

Norris, S., M. Walsh and T. Kaffenberger 2014. Visualising Famagusta: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of the Orthodox Cathedral of Saint George of the Greeks in Famagusta, Cyprus. *Archives and Manuscripts* 42: 48-60.

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Jonathan Harris. *The lost world of Byzantium*. pp. 298+16 b/w illustrations. 2016. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0-30017-857-9 hardcover £25.00.

The lost world of Byzantium is a rather agile and engaging read covering the history of the Byzantine Empire from the foundation of Constantinople to its fall by the hands of Sultan Mehmet II in 1453. The principle aim, as part of the wider scope of the work, is 'to investigate why Byzantium lasted for so long, in spite of all the upheavals and invasions that threatened its existence' (preface, p. x). The ten chapters dedicated to this purpose are structured chronologically; each chapter starts with an excerpt from a written source, a hint on the main lens through which the historical facts are to be examined. The history of Byzantium is recounted by those prominent figures that directly acted to make the empire great, or that brought it to its collapse. It is a history, then, made by emperors, generals, courtiers, and patriarchs, described from the centre (Constantinople), and where the middle and lower classes are mentioned rarely, if at all.

The narrative is purposefully selective, 'personal', and reflects the interests of the writer. Besides the unavoidable references to famous buildings, such as, for example, the Theodosian walls or the Hagia Sophia, the book delves rarely into the archaeological record, which has recently begun to provide different perspectives to the historical narrative given by written sources; for example, the results of classical excavations that have been instrumental in shedding light on the 'Dark Ages' of Byzantium, *in primis* Amorium, go unnoticed. Written sources dominate the scene and rule supreme, as it often happens in accounts of the history of Byzantium. In the first chapter, Harris rightly warns the reader of the difficulties in dealing with such biased sources, reporting as an example the contrasting accounts of the life of Constantine: first by Zosimus, who recorded the emperor to have been 'the

product of a one-night stand with an innkeeper's daughter' (p. 8), and secondly by Eusebius who, in contrast, praises his virtuous character. This selective narrative approach means that a number of important historical threads are left unexplored. Further to this, the general reader with little or no previous knowledge on the topic might feel at first slightly overwhelmed by the impressive amount of information on events, dates, places and historical figures covered in each chapter; the account proceeds quickly and steadily from the beginning to the end. There is little space for criticism by the reader though. Recounting the history of an empire that lasted for over one thousand years, and that spanned the area between the North African coasts to the Armenian borderlands, in less than 250 pages is a rather difficult task that justifies fully such a selective approach.

The narrative flow has been carefully crafted in order to keep the attention of the reader whilst delivering on the intricacies of Byzantine history. There is much to keep him or her constantly engaged. Indeed, the cycles of plots and counter-plots that animated the history of Byzantium and the gruesome accounts of the written sources on the accession to power of certain emperors give the writer more than enough material to work with. In addition, the abundance of Byzantine sources provides opportunities for more curious episodes in the book. For example, when Heraclius, who won a spectacular victory over the Persians but failed to save the empire from the incoming Arabs, developed such a terror of water that brought him to live in his palace at Hieria and not enter the capital; Harris explains that a ship bridge was set crossing the Golden Horn to allow Heraclius access to Constantinople, with thick lines of high trees installed along both sides of the bridge that would have hidden the sight of the sea to the eye of the emperor. It is true that the history is recounted (see above). However, Harris tries hard to tear down the emperors from their ivory towers: where, for example, the mosaic at San Vitale in Ravenna is used to show that Justinian 'was nothing remarkable to look at' (p. 37), and where an amusing anecdote tells the reader that before taking power, Constantine VIII 'had ample scope for hunting, bathing and his favorite hobby of cookery' (p. 161).

Overall, the work is addressed to a broad audience as opposed to a specialized readership. Besides the easy-to-follow narrative and the addition of anecdotes, the decision not to include in-text or foot-noted references enhances the readability of the text. Five chapters are complemented with a map showing the extension of the empire at a certain point of its history and the book ends with a chronology

of the main events and successions of emperors, a short glossary, a selected bibliography and an index – all useful tools for the readers not familiar with the topic. The 33 black-and-white plates form a welcome break in the middle of the text. Despite the clear intended audience, the specialist would find this reading equally informative and amusing for the richness of anecdotes and the balanced use of details throughout the narrative, although, in this sense, the lack of references is admittedly a drawback. Students would find it similarly attractive as an introduction to the history of Byzantium.

Ultimately, the answer to the main question posed in the preface is given in the epilogue to the book. Here Harris argues that the reason behind the resilience of the Byzantine Empire was in its ability to maintain a core identity while preserving a degree of openness to outsiders, who were gradually integrated into its society as early as the reign of Basil II. The lesson to take from this, which catapults us to our own modern geopolitical reality, is that ‘the strength of a society lies in its ability to adapt and incorporate outsiders in even the most adverse circumstances’ (p. 242). A lesson as important today as it was in Byzantium.

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whole has begun to be increasingly popular in research and public awareness.

Those with deeper knowledge of ceramic studies in the post-Roman era will however be puzzled at the limitations of her bibliography. There are other key researchers busy with ceramics in this period, and their publications are fundamental to advances in understanding its pottery and society, yet they are either totally absent or their work is noted only from a decade or so hence. Pamela Armstrong is last observed in 1991, Guy Sanders in 2003, while one of the brightest lights in post-Roman research in both ceramics and field archaeology – Athanasios Vionis, is entirely missing. Science advances best through collaboration and recognition of others’ achievements rather than through self-promotion, so the reviewer will hope that a desired third edition in a decade ahead will show greater generosity to other scholars shining in this field.

Nonetheless, this is surely a book all Eastern Mediterranean field projects should have on their laboratory shelves, and it is a gift for teaching in this long and previously neglected era of post-Roman archaeology. The author is to be congratulated on its design and content.

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Joanita Vroom. *Byzantine to Modern Pottery in the Aegean. An Introduction and Field Guide. Second and Revised Edition. 224 pp., 130 b/w ill. + 178 colour ill., 2 b/w tables. 2014. Turnout: Brepols. ISBN: 978-2-503-55314-6 paperback. €65.*

This is the second edition (the first was 2005) of an extremely useful field guide to ceramics in the post-Roman Aegean. It is exceptionally well-illustrated, well cross-referenced, and goes well beyond earlier studies in giving scope to cooking and household wares alongside the better-known tablewares of the Medieval and Post-Medieval periods. Joanita Vroom’s wide involvement in projects across many regions of Aegean Greece, Albania and Mainland Turkey have allowed her firsthand experience of the wide variety of ceramic products in time and space, both from survey and excavation contexts. The appearance of this book and its revised second edition mark a serious gap-filling exercise as the period as a