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Oriental like Byzantium
Some Remarks on Similarities Between Byzantinism and Orientalism

Norman Davies, a renowned Oxford historian specializing in Polish history, recently published a book entitled »Vanished Kingdoms«. Irritatingly but understandably, one of its chapters is called »Byzantion – The Star-lit Golden Bough«[1]. In this mostly derivative and partly erroneous chapter[2], Davies records an interesting anecdote from his times travelling to Poland as a student:

»As their train approached Warsaw, the tall outline of a huge, ugly building appeared on the horizon. Unbeknown to the student-traveller it was the much-hated Palace of Culture which Joseph Stalin had donated to the Polish capital a dozen years earlier. Braving the language barrier, a gentleman in the compartment pointed through the window to explain what the building was. He tried in Polish; he tried in German; he tried in Russian; all to no avail. But then he found the one word that conveyed his meaning. ›Bizancjum‹, he cried with a broad Eureka grin. ›To jest Bizancjum‹ (›This is Byzantium‹)«[3].

This anecdote shows that Polish Byzantinism is, at least partly, mediated through Polish perceptions of Russia. As has been frequently argued, Polish Byzantinism was born in the 19th century during the partitions of Poland, and more precisely in the part of Poland which was seized by Russia[4]. The word »Byzantine« almost inevitably began to mean »Russian / Orthodox« for 19th-century Poles. Russification of Polish lands included, among other things, the construction of Orthodox churches and the transformation of existing buildings into the »Byzantine« style[5]. Accordingly, Polish Byzantinism in the 19th century is not about Byzantium – it is rather about contemporary Russia, whose medieval prefiguration became Byzantium. The Palace of Culture has in fact nothing in common with either Byzantine or Russian architecture. But its very existence evokes a similar uninvited Russian interference in the 19th century. This peculiar understanding of Byzantinism, and Byzantium as the medieval version of Russia in the Polish public awareness (at least until very recently) differs from a common understanding of Byzantium as oriental and exotic. In what follows, I intend to discuss the »oriental« nature of the imagery of Byzantium and to what extent it might be beneficial to study the reception of Byzantium as a form of what Edward Said called »orientalism«. I will also explore the possible meanings and implications of the use of the term Byzantinism, understood as a sort of Foucauldian discourse of power which posits an unequal relationship between the Byzantine / Oriental and European / Occidental cultures.

It is well known that the 19th century was a crucial period for developing the image of Byzantium both in the popular imagination and in academic debate[6]. Byzantium, in East and West, might have been condemned following the footsteps of Gibbon, or rehabilitated as later historians attempted to do; it might have been linked to the past of a given country[7], or, where there was no direct link with Byzantium, used in a more creative way, as in the Polish case. Therefore, appropriating Byzantium was a multi-layered and complicated process, which to a great extent depended on local factors, both historical and political. This process is mirrored in the various meanings of the word »Byzantium« and its cognates. With very few exceptions (notably in French, Bulgarian and, to some extent, Russian), »Byzantium« and »Byzantine« have consistently denoted negative, undesirable phenomena of culture, discourse and literature[8]. Even the rare positive uses of these words are ambiguous. The French phrase »ce n'est pas Byzance« in fact connotes the notion of luxury, which is one of the prevailing associations with Byzantine culture[9]. Remieg Aerts rightly argues that the pejorative use of the word »Byzantine« (and by extension, Byzantinism, coined only in the 19th century), which first seemed to be semantically neutral, crystallised in the 19th century[10]. Byzantinism is therefore a constructed notion that very often brings together all negative (and in some cases positive) ideas about Byzantium, which may or may not correspond to »the real Byzantium«.

1 Davies, Vanished Kingdoms 536.
2 Apparently Davies has never even looked at Voltaire's »Irene« and thought that the play was about the ninth-century empress while in fact it tells the story of the Komnenian coup d'état.
3 Davies, Vanished Kingdoms 536.
4 Dąbrowska, Byzance source de stéréotypes 43-54 and more recently Marciniak, Byzantium in the Polish Mirror 213-223.
5 Dąbrowska, Byzance source de stéréotypes 46.
6 Leveque, La Vision de Byzance.
7 See for instance Niehoff, To Whom Does Byzantium Belong? 139-151. – Angelov, Byzantinism 3-23.
8 For a discussion on these terms in Bulgarian see Karaboeva, Semantikata 276-307.
9 Marciniak, Ikona dekadencji 41-51. See also Havliková, Ach ta naše povaha byzantská 425-432.
10 Aerts, Dull Gold and Gory Purple 311-324.

Yet there is not and cannot be a universal definition or understanding of Byzantinism. As Helena Bodin recently noted, Byzantinism is, to use the term borrowed from the theory of semiotics, »a floating signifier«, that is a signifier without a single fixed meaning[11]. Its understanding and use are predicated upon various factors – temporal, cultural, and geographical. Byzantinism is a polyphonic term, as it can simultaneously include various, and very often contradictory, meanings. Byzantinism may also encompass yet another multi-layered concept strongly associated with Byzantium: decadence[12].

Herbert Hunger, in his article »Byzantinismus. Nachwirkungen byzantinischer Verhaltensweisen bis in die Gegenwart«[13], argues that other -»isms« used to describe either ideologies or political movements are ideologically pregnant, but Byzantinism is different in that it describes only Byzantine behaviour (»Tatsächlich besteht der Byzantinismus im Wesentlichen aus Verhaltensweisen des Byzantiners in seiner politischen und gesellschaftlichen Umwelt«[14]). In other words, this expression has no underlying political or ideological agenda. At first glance, Hunger seems to be right. The modern definitions of Byzantinism highlight mostly negative generalisations of Byzantine culture. The »Routledge Dictionary of Cultural References in Modern French« defines Byzantinism as follows:

»This term originated to describe the Byzantine theologians who debated the sex of angels while their city, Constantinople, was attacked by the Turks in 1451. It implies a tendency for hair-splitting and overly precise interpretations«[15].

This definition encapsulates popular thinking about Byzantium, but its source is not really Byzantine[16]. In fact it is, more or less, a quotation from Montesquieu's »Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence«[17]. During the Hundred Days, Napoleon expressed a similar thought, which Larousse later quoted in the entry for »Byzance« in the »Grand dictionnaire universel«[18]. This term did not arise from the disputes of Byzantine theologians but from French misconceptions about such disputes. The definitions in other languages are similar, describing Byzantinism as a tendency for hair-splitting (Dutch), excessively ceremonial and slavish behaviour (German), for endless and purposeless debates (French, Italian) and even for hypocrisy and the presentation of the bad as good (Polish), therefore mostly focusing on the Byzantine (mis-)behaviour. What they have in common is their expression of a mediated opinion, which, in most cases, dates back to the medieval period and is a result of the observations of medieval chroniclers[19]. However, contrary to Hunger, Byzantinism can sometimes be construed as a more complex issue with a clear political agenda, as was of course the case with Russian terms such as »vyzantinism« and »vyzantism«[20]. After all, the beginnings of Byzantine studies (and consequently, to some extent the reception of Byzantium) are inextricably connected to politics. As Roderich Reinsch recently noted, Hieronymus Wolf's translation of Byzantine historians sponsored by the Fugger family was prompted by an imminent Ottoman danger[21]. As John Haldon put it, »it was to Byzantine authors and texts that Renaissance scholars and leaders turned when they wanted to find out about the Ottomans and how to deal with them«[22]. Feliks Koneczny (1862-1949), a Polish historian and historiosopher, coined the term »German Byzantinism« to refer to a movement he saw as already emerging in Germany in the 10th century[23]. Its fully developed, modern form was characterised by a highly perfected bureaucracy, which granted a marginal role to civil society. In Koneczny's own words »The administration of the Eastern Empire did not change from the third century onward«[24]. Koneczny believed that German Byzantinism, which ended with the fall of the Reich in 1945, was the most powerful emanation of Byzantine civilisation in history. Andrew Kier Wise, saw Koneczny's Byzantinism as similar to Said's concept of Orientalism[25].

To compare Byzantinism with orientalism and to look at Byzantium as the Oriental other is by no means a new idea[26]. »Oriental« is a charged term in today's scientific discourse. Its use evokes the Saidian concept of the Orient and its understanding in Western scholarship. However, it may (and it certainly did in the earlier period) also simply denote a spatial location. Before the Eastern Empire became Byzantium for good[27], it was just this – the eastern part of the former Roman Empire. In most cases it is mentioned as such and there is no underlying ideology hidden in such a description. Whenever Madame de Sévigné, a 17th-century aristocrat and

11 Bodin, Whose Byzantinism – Ours or Theirs? 11-42.
12 Pontani, A margine di »Bisanzi e la décadence« 285-307. The very notion of decadence regarding Byzantium/byzantinisme and its influence on literary aesthetics attracted the attention of scholars quite recently see for instance Palacio, Les nacres de la perle 163-171.
13 Hunger, Byzantinismus 3-20.
14 Ibidem 4-5.
15 Mould, The Routledge Dictionary 177.
16 See for instance the 8th edition of the Dictionnaire de l'Académie française s. v. byzantin: 2. Expr. fig. et péj. Querelle discussion byzantine d'une subtilité excessive et sans intérêt réel par allusion aux controverses grammaticales ou théologiques des derniers temps de l'empire de Byzance.
17 »La fureur des disputes devint un état si naturel aux Grecs que lorsque Cantacuzène prit Constantinople il trouva l'empereur Jean et l'impératrice Anne occupés à un concile contre quelques ennemis des moines; et quand Mahomet II l'assiégea il ne put suspendre les haines théologiques; et on y était plus occupé du concile de Florence que de l'armée des Turcs« Montesquieu, Considérations 258.
18 Guéroult, Byzance.
19 Runciman, The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus 27: »Ever since our rough crusading forefathers first saw Constantinople and met to their contemptuous disgust a society where everyone read and wrote ate food with forks and preferred diplomacy to war it has been fashionable to pass the Byzantines by with scorn and to use their name as synonymous with decadence«. For a more detailed analysis see Carrier, L'image du Grec.
20 Stamatopoulos, From the Vyzantism 321-340.
21 Reinsch, Hieronymous Wolf 45-46.
22 Haldon, Taking a Leaf 143.
23 Skoczyński on the other hand attributes the invention of this term to Edward Quinet. See Skoczyński, Koneczny 142.
24 Koneczny, Cywilizacja bizantyńska 89 (transl. A. Kier).
25 Kier, The European Union 207-239.
26 The usefulness of Said's concept was already suggested by Averil Cameron in her paper »Byzance dans le débat sur orientalisme«.
27 On this change on the vocabulary level see for instance Argyropoulos, Les intellectules grecs à la recherché de Byzance 30.

writer, mentioned Byzantium in her letters, she referred to it as »l'empire oriental«[28]. Of course, at that time Byzantium was not perceived as »a historical reality in itself« but rather as a continuation of the Roman Empire[29].

Yet, in the same period, in a different part of Europe one can find an example of a more politically charged use of the term oriental or Eastern. The imminent Turkish danger was a reason for Christian Gryphius, a playwright and pedagogue from Breslau, then part of the Hapsburg Empire, to write a play entitled *Graecorum imperium a Muhamede secundo eversum* (»The Greek Empire Destroyed by Mohammed the Second«). This play, performed in 1682, details the history of the fall of Constantinople[30]. The author presents Constantinople and its last Emperor in a highly favourable light. However, interestingly, he seems deliberately to avoid using the adjective *orientalis*, or eastern, and the play always refers to *Imperium Graecorum*, and not *Imperium Orientale*. Only the program of the play is extant – the text itself is lost – so there is no way to say for sure whether the author consciously creates an opposition between the Orient, represented by the Turks, and the Occident, represented here by Byzantium. However, it may be supposed that the author refers to the old opposition between Europe (Greece) and Asia (Turkey).

Interestingly enough a similar thought can be found in a text written centuries later. The French translation of Dimitrios Vikelas's »Les Grecs au moyen age« (1874) is introduced by Alfred Rambaud, an eminent French historian and Byzantinist. For Rambaud, Byzantium is oriental mostly because its location is oriental, in this case meaning eastern. Yet, Byzantium is by all means a European state: »Aucun État européen […] n'a eu plus souvent à combattre pour l'existence«[31]. He juxtaposes civilised Byzantium with the oriental enemies attacking the Empire: beginning with Goths, to Huns and then Pechenegs, and finally the Turks[32]. Byzantium is a natural successor of Greece in the old conflict between Europe and Asia. When Rambaud states that »Constantinople était le Paris du moyen âge oriental« (Constantinople was the Paris of the eastern middle ages) it shows that he saw both capitals as focal cities in their respective times. Rambaud's motivation was certainly different from that of the 17th-century author. In the 19th century, imagery grew of Byzantium-turned-Orient, even though some historians and Byzantinists – like Rambaud – attempted to build a different set of connotations. Once again it is obvious that Byzantinism may have been modified according to the needs of those who referred to the Byzantine heritage.

Orientalism, understood as a cultural discourse in large part constructed by scholars of the Orient, is a set of stereotypes in which Europe (understood as the West, the self) is seen as essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative and masculine. At the same time the Orient (understood as the East, the other) is viewed as a sort of surrogate, underground version of the West or the self which is irrational, backward, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine and sexually corrupt. These binary notions are designed to dominate, structure and exert authority over »the Orient«. Orientalism is basically an artificial construct in which text-based knowledge plays an important part. Therefore, there is no need to engage empirically with the world described or actually to observe it, as all that is important and relevant can be found in the books[33].

There are obvious similarities between Orientalism and Byzantinism on a very general level. Byzantinism tends to present Byzantium as inferior to western cultures by ascribing to it a series of derogatory stereotypes. Byzantinism is also, to some extent, a product of scholars of Byzantium. The famous scholar Romilly Jenkins, in his lecture entitled »Byzantium and Byzantinism«, delivered in memory of Louise Taft Semple and purportedly aimed at making Byzantium more accessible, spoke of the subject of his studies with what could be described as bordering disdain[34]. His statements, such as, »[b]ut from the period of the Crusades onwards the advance of Western Europe was such as hopelessly to distance its eastern rival«, inscribe Byzantine culture in the discourse of »inferior Byzantium«[35]. To support his claims he quotes Alexios I's alleged statement, »olim sapientia deducta est de oriente in occidentem […] nunc e contrario de occidente in orientem latinus veniens descendit ad graecos«[36]. There are many similar examples, such as Paul Speck's odd theory about Byzantine cultural suicide in the ninth century (Speck unwittingly repeats almost verbatim the words of the great 19th century Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz)[37], or Topping's views on Byzantine literature[38], In the words of Margaret Mullett, a multitude of Byzantine scholars loved to hate Byzantium[39].

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Byzantine studies developed, after a long hiatus, during the 19th century, when orientalist studies also flourished. Some scholars even combined these two interests. Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866), a poet and orientalist, penned a cycle of 31 poems entitled »Hellenis. Sagen und Legenden aus der griechischen Kaisergeschichte«, which covers Byzantine history between the 4th and 10th centuries[40]. The image of Byzantium in Rückert's poems blends a

28 See for instance her remark about »The Alexiad« Madame de Sévigné, Correspondance 527, ep. 600: »Nous lisons une histoire des empereurs d'Orient écrite par une jeune princesse fille de l'empereur Alexis«.
29 Spieser, Du Cange and Byzantium 207.
30 Das Breslauer Schultheater 93-96.
31 Vikelas, Les Grecs au Moyen Age 5.
32 Ibidem.
33 Said, Orientalism 10. The summary above is taken from Macfie, Orientalism 8.
34 Jenkins, Byzantium and Byzantinism 137-178.
35 Ibidem 150-151.
36 Ibidem 153: »Once wisdom was derived from the Orient to the Occident […] now on the contrary from the Occident a Latin arrives and descends to the Greeks«. One such Latin is Peter Chrysolanus see Bloch, Monte Cassino 111.
37 Speck, Byzantium, Cultural Suicide 73. 82-84.
38 Topping, The Poet-Priest 40: »From the fourth to the fifteenth century for a thousand years the poet priest voiced the ideals and aspirations of Byzantium. While secular poets busied themselves with imitating ancient models only to produce correct but dry verses the poets of the church wrote vital original and significant poetry.«
39 Mullett, Dancing with Deconstructionists 258-275.
40 Koder, Friedrich Rückert 7-117.

stereotypical view of Byzantium and his fascination with the real modern Orient[41]. 19th-century writings offer a plethora of examples of authors who use imagery traditionally connected with orientalism to describe Byzantium. Amadee Gasquet, in his book »L'empire Byzantine et la monarchie Franque« published 1888, called Constantinople a »caravanserai«[42], while Victor Duruy, in »Histoire du Moyen Âge depuis la chute de l'Empire«, published 1877, used the term »les Orientaux« interchangeably with »the Byzantines«[43]. In a lecture on the history of Byzantium from 1900, Frederic Harrison described Byzantine governance as semi-Oriental[44]. Byzantium was thus located in the same conceptual space as the modern Orient and was accordingly transferred to the Asian side of the eternal binary opposition of Asia–Europe. To the best of my knowledge, this thinking was challenged only once: during the Greek irredenta, when the fall of Constantinople was interpreted as a prefiguration of the Greek War of Independence[45].

Byzantinism, like orientalism, is a primarily text-based construct. Perhaps the best-known, but by no means the only example of such an approach is the (in)famous work of Edward Gibbon. Gibbon, of course, never visited Constantinople, so he did not see the Hagia Sophia, which he describes at length in his book. It was argued that some of Gibbon's conclusions regarding the military exploits of the Byzantines were wrong simply because he had never seen the places he described[46]. This illustrates that for many scholars, Byzantium is a textual world and, as such, does not demand any kind of empirical approach.

Byzantium, like the Orient, tends to be presented as backwards and passive, and above all stagnant. It had played no active role in the development of human culture but merely acted as a bridge between antiquity and the Renaissance. In the early 19th century, German historian Johannes von Müller wrote that Constantinople had been primarily a shelter for literature and culture exiled from Western Europe[47]. Choiseul, in a history of the crusades published in Paris in 1809, described Constantinople as a depository for ancient artworks, later returned by the crusaders to their proper place to Italy[48]. Finally, Jules Zeller, in his 1871 »Entretiens sur l'histoire. Antiquité et Moyen Age«, called the Byzantines the librarians of humankind[49]. We know today that such opinions are unjustified. In addition to the obvious facts that the Byzantines were much more than the librarians and depositaries of ancient works, Byzantine literature was read and translated in the period after the fall of Constantinople. However, these historians' works present an extremely unflattering picture in which the Byzantines appear as no more than keepers, and even the crusaders' sack of Constantinople in 1204 can be justified in these terms, because the crusaders had simply returned the artworks to their proper owners. Byzantium, to use the term introduced by Victor Turner, lies in a liminal state, is an entity in between that has no real value except for its power to transmit and to recreate[50]. Even more fascinatingly, the Turkish narrative about Byzantium can be constructed in a very similar way. Ahmet Mithat Efendi (1844-1912), a writer, journalist and a publisher, compared the vigorous, young Ottoman state with the Byzantine Empire, which he saw as representing rotten antiquity and the Middle Ages. Efendi pointed to the ways in which the Ottomans had contributed to global history, putting mercifully end to the dying Empire and thus ending the Middle Ages in both West and East. Consequently, Byzantine scholars who left Constantinople for Italy also helped put an end to the western Medieval Ages. This is a highly subversive view of the roles of both Byzantium and the Ottoman state, which plays on Western phobias of the Empire and positions the Ottoman Empire as the real force behind the Renaissance[51].

Oriental sexuality also made its way into the notion of Byzantinism. Averil Cameron has remarked on the orientalising descriptions of Byzantine empresses[52], and Panagiotis Agapitos has shown how Theophano in Kostas Palamas's »Royal Flute« is built upon biblical images of Delilah, Salome and Judith[53]. Similarly, I think that the fascination with Eastern sexuality and femininity was also the main reason behind the enormous popularity of the Empress Theodora. The wife of Emperor Justinian is one of the few figures in Byzantine history of whom non-Byzantinists are likely to have heard. However, the reasons for her career in the popular imagination are not obvious. Other empresses were far more important. In Marmontel's highly politically influential novel Belisaire (1767), Theodora is a rather unimportant figure[54].

41 Ibidem 116.
42 Gasquet, L'empire byzantine 7.
43 Duruy, Histoire du Moyen Âge 72.
44 Harrison, Byzantine History 16: »No doubt it was semi-Oriental it was absolutist it was oppressive it was theocratic«.
45 Roessel, In Byron's Shadow 36-37: »The fall of Constantinople in 1453 which for Greeks constitutes the defining moment of their history was the single event of Byzantine history that had any currency in philhellenic writing. Felicia Hemans described the fall of the city and the death of Constantine XI in Modern Greece (1817) and at greater length in ›The Last Constantine‹ (1823). But in both works she made numerous allusions to the Persian Wars. [...] Hemans placed the capture of the city in the context of the Herodotean struggle between Europe and Asia. Like many early philhellenic writers, she appropriated the fall of Constantinople and subsumed it into the desire to revive Athens. So did Shelley in Hellas where his vision of the recapture of Constantinople by the Greeks was set within the framework of The Persians.«
46 This was already observed in the 19th century see Walsh, Narrative 31: »Balta was the name of the admiral and this little port retaining his name is considered proof of the fact. From hence to the harbor the distance is ten or eleven miles which induced Gibbon to say for the sake of probability that „he wished he could contract the distance of ten miles and prolong the term of one night«. Now had Gibbon visited the spot he might have spared his wish and established the probability«. See also Howard-Johnston, The Middle Period 74.
47 Müller, Histoire universelle 334.
48 Choiseul, De l'influence des croisades 146.
49 Zeller, Entretiens 393: »Les Byzantins deviennent seulement […] les bibliothécaires du genre humain«.
50 Turner, From Ritual to Theatre 113.
51 For a more detailed analysis see Ursinus, Byzanz 166 and also Ursinus, Byzantine History 211-222.
52 Cameron, Byzance dans le débat 243.
53 Agapitos, Byzantium in the Poetry 10.
54 On Marmontel's novel see Renwick, Marmontel.

Her real career starts in the 19th century and follows the pattern inadvertently set by the 16th century Cardinal Baronius, who called her a new Eve and compared her to Delilah and Herodias[55]. This comparison is exactly what made Theodora, viewed through the lenses of Procopius' malicious Secret History, such an attractive figure for 19th-century writers: she embodied the mysterious, sexual and sensual East. When Sardou claimed in the interview about his play »j'ai respecté absolument l'histoire«, he was right[56]. From his perspective, he depicts Theodora exactly as she was perceived by 19th-century readers[57].

The question remains, therefore, is Byzantinism like orientalism? In many ways it can be perceived as quite similar because both are artificial constructs created to make a certain phenomenon (be it »the Orient« or Byzantium) more understandable and to position it in a certain, and in this case inferior, way. And this usually involves a great deal of simplification and prejudice. Byzantium became inferior because there was no need to include it in the 19th-century vision of the development of Western culture, and since it was not really needed, it became the Other. Agapitos notes that this orientalised view of Byzantium permitted Western Europeans to place the origins of European states in the Latin Middle Ages and to claim the heritage of ancient Greece civilisation through Rome and the Renaissance[58]. In other words, this narrative presented modern Europe and ancient Greece as a continuum without the need to refer to a rather strange political entity. The image of Byzantium was also hindered by the fact that it was neither completely ancient Greece, nor Rome, nor even a »proper‹ Christian state (meaning Roman Catholic), and above all it simply did not fit with the cult of the newly discovered »ancient Greece«. The curious attempts to find a certain function for Byzantium and the Byzantines (as curators, librarians), to describe it by using the words taken from other contexts (Byzantium is both retronym and exonym), were mostly prompted by the fact that Byzantium and its heritage were forgotten and largely misunderstood. It is well known that before the 19th century, Byzantine literature was translated and imitated[59]. Therefore, in 19th-century Europe Byzantium became a cultural and political Other. As Angelov has argued: »As a discourse of ›otherness‹, Byzantinism evolves from, and reflects upon, the West's worst dreams and nightmares about its own self«[60]. The philosophers of the Enlightenment period treated Byzantium as a mirror in which they saw vices of their past, projecting their own fears and disdain upon Eastern Empire[61]. The situation in what Bodin defined as the »Eastern semiosphere« was partly different, but the educated elite to some extent transferred the disdain towards Byzantium to their own countries[62]. But while the Orient could have actually been studied – since it existed at the time — this was not the case with Byzantium. Byzantine stereotypes are based mostly on the impressions of medieval Western chroniclers. And this created a double filter – popular imagery of Byzantium or the Eastern Roman Empire was perceived through the texts of writers less alien to the Europeans than the medieval Greek ones, and was therefore more accessible and understandable. Therefore, I argue that Byzantinism is not a valid methodology or a well-defined ideology, but rather a useful way of understanding how the imagery of Byzantium was created in Western Europe. In a way, Byzantium was mentally colonized and subjected to the same process as the physically and politically colonized Orient. In this sense, I believe the process of re-appropriating Byzantium, be it in the modern scholarship or on the part of the countries of the Eastern semiosphere, does to some extent resemble the process of decolonization, of de-filtering Byzantium and its heritage from the Western European mode of thinking.

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55 Translation after Brittain/Carroll, Women of Early Christianity chap. 11: »a detestable creature, a second Eve too ready to listen to the serpent, a new Delilah, another Herodias, revelling in the blood of the saints, a citizen of Hell, protected by demons, inspired by Satan, burning to break the concord bought by the blood of confessors and of martyrs«.

56 Interview in L'Univers Illustré no. 1554, 3 Janvier 1885, 10.

57 For a survey on the reception of Theodora in later times see Carlà, Historische Quellen 31-62.

58 Agapitos, Byzantine Literature and Greek Philologists 238.

59 Nilsson, Les Amours d'Ismène & Isménias 171-211.

60 Angelov, Byzantinism 3.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

Oriental like Byzantium. Some Remarks on Similarities Between Byzantinism and Orientalism

This paper follows the footsteps of scholars such as Averil Cameron who argue that Orientalism might be a useful approach to studying the reception of Byzantium. Therefore, it discusses the »Oriental« nature of the imagery of Byzantium – especially in the 19th century – and to what extent it might be beneficial to study the reception of Byzantium as a form of what Edward Said called Orientalism. It is argued that, contrary to what some scholars have claimed, Byzantinism can sometimes be construed as a rather complex issue with a clear political agenda. Byzantinism is thus understood here as a polyphonic term, which can simultaneously include various – often contradictory – meanings. The paper shows that Byzantinism was used in certain cases to express the same ideas and prejudices as evoked by the term Orientalism.

Orientalisch wie Byzanz. Einige Bemerkungen über Ähnlichkeiten von Byzantinismus und Orientalismus

Dieser Beitrag folgt den Spuren von Wissenschaftlern wie Averil Cameron, der behauptet, dass Orientalismus ein nützliches Konzept für das Studium der Rezeption von Byzanz sein könne. Daher wird hier die »orientalische« Natur der Metaphorik von Byzanz – insbesondere im 19. Jahrhundert – diskutiert und inwiefern es sich als dienlich erweisen könnte, die Rezeption von Byzanz als eine Form dessen zu studieren, was Edward Said Orientalismus genannt hat. Es wird dabei argumentiert, dass im Gegensatz zu dem, was einige Forscher geltend machten, Byzantinismus zeitweise als ein ziemlich komplexes Problem mit einer klaren politischen Agenda aufgefasst werden kann. Byzantinismus wird hier als ein polyphoner Begriff verstanden, der gleichzeitig verschiedene und oft widersprüchliche Bedeutungen beinhalten kann. Der Beitrag zeigt, dass Byzantinismus in bestimmten Fällen dazu benutzt wurde, die gleichen Ideen und Vorurteile auszudrücken, die der Begriff Orientalismus hervorrief.