

# Introduction

We live in a time of immeasurable possibilities, a time in which living conditions are changing faster than ever before. Over the past 250 years, pioneering scientific and technical innovations have fundamentally transformed our everyday lives, created new ways of communicating, networked our world and made distances shrink. The primacy of free enterprise has opened up borders and created disparities, triggered migrations and led to the emergence of new social groups. These processes have not only led to the emergence of other forms of social coexistence, but have also shaped entirely new ideas of ethical and social values that are closely linked to the great ideologies of modernity. The extreme speed with which social transformations are taking place today makes it almost impossible to assess their prospects for the future or to observe them with any degree of simplicity. Only in retrospect can causes and effects be recognized; only in retrospect can an attempt be made to crystallize which transformations helped societies to resist the adversities they faced from outside and within, and which led to their demise. The Old World experienced a similarly hot phase of innovation and social transformation two millennia ago. The Roman Empire brought the blossoms of the Hellenistic cultures of the Mediterranean region to full bloom: science, technology and philosophy flourished in the service of the economy, culture and society. Under Roman rule, people of very different origins, cultures and religions lived together – it was an early pluralistic society. This period was so significant that it still resonates in many aspects of our lives today, so that the Roman Empire could become the cornerstone of our Europe today. However, the loss of the heartland with the decline of the Western Roman Empire in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century by no means meant the end of the Roman Empire, as it is often understood.

The following Byzantine Empire in the eastern part of the Roman world lasted more than a thousand years. During this time between the foundation of the new capital of Constantinople in 330 and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the ancient world was fundamentally transformed, and with these transformations the foundations for modern-day Europe were laid. The political, economic, social and cultural processes of change were closely interconnected in multiple ways and frequently affected all levels. Hence transformations can be recognized in many sources, in writings, images, objects and architecture. Archaeology has long sought to determine the social dynamics behind changes in urban and rural life. Landscapes were also subject to processes of trans-

formation in their function as economic spaces and zones of contact between centers. Changes in landscapes are conditioned above all by the type of settlement and utilization of resources and still reverberate today (for example in the stages of degradation that characterize the vegetation of the Mediterranean today).

The Byzantine Empire thus was a continuation of the Roman Empire that lasted until the beginning of the early modern era. This long existence was only possible because the empire continuously adapted and reinvented itself to the demands of the time. Thus, it transformed itself into a Christian state of the Middle Ages, which managed to maintain an inner coherence and a cultural continuity that lasted for centuries despite all the changes.

The Byzantine Empire is an ideal object for the study of social transformation processes, their triggers, underlying factors and courses, not only because of its long history and its formative significance for the medieval and modern cultures of the Old World, but also because of its wealth of information. Here, many aspects that are significant for contemporary societies around the world can be rediscovered on a smaller scale and their social implications can be observed over the long term. Some examples are the effects of widely networked flows of goods, technical innovations, manorial power, financial and economic crises, demographic changes, processes of agglomeration and ruralization, strategies of intensive resource and landscape use, the rapid spread of diseases transmitted from animals to humans or even religious reforms.

The available sources are diverse and complementary: while the written sources and art reflect contemporary observations from within Byzantine society as well as from outside, bringing the perception, social values and crystallization points of cultural identification into the light of history, the archaeological finds are material manifestations of the everyday life of the population, about which the written sources are largely silent. Everyday life, however, is an important scene of social change: No matter how important the head of the centralized state may have been, the population with all its levels, milieus, and strata was a no less important agent of social change.

The concept of »transformation« or simply »reshaping« contains the elements of what remains, the conservative, the kernel of what continues, as well of what changes, the innovative. In the framework of this publication, we seek to

draw attention to this dichotomy and investigate the extent to which change in daily life can be detected by archaeology, history and art history. Who were the agents of transformation and how did they and their environment change? To what extent did the state or its citizens, for example, show themselves to be flexible in handling external and internal pressures of innovation? In what manner and to what extent were the Byzantines able to preserve their identity and the internal cohesion of their empire in the course of these processes of adaptation? We would like to draw attention to the dichotomy between the conservative and the changing by examining processes of change or the consequences of transformations in the Byzantine Empire.

From 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016, the Leibniz Science-Campus Mainz »Byzantium between Orient and Occident« organized a conference on this topic together with the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Leibniz Research Institute for Archaeology. The focus was placed on »Transformation of City and Landscape«, »Economic Transformation, »Processes of Transformation in the World of Faith« and »Bearers of Transformation«. The publication of the conference papers was delayed for various reasons. We are pleased that some of the conference participants are presenting the results of the discussions in this book.

The contributions illuminate the transformations in different ways and with different approaches. Under the heading »Spatial Transformation«, Ine Jacobs gives an overview of the relationship between city and country. She observes that from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards architecture normally associated with »cities« can be found in villages. In her contribution she discusses the reasons for these urban contexts in villages. Myrto Veikou brings archaeology together with historical texts to examine spatial practices from a socio-cultural perspective. She demonstrates a new approach to explain the profound change from the decline of the old urban elite and the emergence of a new upper class with new rules of use and a changed management of space. Messene, studied by Nikos Tzivikis, give an excellent view on the multiple transformations that a city could undergo. Even if agriculture took place inside the city after the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Messene never lost the structure and organization of a city. In her contribution to the transformation of a landscape, Beate Böhlendorf-Arslan points out the close interdependence between natural disasters and economy in the settlements of the Troad region in Turkey. In his article, Rainer Schreg examines a new method of research into spatial transformations, the examination of

Byzantine agricultural land by geoarchaeological studies. To illustrate the ecological perspective, which is necessary to understand the complex interaction of a various factors involved in landscape transformation he refers on better known examples from medieval Southern Germany.

In the chapter on »Economic Transformations« Albrecht Berger gives an overview of the key role of economy and trade in Constantinople. Many foreign traders were involved, especially in long-distance trade and trade with luxury goods. Using this example, he can reconstruct the changes in trade goods and structures of foreign relations. Konstantinos D. Politis shows the economic transformations in the Byzantine Near East with the example of Zoara – modern-day Ghor al-Safi in Jordan in a region where the rapid change in political systems brought much movement to the general structure. The economic situation of the city is intricately linked with changes in agricultural practises.

In the context of »Transformations in the World of Faith« Jean-Michel Spieser focuses on changes of images in Late Antiquity. Statuary became unfashionable, while mosaics and painting gained importance. According to Spieser, images were now migrating from the private environment to churches while representations with ancient origins were often adapted to the new world of faith.

In the field of »Bearers of Transformations« Cécile Morrison gives an overview of the agents. According to her, private agents make their decisions according to their economic, political and physical environment, building directly on the social life in the village community. Miriam Steinborn focuses on everyday life and thus to the »household«. In the households the users act. Households therefore offer the opportunity to look at the possibilities of individuals and their function in the process of transformation.

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Beate Böhlendorf-Arslan, Robert Schick*