

RUSTAM SHUKUROV, *Византия и Азия. Гибель цивилизации* [Byzantium and Asia: The Demise of a Civilization]. Saint Petersburg: Наука 2023. 375 pp. – ISBN 978-5-02-040284-3

• GEORGI PARPULOV, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
(georgi.parpulov@lmu.de)

Originally planned as a narrative *prolegomenon* to the author's *Byzantine Turks* (p. 8),¹ this is a book about ethnography, politics, war, and conquest. Its general theme is the encounter between two divergent ways of life, the sedentary and the nomadic. Its focal point is the Constantinopolitan government's changing response to a series of migratory movements from Inner Asia toward the Black Sea and the Aegean. Its main protagonists are the Pechenegs and the Uzes, the Cumans and the Tatars, the Seljuqs and the Ottomans. Its story is that of successive offensives into Anatolia and the Balkans, of 'nomadisation' (номадизация) and 'Turcification' (тюркизация). It ends with the fall of Constantinople (1454), Mystras (1460), and Trebizond (1461). In short, this is a partial account of the history of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The account is partial in two ways. First, it only shows Byzantium, as it were, facing northward and eastward. Second, SHUKUROV, who is a Byzantinist, reflexively adopts a 'Constantinopolitan' point of view. When he speaks of 'the empire's twilight' (закат империи), he does not, of course, mean the Mongols or the Ottomans. Rashid al-Din is only cited twice; his contemporary Pachymeres, twenty-eight times in a row.

The text opens with a brief survey of East Roman dealings with the Huns, Avars, Chazars, Bulgars, and Magyars (pp. 10–28). Their impact on Byzantine internal affairs was rather limited. By contrast, from the eleventh century onward incoming nomads would seriously disrupt the empire's economic and social life. SHUKUROV explains this with state weakness ('demilitarisation') (pp. 30–32), rather than, say, with changes in demography or climate.² It is at this point that his story really begins. In three long chapters, he describes nomadic incursions into the Balkans (pp. 29–80) and into

1. RUSTAM SHUKUROV, *The Byzantine Turks, 1204–1461* (The Medieval Mediterranean 105). Leiden – Boston 2016; IDEM, *Тюрки в византийском мире (1204–1461)*. Moscow 2017.

2. Cf. ADAM IZDEBSKI, *Ein vormoderner Staat als sozio-ökologisches System. Das oströmische Reich 300–1300 n. Chr.* (Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa 59). Dresden 2021, pp. 128–133.

Asia Minor (pp. 81–146), together with the Ottoman expansion that followed them (pp. 147–208). The Empire of Trebizond and its relations with neighbouring powers receive separate treatment (pp. 209–266). A blow-by-blow account of ‘Byzantium’s triple death’ in the mid-fifteenth century serves as conclusion (pp. 266–302).

The book’s narrative is periodically interrupted by ethnographic vignettes: ‘Pecheneg Portraits’ (pp. 46–52), ‘Cuman Portraits’ (pp. 61–66), ‘Persianate Portraits’ («Персидские» портреты) (pp. 123–136). The subject of these interesting digressions is a bit elusive. Sometimes SHUKUROV thinks in terms of collective character: ‘Quite naturally, the Pechenegs, an ingenious people, were devoid of the Byzantines’ refined cleverness’ (p. 47).³ Once or twice, natural science is invoked: ‘Craniology, at any rate, shows that the Pechenegs’ physical type was primarily Caucasian, with some Mongoloid admixtures’ (p. 35, cf. p. 47).⁴ There is also a kind of folk linguistics: the neighbours of Pecheneg, Uz, and Cuman tribes ‘defined them as speakers of Turkic dialects’ (p. 30). A general problem, however, is that ‘modern ideas of ethnic identity fundamentally differ from the ancient ones’ (p. 25). ‘Nomadic regions remained essentially polyglot in terms of speech, as well as, more generally, of culture’ (p. 27). ‘Polyglottism and marked hybridity impeded the “ethnicization” of sociocultural space’ (ibid.).⁵

Hybridity comes to the fore in SHUKUROV’s discussion of ‘Irano-Greek civilization’ in twelfth and thirteenth-century Anatolia (pp. 136–144). Despite the Turkish conquest of 1071, a large part of the region’s inhabitants remained Christian. Even Muslims would use Greek as a *lingua franca*. These were, moreover, far from a homogeneous group: of some two thousand Muslims named in contemporary sources, no less than six per cent can be identified as immigrants from Iran. Persian, widely spoken in the cities, was the language of state administration. Local artists followed either Iranian or Byzantine models.⁶ In terms of its dual character, the culture of Seljuq Anatolia is comparable to that of Muslim India.

3. Печенеги, естественным образом, были простодушны и чужды рафинированной мудрости византийцев.

4. No supporting bibliography is cited for this statement.

5. Cf. IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, *The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity*. *Sociological Forum* 2 (1987) pp. 373–388.

6. For an interesting example not cited by SHUKUROV see NESLIHAN ASUTAY-EFFENBERGER, *Überlegung zur Datierung und Lokalisierung der Innsbrucker Artukiden-Schale*. *Byzantion* 79 (2009) pp. 37–47.

SHUKUROV's text itself mixes two registers. His regular style is formulaic and slightly ponderous: 'with a few exceptions, [Cumans] did not demonstrate social success and were not admitted into the Byzantine élite' (p. 80), 'widespread knowledge of Greek... solved the problem of communication between bearers of different cultural traditions' (p. 137), 'the Empire of the Grand Comneni retained its stability and turned again into an important regional power, superior to its Muslim neighbours in terms of its potential' (p. 241), 'events surrounding the siege and fall of Constantinople unequivocally demonstrated [Emperor] Constantine's high moral qualities, fearlessness, and self-sacrifice' (p. 285).⁷ A second, occasionally used mode recalls popular fiction: 'Mary of Alania was distinguished by great beauty and remarkable character' (p. 72), 'a Turk trusted a Greek – and he probably had his reasons' (p. 205), 'the young sultan intended the City's capture to be his first great exploit' (p. 267).⁸

The book contains three exhaustive indices of personal names, geographic names, and ethnonyms. There are five maps and a few well-chosen black-and-white photographic illustrations.⁹ One stumbles upon a couple of minor factual errors: in 626, the Persians did not capture Chalcedon (p. 18) but just laid siege on it; in 1277, Lachanas rebelled not against the Byzantine emperor (p. 151) but against the tsar of Bulgaria. I am not sure whether 'Murchuflos' (Мурчуфл) (p. 118) is a misprint or a reconstructed form of the supposedly Turkic surname Μούρτζουφλος. A few bibliographical omissions might be intentional.¹⁰

Needless to say, none of these small shortcomings decrease the value of

7. Половцы... за немногими исключениями, так и не продемонстрировали социальной успешности и не были допущены в византийскую элиту (p. 80). Именно распространённость знания греческого... решало проблему коммуникации между носителями разных культурных традиций (p. 137). ...империя Великих Комнинов сохраняет стабильность и вновь превращается в важную региональную силу, превосходившую по своему потенциалу своих мусульманских соседей (p. 241). Бесспорно, события осады и взятия Константинополя однозначно продемонстрировали высокие моральные качества, бесстрашие и самопожертвование Константина (p. 285).

8. Мария Аланская отличалась исключительной красотой и замечательным характером (p. 72). Турок доверял греку, и у него, вероятно, были на то причины (p. 205). Молодой султан задумал захват Города как свое первое великое свершение (p. 267).

9. I fail to see how the miniature reproduced in Fig. 12 can be considered a specimen of 'the Byzantine school of painting' (p. 138).

10. E.g. JOHN HALDON, *Marching across Anatolia: Medieval Logistics and Modeling the Mantzikert Campaign*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 65/66 (2011–2012) pp. 209–235.

SHUKUROV's work. His detailed monograph presents the history of middle and late Byzantium from an unusual angle.

Keywords

nomadism; migrations; ethnicity; multiculturalism