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## BYZANTINE

**Yannis Stouraitis (ed.) *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World*. pp. 432, 27 black and white ills, 1 table. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781474493628, hardback £115.00.**

Identity and ideology are currently attracting a fast-growing enthusiasm in academic research and debate, and Byzantine studies are benefitting especially strongly from this trend. That is why Yannis Stouraitis' new edited book will be a welcome and advantageous addition to the Byzantinist's library. With great diligence and creativity, Stouraitis brings together seventeen scholars to expose the multifaceted and conflicting constructions of ideology and identity in Byzantium and her peripheries.

The aim of this book, as stated in its introduction, co-written by Stouraitis and John Haldon, is to broaden the perspectives with which different groups in Byzantium perceived themselves and each other, and the forms by which these identities were articulated.<sup>7</sup> It also aims to draw together varying definitions of 'identity' and 'ideology' and how the two dynamics interacted with one another in Byzantine culture. What differences appear in scholarly definitions, and can they be reconciled?<sup>8</sup> It succeeds excellently in both these aims.

The book is formally divided into two halves, each containing eight of its sixteen main body chapters, but these are subdivided further into broadly defined themes: Ideas and beliefs, practices of identification, the relationship between central and rural identity, and the influence of Byzantine identity and ideology outside imperial borders.<sup>9</sup> Each chapter adopts a commendably individual approach, displaying a wide breadth of scholarly definitions of 'identity' and 'ideology' through which the corresponding arguments are justified. Simultaneously it promotes critical thinking and debate in cases where two or more authors challenge each other's definitions. This appears to have been a conscious choice by Stouraitis, who argues that the two terms must be applied in the vaguest sense,

<sup>7</sup> John Haldon and Yannis Stouraitis, 'The ideology of identities and the identity of ideologies', pp.1-19 at p.1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> See Ibid, pp.10-13, for further detail.

since they are always changing and contradicting.<sup>1</sup> The differing constructions by each author fittingly reflect that pivotal characteristic.

Particularly stimulating in that regard, to name but one example among several, is the implicit dialogue between Alicia Simpson and Dionysios Stathakopoulos. Their two chapters debate the nature of violence in identity formation, but whereas Simpson suggests that the impact of violence on identity is dependent on other factors or contexts, Stathakopoulos argues it is a decisive factor itself: one which produces predictable results.<sup>2</sup> Such dialogue between the two not only provides the reader with a wider breadth of information and prompts greater critical thinking. It also perfectly exemplifies Stouraitis' point on the constantly shifting construction of beliefs. The structure thus allows every author to work to his or her greatest strengths and illustrates the relevance of the book's overarching aims.

Every chapter is accompanied by extremely helpful footnotes and an individual bibliography, all of which are extensive in length and consistent in style. This makes the research that went into the book's production superbly easy to navigate, to the great benefit of the researchers and students who will make up the majority of its readership. No formatting errors or inconsistencies are visible; the book has clearly been edited with care and precision. The formatting makes it accessible and useful to undergraduates and professional researchers alike.

Having said that, the historian of ideas is, naturally, given the book's themes, favoured over other specialists. Archaeologists will focus overwhelmingly on Fontini Kondyli's eighth chapter, which provides enlightening observations on the material identity of Byzantine Athens. It alone contains thirteen of the book's twenty-seven illustrations, all of them floor plans, material objects, or archaeological sites that will be of great use to the archaeologist alongside Kondyli's written thoughts.<sup>3</sup> All illustrations throughout the book are of superbly high-quality and well-annotated, another indication of its careful editing and high production quality. They are, however, unevenly distributed. As already noted, Kondyli's chapter

contains nearly half of the total illustrations by itself. Of the fourteen outstanding, seven are found in Leslie Brubacker's fifth chapter, which will be the most appealing to the art historian,<sup>4</sup> six in Daniel Reynolds' seventh chapter,<sup>5</sup> and one in the thirteenth chapter by Dimitri Korobeinikov.<sup>6</sup> While the subjects of some chapters inevitably lend themselves more naturally to imagery than others, a more balanced employment of illustration might have extended the book's appeal to a wider academic audience with little changes needed to its theme or structure.

Overall, this book provides a well-produced, helpful, engaging contribution to the expanding fields of identity of ideology. It succeeds outstandingly in both of its stated aims, making it a valuable asset both to Byzantine studies and the study of ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Alicia Simpson, 'Provincial separatism in the late twelfth century: A case of power relations or disparate identities?', pp.250-268 at pp.262-263; Dionysios Stathakopoulos, 'Irrevocable blood: Violence and collective identity formation in the late twelfth century', pp.268-289 at pp.268, 278-281.

<sup>3</sup> Fontini Kondyli, 'Community-building and collective identity in middle Byzantine Athens', pp.200-231. Illustrations on pp.205-211, 215-216, 218-219, 222.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Brubacker, 'Performing Byzantine identity: Gender, status and the cult of the virgin', pp.129-146. Illustrations on pp.130, 134-138.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Reynolds, 'Byzantium from below: Rural identity in Byzantine Arabia and Palaestina, 500-630', pp.164-200. Illustrations on pp.171-172, 186-187, 190.

<sup>6</sup> Dimitri Korobeinikov, 'Two paradoxes of border identity: Michael VIII Palaiologos and Constantine Doukas Nestongos in the sultanate of Rûm', pp.319-346 at p.337.