. Bucharest and Iași became centres in which Greek scholars taught philosophy, history, literature, grammar and other subjects. The curriculum of the school in Iași was said to have formed the Byzantine program in its entirety²³.

As the final great exponents of the *Byzance après Byzance* phenomenon, the Phanariots enter the scene. These were a circle of individuals from the Phanar quarter who grouped around the Patriarch and the patriarchate church at the Golden Horn in Constantinople²⁴. From this Greek-speaking, Orthodox elite there emerged firstly dragomen, then grand dragomen and finally princes of Moldavia and Wallachia in the 18th and 19th centuries²⁵. Nikolaos Mavrokordatos made the start here in 1709, first as prince of Moldavia (1709-1716) and then also as prince of Wallachia (1716-1730). Then followed princes from the Ghika, Kallimachi, Karazá, Soutzo, Mourousi, Mavrogheni and Ipsilanti families. In their appearance and bearing, as well as in their ideology, they strove, on the one hand, for the continuation of Byzantine traditions and dreamt of the refoundation of a Byzantine Empire, but on the other hand they were at the same time the gravediggers of Byzantium.

Byzantium and the Southeast European Orthodox community disappeared, according to Iorga, only in the 19th century with the powerful emergence of the modern nation-state and modern nationalism. He saw the year 1821, in which the Greek revolution had begun, as the turning point. Iorga accused the Phanariots of having brought about the end of Byzantium through their contradictory behaviour: on the one hand by being representatives of Byzantine traditions and on the other hand of having been supporters of the most exclusionary spirit of the modern nation²⁶.

The after-effects

It is thanks to Nicolae Iorga's study of the history of Byzantium, and in our case in particular of its reception, that the title of his book »Byzance après Byzance« has remained a really familiar quotation until the present that is proverbial to this day, though admittedly even specialists often use it as a mere formula, detached from its underlying content and the argumentation developed by Iorga.

In Romania, the topic is still very much present in the minds of the specialist public. In a round of discussions organised by the Institute for Defence Political and Military Historical Studies in 2010, Romanian historians were asked for

their opinion, among other things, on the following question: What is the present perception of »Byzantium after Byzantium« as a result of the historiographical contributions from 1935 until today²⁷? Whereas some repeat Iorga's theses and thus confirm and emphasise their continued validity and national importance²⁸, others see in them a still valid model for explaining the contrasts between East and West or a model for a better understanding of Eastern Europe²⁹. In a negative respect, »Byzantium after Byzantium« today is seen as the continuation of certain cultural forms, as the perpetuating imitation of clichés, coupled with economic and intellectual stagnation. A striking example in this direction is the book by the political scientist Daniel Barbu »Byzance against Byzance, Explorations in Romanian Political Culture«, published in the year 2001.

For Barbu, Iorga's concept is nothing but a profile of the expectation horizon of Romania, a systematic inventory of post-Byzantine cultural imports. But these imports remain nothing but forms without content (*forme fără fond*). The Romanians have thus, according to Barbu, indeed taken on the formula of the act of government as well as the cultural equipment of Byzantium, but only superficially. Their underlying meaning (*homoetheia*) remained foreign to Romanians. They had not taken on the Byzantine self-understanding connected with it. Barbu thus opposes Iorga's formula. The principedoms were by no means a new Byzantium, which had let itself be formed after the models of the Byzantine Empire, but places that were in fact opposed to Byzantium and its forms³⁰.

One of the most detailed and intensive discussions of Iorga's concept comes from the pen of his grandson, the well-known historian Andrei Pippidi, in his book published in 1983, *The Political Byzantine Tradition in the Romanian Lands from 16th to 18th Century*.

By concentrating on the political aspect, Pippidi examines and at the same time widens the view of his grandfather's work. Behind the respect for Byzantine tradition as an ideal form of government after the fall of Byzantium, Pippidi saw a myth, a political model. Consequently, the political Byzantine tradition in the Romanian principedoms had been a powerful idea and an unfulfilled dream³¹. At the same time he emphasises the influence of the people »in between« (Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs) and takes up an idea of Iorga's, according to which it was not about a continuation of Byzantium exclusively among the Romanians, but about Byzantine forms and aspirations in the whole European part of the former Empire.

Thus Pippidi examines the influence of Serbian refugees or Byzantine ideas from the court of the Serbian despots before their incorporation into the Ottoman Empire in the case of

23 Iorga, *Bizant* 213.

24 Zamfirescu, *Bizanțul XLVII*.

25 On this see also Maner, *Dragoman 665-680*.

26 Iorga, *Bizanțul după bizanț* 132.

27 Ionescu, *Bizant versus Bizant* 22.

28 Ibidem 58, Ginel Lazăr, Historian in the National History Museum of Romania in Bucharest; Ibidem 70, Alexandru Madgearu, Historian at the Bucharest Institute

for Defense Policy Studies and Military History; ibidem 144, Răzvan Theodorrescu, Historian and Politician.

29 Ibidem 34, 112 f. thus e.g. Neagu Djuvara, Ioan-Aurel Pop.

30 Barbu, *Bizant*.

31 Pippidi, *Tradiția* 22.

Alexandru Lăpuşeanu, father of Bogdan and husband of Ruxandra. In the case of Michael the Brave, the persistence of the »mental clichés« and of legends regarding the restoration of the Byzantine Empire become especially clear. It also becomes clear that these ideas did not only circulate in the princedoms, but were also to be found to the south of the Danube and came together to a certain degree in the person of Michael the Brave³². According to Pippidi, many influences also came together in the person of Vasile Lupu. Thus he was a typical representative of the new Balkan class of boyars who virtually embodied the head of an ecumenical monarchy in Iaşi, of course with a great deal of self-staging³³.

Conclusion

Iorga's preoccupation in the first third of the 20th century with the entangled themes of *Byzance après Byzance*, as well as the reactions to his thoughts on the subject, cannot be seen detached from the spirit of the respective age. In dealing with the history of Byzantium, in particular with the afterlife of Byzantium, Iorga placed two fundamental aspects to the fore: the exemplary model of the union, not just on a regional basis, which Byzantium had offered in his opinion and – embedded in this model – the Romanians' role of leading the way. The latter was, of course, connected with his

life-long activity, the construction of a Romanian nation justified by history. These thoughts are to be found, for example, in his »History of the Romanian People« of 1905. In 1912/13, political developments add further context, leading to the questions: What is happening to the Ottoman Empire and what is intended to take its place? Or: How is the area to be shaped in the future? In particular, during the Second Balkan War, there were thoughts in Bucharest of acting towards the Balkans in the form of a civilising mission. In addition, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, there were plans for regional mergers, with the Byzantine Empire always present as the idea and model, also in Iorga's reflections, which, for example, he presented in a contribution in 1931 regarding federal structures in Southeastern Europe³⁴. The project of a Balkan union occupied the Balkan conferences that took place from 1930 to 1934, which in 1934 led finally to the Balkan entente concluded between Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Romania.

The need for dealing with Iorga's book in the Bucharest round of discussions in 2010 is based on the search for validation and an atmosphere of general security after the attack of 2001 as well as after the shaping of new architecture in Eastern Europe with NATO and the EU as key players. No less is also the activity of the well-known political scientist Daniel Barbu with the topic caused by developments, or much rather faulty developments of politics in Romania in the 1990s.

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32 Ibidem 262-273.

33 Wasiucionek, Die Simulation von Souveränität 112-115.

34 On this see also Campus, Ideea federală 100f.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

»Byzance après Byzance« – Nicolae Iorga's Concept and its Aftermath

The studies about Nicolae Iorga and the history of Byzantium, and especially his reception, can largely be explained by the fact that the title of his book »Byzance après Byzance« has become almost a proverbial figure of speech. The phrase is used today, detached from the underlying content and the argumentation developed by Iorga. The original work of Byzance après Byzance will therefore be placed at the centre of attention, analysing and explaining its structure, before finally looking at some after-effects in the Romanian academic context.

»Byzance après Byzance« – Nicolae Iorga's Konzept und seine Nachwirkungen

Untersuchungen über Nicolae Iorga und die Geschichte von Byzanz und insbesondere dessen Rezeption lassen sich weitgehend damit erklären, dass der Titel seines Buches »Byzance après Byzance« fast schon zur sprichwörtlichen Redewendung geworden ist. Der Ausdruck wird heute in der Regel verwendet, ohne den Inhalt und die von Iorga entwickelte Argumentation vor Augen zu haben. In den Ausführungen wird daher das Werk »Byzance après Byzance« im Mittelpunkt der Aufmerksamkeit stehen und seine Struktur analysiert sowie erläutert, bevor schließlich noch einige Nachwirkungen im rumänischen akademischen Kontext betrachtet werden.