

ANTHONY KALDELLIS, *Romanland. Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2019. 373 pp. – ISBN: 978-0-674-98651-0 (Hardcover € 40,50)

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Romanland is KALDELLIS' second part of an anticipated trilogy which goes back to the basics regarding the "Byzantine Empire". The author's thesis is that quite a few of the persisting certainties in the field of Byzantine Studies in relation to the civilization it studies are long-lasting distortions of the historical reality, which are uncritically repeated through the ages. After having brought to the foreground the ancient republican ideological foundations of the medieval Roman monarchy as opposed to the prevailing views about its theocratic nature,¹ KALDELLIS provides another major corrective in the present volume, this time concerning the identity of the East Roman polity's Greek-speaking core population as well as the nature of its statehood in the so-called middle Byzantine period.

The book is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the "Romans" (pp. 1–120) and the second with the "Others" (pp. 121–268). The first chapter of the first part is called "A History of Denial" (pp. 3–37) and reveals the reasons for the field's stubborn denial of Byzantium's Romanness. KALDELLIS discusses the western political and ideological tradition that has informed this denialism since the time of Charlemagne and, most importantly, the twist of the 19th century politics (Crimean War) that led to the replacement of the ethnonym "Greek" used until then by Westerners for the people of the Eastern Empire with the de-ethnicized designation "Byzantine". Since then Byzantium's Greekness persisted for obvious reasons mainly in modern Greek historiography. [That is why, one could here add, the issue of the obvious identity shift in the Greek-speaking world, *i.e.*, under which circumstances medieval and modern "ethnic" Romans (Ῥωμαῖοι/ Ῥωμαῖοί/ Ῥωμιοί) chose to turn into modern Greeks (actually Hellenes/ Ἕλληνες), remains still relatively understudied.²] KALDELLIS

1. *The Byzantine Republic. People and Power in New Rome*, Cambridge MA 2015.

2. A recent attempt in this direction is partly represented by the collective volume that resulted from a conference organized by the University of Athens: OLGA KATSIARDI-

goes on to discuss the scholars' often absurd criteria for denying the obvious, namely that the Byzantines were Romans, despite the inescapable evidence of the medieval Greek sources. Although Byzantinists often admit this reality by stating that the Byzantines "called themselves Romans", they quickly pass over it without taking into account its implications, with some notable exceptions referred to by the author.

In the second chapter labeled "Roman Ethnicity" (pp. 38–80) the author explains how this denialism has led to a strange picture, where the Byzantine state has been studied in relation to its ethnic minorities but without acknowledging its ethnic majority. He argues that the Roman ethnic majority forms a distinct community quite manifest in the sources, which are often cited *in extenso*, by essentially meeting all the criteria of inclusion and exclusion (religion, language, customs, etc.) required by the relevant scholarship on ethnicity. Romanness is an ethnic reality on the ground and not an elite social construct; moreover it is acknowledged even by the neighboring cultures in East and West.

The third chapter, called after the book's title "Romanland", investigates the vocabulary employed for identifying with a national homeland: key-word here is the consistent vernacular term Romanía (gr. Ῥωμανία), which is treated in a way very similar to the modern naming of nation-states. Quite indicative is also the gradual popular usage of the term Roman (Romaic/Ῥωμαίικα) for the (Greek) language spoken in the Roman state, thus ethnicizing it. Then KALDELLIS argues that religious ecumenism was rather limited for most Byzantines, as they well understood that the labels Roman and (Orthodox) Christian were not synonymous. The author concludes the first part of his book by referring to the concept of the Romanization of foreign ethnic groups as discussed by the Byzantines themselves.

In the second part of the volume, having defined the Roman ethnicity that constituted the majority population of the medieval Roman state, KALDELLIS directs his attention on the relation between Romans and others. In his fourth chapter the author discusses the "Ethnic Assimilation" (pp. 123–154) of non-Romans, which had a long history since antiquity, by referring to different cases (Khurramites, Muslims, and particularly Slavs) and the incentives employed to achieve this goal. Following the same pattern, in the fifth chapter he deals in particular with "The Armenian Fallacy" (pp.

HERING et al., Ἑλλην, Ῥωμηός, Γραικός. Συλλογικοί προσδιορισμοί & ταυτότητες, Athens 2018 (in Greek with English summaries).

155–195), that is the pervasive absurd claim that many Romans, just because they had (some) Armenian descent, had not been assimilated and acted as an Armenian power group within Romanía. Most amusing is the subchapter “‘Armenian’ Emperors”, in that it effectively exposes the fallacy’s line of (often racial) thought in assuming such descent for some of the Roman monarchs. The chapter is not to deny the Armenian origins of many Romans but to expose the field’s outdated tendency to “dig up” ethnic Armenians among perfectly Roman elites.

The last two chapters – the sixth labeled “Was Byzantium an Empire in the Tenth Century?” (pp. 196–232) and the seventh named “The Apogee of Empire in the Eleventh Century” (pp. 233–268) – ask whether the medieval Roman state functioned as an empire. Having clarified the ethnic reality within the Byzantine polity, the author goes on to discuss what an empire is. Referring to modern literature on the issue, KALDELLIS argues that being an empire is not a matter of titulature (*e.g.*, having an emperor as head of state) but rather depends on the exercise of power by a dominant ethnic group over non-assimilated foreign groups, *i.e.*, Roman domination over non-Romans. In the case of the 10th century, KALDELLIS surveys the minority populations (including the very intriguing case of the Jews) and finds that they were not as significant as one would have expected given that Byzantium is quite often called a multiethnic empire. Moreover, there is no sign in the sources of a differentiated rule over Romans as opposed to non-Romans: Romanía was relatively ethnically homogenous and resembled a national state. This changed towards the end of the 10th century due to the conquest of large territories in the Balkans and the East. Therefore, in the 11th century Romanía came to *have* an empire (but it still *was* not an empire), as by then the core national state started to behave to a certain extent differently, *i.e.*, imperially, towards its foreign subjects (Bulgarians, Vlachs, Armenians, Georgians, Syrians, Melkites, Muslims, and Jews) in the newly acquired lands. The volume closes with a brief conclusion (pp. 269–275), followed by endnotes (pp. 281–324), a bibliography (pp. 325–361) and an index (pp. 363–373).

KALDELLIS’ Romanland essentially argues that what we call “Byzantine Empire” was neither Byzantine nor empire: Romanía is rather the national state of the medieval Romans. This is something that many had fancied in the past and some have even hinted to in their studies. KALDELLIS, however, takes full credit for clearly – perhaps even provocatively – articulating this against the dominant theory of a multiethnic empire where the desig-

nation Romans was nothing more than just an elitist label. The final part of his “shifting-the-paradigm-in-the-Byzantine-studies-trilogy” will focus, it seems, on the institutional framework of the medieval Roman republican national state.

Keywords

assimilation; ethnicity; identity; (non-)Romans; empire