

ANTHONY KALDELLIS, *The Case for East Roman Studies (Past Imperfect)*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press 2024. 105 pp. – ISBN 978-1-80270-182-1

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In this short book, ANTHONY KALDELLIS argues for the abolition of the field of Byzantine Studies and its replacement by a new field of East Roman Studies. The latter will not only bear the epithet ‘Roman’ instead of ‘Byzantine’, but will cover a much longer period, from the time of Augustus until at least the fall of the last East Roman outposts in the 15th century. KALDELLIS develops his argument in three chapters. The first one, tellingly entitled ‘RIP Byzantium’, discusses why we should abandon the existing model with its traditional chronological span (4th through 15th centuries) and its use of the terms ‘Byzantium’ and ‘Byzantine’. KALDELLIS claims that such terminology is not only artificial, but also recent. He argues that despite the use of the epithet ‘Byzantine’ by Hieronymus Wolf in the 16th century, the term became prominent only in the mid-19th century (p. 9). Until then, Western European scholars understood the empire and its people as ‘Greek’, continuing the medieval strategy (since 800) of denying their Romanness. KALDELLIS observes that the Western European stance towards the appellation of the Eastern empire changed during the Crimean war (1853–1856), when the irredentist dream of a Greek empire led a number of Greeks to fight on the Russian side. He also notes that this shift in terminology occurred during the peak of European colonialism, which affected the newly-created field of Byzantine Studies.

KALDELLIS highlights the danger of using ‘Byzantine’ and ‘Byzantium’ as designations for scholarly output. The decision to call the Eastern Roman empire ‘Byzantine’ implies, in his words, a different ‘essence’ from the Roman empire. This has led scholars to exaggerate the contrasts with earlier Roman history (e.g. Christianization, Arab conquests, and prevalence of the Greek language), and prevented them from looking closer at ancient Rome and ancient Roman material. KALDELLIS attributes this phenomenon to the importance Byzantinists have placed on the ideology expressed in the works of Eusebios of Caesarea, which were treated as ‘quasi-constitutional founding texts of the new order’ (p. 21).

KALDELLIS warns that artificial division of Roman history has so far served the Western European agenda of ‘othering’ the Eastern Roman empire. According to him, what is today perceived as the essence of Byzantine civilization, namely, Roman institutions, Greek culture, and Orthodoxy, in the Enlightenment model of Byzantium were presented as ‘the “bad” versions of the constitutive elements of European civilization’. Western European civilization appeared as the only true heir of the classical world. The negative connotations that accompany the term Byzantium cannot be fully purged. General public consciousness has long been shaped by negative stereotypes, evident in the way the words ‘Byzantium’ and ‘Byzantine’ have entered the vocabulary of many modern languages. KALDELLIS suggests that the founders of Byzantine Studies were well aware of the prejudices associated with the terms and, to a large extent, shared them.

Another problem, according to KALDELLIS, is that the term Byzantium ‘suggests affinities with the Slavic Orthodox World and specifically with Russia’ (p. 22). The notion of an Eastern European Orthodox block, which stemmed from Byzantium, was used as a way to understand the realities of Cold-War Europe, leading to parallelisms between modern Russia and the Eastern empire. KALDELLIS points out that this would not have been so easily achieved if the Eastern empire was presented in scholarship as Roman, with deep roots in antiquity. Instead, he argues that Western scholarship, after denying its Romanness and then, in the 19th century, also its Greek identity, left Orthodoxy as the empire’s ‘sole remaining cultural marker’ (p. 24).

The most important issue, however, is that these terms were never used by the inhabitants of the empire, who understood themselves and their state as ‘Roman’ (KALDELLIS prefers the term *Romanía* for the state). The terms ‘Byzantium’ and ‘Byzantines’ were devised exactly to silence this fact. ‘Denying a people’s identity, especially when that was consistently and strongly held across fifteen centuries at all levels of their society’ (p.14), is unacceptable from both an ethical and a scholarly point of view.

The second chapter, ‘Contenders for a New Field-Name’, discusses possible replacements for ‘Byzantium’ and ‘Byzantine’. First of all, KALDELLIS investigates the suitability of the term ‘Medieval Romans’, which is rejected as problematic for a number of reasons. There is no consensus regarding the chronological span of the Middle Ages (which are a Western historical concept, after all); in fact, after the creation of the concept of ‘late antiquity’ the empire between the 4th and the 7th centuries would

hardly qualify for this term. Moreover, the term does not allow for distinction between Eastern and Western Romans, creating confusion between the Eastern empire and the city of Rome. KALDELLIS also notes that the term ‘medieval’ is just as loaded with negative connotations as the term ‘Byzantine’, since both are connected with a perceived decline of civilization in Western Europe. The Eastern Roman empire differed significantly from its contemporary polities in the West, remaining always a centralized state with institutions deeply rooted in antiquity, while its culture never severed its links to its classical heritage. KALDELLIS expresses the fear that the label ‘medieval’ might turn the field into a sub-field of Medieval Studies, which are focused on Western Europe. This would mean that the Eastern empire does not receive an equal share of attention with its contemporary western polities and societies.

A second term KALDELLIS discusses, ‘New Romans’, is derived from New Rome (Constantinople), the name the Eastern empire’s capital. KALDELLIS finds that this term preserves the identity of the people we study as Romans and that the epithet ‘new’ has positive connotations. He admits that this was the reason he chose it for the title of his book *The New Roman Empire: A History of Byzantium* (Oxford 2023). Additionally, the term ‘new’ indicates an ‘ambiguous relationship to a canonical past’ (p. 43), which functions as a model for the ‘new’: Romans strove to imitate idealized past models such as Augustus and Constantine. However, the term was never used in Constantinople itself: there are no ‘New-Romans’ in our sources. The only example known to KALDELLIS is Theodosios Zygomalas in the 1580s, who styled Greek-speaking Christians ‘New-Romans’. According to KALDELLIS, this late and limited usage hardly justifies adopting the term. He also argues that calling the East Romans ‘New’ postulating that this stems from their use of Greek, does not seem reasonable: Greek-speaking Christian Romans were the norm in the East, since at least the 5th century. Viewing Roman history as a continuous process of evolution and change, KALDELLIS argues that ‘all Romans in any period were New Romans’ (p. 45). The chain of changes that occurred in the 4th century (e.g. the foundation of Constantinople, the adoption of Christianity by the state) were not perceived as ruptures with the past, so that one can justify the term ‘new’. Even New Rome, says KALDELLIS, cannot justify the term, for there had been ‘new Romes’ before Constantinople. A final point against the term is that a name ‘New Roman Studies’ would create the im-

pression that the field is a new version of ancient Roman studies, rather than a separate field. KALDELLIS suggests, therefore, that it should be avoided. Next, the author considers ‘Romeans’, a term inspired by the Greek word for ‘Romans’, which is *Rhomaioi*. This choice could result in a field name Roman or Romaic Studies. KALDELLIS warns that the apparent advantages of the term are, in reality, its disadvantages. For example, one could argue that the term reproduces a word these people used to describe themselves in their language, while at the same time allowing for a distinction between Eastern and Western Romans (or Ancient Romans). KALDELLIS thinks that this is precisely where the danger lies. Assigning to a group of people the term ‘Rhomaioi’ creates the impression that they were sort of Romans, but different in any case from the ancient ones. Moreover, the term perpetuates the problem of division of Roman history, this time between Roman and Romaic history. KALDELLIS finds this division even more problematic, since it emphasizes the cultural difference between the two strands of Roman tradition, which evolved over time and cannot easily be pinpointed. Most importantly, a division marked by the use of two distinct epithets will again lead scholars to try to discover a different ‘essence’. For KALDELLIS, it is important that the same term be used for both ancient Rome and its Eastern continuation – otherwise we run the risk of forgetting ‘the truth that there was only one Roman tradition, one Roman people in continual evolution’ (p. 47). After all, he reminds us, the word ‘Roman’ in Greek (*Rhomaioi*) was the same for the ancient Latin-speaking Romans and the later Greek-speaking Romans. Furthermore, he argues that the term is not innocent of Roman denialism. In the 12th century, German emperors had used the phrases *imperator Romeorum* and *imperator Romeon* by way of avoiding the proper appellation *imperator Romanorum*.

Finally, KALDELLIS considers the term ‘East Romans’, which he proposes as the new name for the field. He argues that the term respects the identity of our subjects and does not foster chronological divisions of Roman history. On the contrary, it can encompass individuals from the 1st until the 19th century, covering the entire time span of East Roman history and linking antiquity to modernity. In this way, Josephus (1st c.) and Ailios Aristeides (2nd c.) could be subsumed under the same label as Greek-speaking individuals under Ottoman rule. Even Mark Antony can be called ‘East-Roman’. Moreover, KALDELLIS argues that the name ‘East Roman’ is not artificial, since it relates to the administrative division of the empire in 395, which was remembered by the generations shaping the European political landscape in the following centuries. In any event, KALDELLIS suggests

that the term 'Roman' be used in most cases. If disambiguation is needed, one could resort to 'East Roman'.

In his third chapter, 'Implications for Allied Fields', KALDELLIS discusses the implications of his new terminology for the various sub-fields of Byzantine Studies. Firstly, he investigates the changes on those who study East Roman Christianity. Here, he argues for the introduction of the term 'Roman Orthodoxy' (as opposed to Roman Catholicism) as a replacement of the term 'Byzantine Orthodoxy'. This term is to describe the form of Christianity that proliferated in Romanía, the Eastern Roman State. KALDELLIS claims that Orthodoxy was closely associated with the Roman state and should be named after it. It is misleading, he continues, to portray Orthodoxy as transcending state borders, a notion that is fostered by the artificial term 'Byzantium'. KALDELLIS asserts that OBOLENSKY's concept of a 'Byzantine Commonwealth' could not have worked if one replaced 'Byzantine' with 'Roman'. He sees no reason to use the label 'Byzantine Church' for the church of Constantinople, which was in essence a department of the state: the imperial Church. He brings examples from the sources in support of his suggestion, claiming that if one reads 'East Roman hagiographical texts', one will not find 'ecumenical orthodoxy' but 'only Roman patriotism infused with religious fervor' (p. 74).

The second field KALDELLIS discusses is art history. Surprisingly, he admits that art historians have so successfully invested in the term 'Byzantine', that to adopt the term 'East Roman' might in some cases damage the field. He argues that 'Byzantine icons' cannot satisfactorily be replaced by 'East Roman icons', as the latter 'fails to evoke the defining religious dimension that undergirds the study of icons' (p. 74). Moreover, in art history 'Byzantium' is not only a term linked to a specific state, but also a term describing specific stylistic concerns which surpass political borders. Other forms of art, nevertheless, can change name without issues. Imperial art and architecture as well as secular art (mosaics, statues, etc.) can be branded 'East Roman' without problem, since they stemmed from the Roman state. KALDELLIS believes that this should also be the case with churches: he prefers 'East Roman churches' to 'Byzantine churches'. KALDELLIS admits that art history terminology will be decided by art historians, who will choose what best serves their needs. He even expresses the conviction that the term 'Byzantine' might work better for art historians, and claims that its abandonment by all other fields will render it an explicit art-historical term, helping in this way art historians. He clarifies, nonetheless, that he objects to the term 'Byzantine iconoclasm', which is frequently used by art

historians. According to KALDELLIS, this religious conflict was limited to the space of Romanía, and, therefore, it should be called ‘Roman iconoclasm’ – not even ‘East Roman iconoclasm’. It is to be seen as separate from wider discussion in this period about the role of religious images.

Next, KALDELLIS turns to Literature and Philology. He argues that one of the main problems regarding the reception of ‘Byzantine’ texts is that they are not studied as literature, and that they are separated by language. More specifically, KALDELLIS argues that academic philology categorizes texts based on language, ‘not history, cultural affinity or logic’. In this way, the field of Byzantine Philology conventionally studies Greek texts written between 330 and 1453 (modern linguistic categories here take priority over the identity of our subjects: p. 85). KALDELLIS thinks that the new field of East Roman literature will change that, for it will study the literary output of the Eastern half of the Roman empire regardless of language. Texts in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Hebrew, Arabic, Armenian, etc. will be studied together, as the product of a single culture. The inclusive ‘East Roman’ label can serve this purpose far better than ‘medieval Greek’. Even regarding Greek literature, KALDELLIS argues that an ‘East Roman’ rubric will improve our understanding of Greek texts. The 4th century did not signal any major change in Greek literature; on the other hand, the 2nd century was the starting point for a number of literary genres that dominated the later period. KALDELLIS considers important that the East Roman corpus includes texts produced during the early imperial period, which is conventionally called ‘Second Sophistic’. Plutarch, Lucian, and Cassius Dio are seen as East Roman authors who inaugurated the early East Roman period which runs up to the 7th century.

Regarding the terminology of the new field, KALDELLIS suggests that we name the field ‘East Roman Studies’; that we use the terms ‘Romanía’, ‘empire of the Romans’ and ‘East Rome’ for the state and its society; and that we call the majority of its population ‘Romans’ or ‘East Romans’. As for periodization, KALDELLIS proposes a distinction between an early imperial period (Augustus–7th century), a middle imperial period (7th century–

1204), and a late imperial period (1204–15th century). KALDELLIS notes that he does not see late-period Romanía as an empire; however, he uses the term to emphasize the continuity of the polity from antiquity to the 15th century.

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Given that KALDELLIS' book touches upon a vast range of topics and could be the starting point of a number of interesting discussions, I have decided to limit myself to what I consider the core of his argument, without discussing its ramifications for the various subfields of Byzantine Studies or its feasibility in the current academic realities. Neither will I defend the usage of the term 'Byzantine', which I have done elsewhere (without invalidating the point of those who highlight the negative connotations of the term).¹ My focus, therefore, will be on the suggested recalibration of 'Eastern Romanness' and the implications of the concept of 'East Rome'.

As seen, KALDELLIS does not merely call for the replacement of the terms 'Byzantium' and 'Byzantine' with a term that acknowledges the Romanness of the empire. He suggests that we abandon the very concept of Byzantium altogether. In his opinion, the concept of Byzantium as a distinct state and civilization which emerges during the reign of Constantine, serves only those narratives that undermine its Romanness. To build a new field of East Roman Studies that will cover at least the fifteen centuries between Augustus and the fall of the last East Roman polities in the 15th century, KALDELLIS deconstructs 'Byzantium'. He attacks all those elements that Byzantinists, for generations, have highlighted as differentiating Byzantium from the Ancient Roman empire, that is, Greek language and culture, Christianity, and Constantinople. KALDELLIS argues that none of these was important enough to cause such a rupture as the concept of Byzantium suggests.

The greatest advantage of this proposition is that it opens new ways of narrating Roman history. By abandoning the traditional distinction between imperial Roman and Byzantine history, historians can follow the long process of the establishment of Roman rule in the East, the gradual formation of new Roman identities, the spread of Christianity and its evolution into

1. PANAGIOTIS THEODOROPOULOS, *Did the Byzantines Call Themselves Byzantines? Elements of Eastern Roman Identity in the Imperial Discourse of the Seventh Century*. *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 45 (2021) pp. 25-41.

the official religion of the Roman empire. The evolution of the Roman imperial apparatus and the provincial administration into a more centralized empire can, in this way, be examined alongside the transformation of civic, ethnic, and religious identities on both sides of the conventional 4th-century ‘watershed’. Moreover, this model would allow students of the Christian Roman empire to follow a narrative of Roman history that includes fundamental events for the development of the consciousness of Christian Romans: the incarnation of Jesus Christ during the reign of Augustus, which was used to highlight the providential dimension of the Roman empire embedding Christian eschatology into Roman imperial ideology; and the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, which was seen as evidence for the superiority of the Christian/Roman faith.

But I should also mention possible drawbacks. By lumping together as ‘East Romans’ individuals living in the Roman East in the 1st century CE and individuals living in the Ottoman empire in the 17th century, one perhaps overemphasizes continuity based on the continuous usage of ‘Roman’ as a self-descriptive ethnonym and ignores semantic variations. Being Roman meant different things to different people even at the same time, let alone in a period of over fifteen centuries. Insisting on the application of a single term for all these individuals might downplay changes, obscure diversity, and silence expressions of collective identities that do not serve this agenda.

To elaborate on this: calling every author who wrote in Greek during, for example, the first three centuries CE, ‘East Roman’, and incorporating their work into a single corpus of East Roman literature creates the impression that the Greeks turned overnight into Romans. It will obscure the fact that the merge of Hellenism with Romanness took centuries to produce an ‘East Roman’ identity.² HANS-GEORG BECK suggested that this phenomenon was still in progress even as late as the 4th century CE, when the empire had become far more centralized than in the previous centuries (which PETER BROWN has described as a commonwealth of cities).³ The same goes for the various other *ethne* of the Roman East.

KALDELLIS emphasizes the spread of Roman citizenship in the East, which

2. GREG WOOLF, *Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East*. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40 (1994) pp. 116–143.

3. HANS-GEORG BECK, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend*. Munich 1978, pp. 11–29; PETER BROWN, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*. Oxford 1996, p. 61.

culminated in 212 with the grant of Roman citizenship to all free men within the empire. It is at that moment that virtually everyone became Roman in a political sense. This, however, does not necessarily equate with the adoption of a uniform Roman identity. Studies have shown that exactly because of the devaluation of Roman citizenship as an element of social distinction, the term ‘Roman’ lost its significance as an identity marker.⁴ Therefore, to use the argument of Roman citizenship in order to label as ‘East Roman’ the literary and artistic output of the various peoples under Roman rule in the first three centuries CE, does not seem to respect those peoples’ identities, as KALDELLIS argues (see below), but imposes on them a convenient (to a specific viewpoint) unifying ethnonym.

Moreover, there were provincial populations that seem to have never fully adopted a Roman identity. JACK TANNOUS has argued that in Syriac texts the Romans typically appear as others, even though the Aramaic-speaking populations of Syria had been Roman citizens for centuries. The word ‘Roman’ in Syriac could mean no more than just ‘soldier’.⁵ This example indicates that even as late as the 7th century, Roman citizenship did not entail Roman identity.

The emphasis on citizenship as the sole indicator of Romanness might create further problems for the concept of East Rome. The first one is that KALDELLIS uses political criteria to formulate what seems to be a cultural term. East Romans should be distinguished from West Romans. The criteria for this division are never outlined. In KALDELLIS’ view, even Mark Antony could be labeled East Roman, for he ruled the Roman East from Alexandria (p. 53). In the period, many members of the Roman elite were bilingual (in Latin and Greek) and moved between East and West, which makes such distinctions extremely difficult. KALDELLIS’ vision for the field is to follow the history of the Romans in the Eastern half of the Roman empire. This might be possible if one studies the evolution (social, administrative, etc.) of the cities of the East or the provinces of the East, but it becomes problematic when one attempts to narrate Roman political

4. RALPH MATHISEN, Roman Identity in Late Antiquity, with Special Attention to Gaul. In: WALTER POHL et al. (eds.), *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities* (Millennium-Studien 71). Berlin – Boston 2018, pp. 255–274; EVANGELOS CHRYSOS, The Roman Political Identity in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium. In: KARSTEN FLEDELIUS (ed.), *Byzantium – Identity, Image, Influence: XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies*. Copenhagen 1996, pp. 7–16, at pp. 9–10.

5. JACK TANNOUS, Romanness in the Syriac East. In: POHL et al. (eds.), *Transformations of Romanness*, pp. 457–479, at pp. 457–458.

history, which is impossible to do without following the political developments of the empire writ large, and without studying Rome itself. Therefore, without a clear definition of what it meant to be East Roman in the first three centuries CE and without a clear proposition how the concept of East Rome will incorporate Roman political history, it will be perhaps better to exclude this early period from the scope of our field.

One can more easily match Roman political history with the cultural concept of East Rome after the foundation of Constantinople, where the newly-founded senate eventually divided the Roman senatorial aristocracy into eastern and western. This early dichotomy was finalized by the institutional division of the empire in 395. After this date, ‘East Romans’ becomes a valid political term for the inhabitants of the Eastern half of the empire, but this brings us dangerously close to the concept of Byzantium. For this reason, KALDELLIS denies the importance of Constantinople for the development of East Romanness. He argues that the spread of Roman citizenship in the 3rd century, which turned Rome from *urbs* into *orbis* (p. 59), meant that the Roman East had become an East Rome. In other words, the Roman state – and not Rome (or New Rome) – was the source of Romanness. KALDELLIS adds that the concept of a new Rome was not new at all and that there were previous imperial capitals other than Rome. But GILBERT DAGRON has long stressed the fact that Constantinople was not meant to be just another imperial capital.⁶ KALDELLIS’ effort to downplay the importance of Constantinople for the development of East Romanness goes hand in hand with another potential problem of the citizenship argument, namely that it also downplays the interplay between Romanness and Christianity. Regarding Constantinople, one can recall PAUL ALEXANDER’s analysis of the eschatological significance of the epithet ‘New’ for Christian Romans.⁷ In this line of thought, New Rome replaced and surpassed Old Rome, since as the seat of the Christian emperor, it had a more important role in God’s providential plan.

EVANGELOS CHRYSOS has highlighted the fact that the spread of Roman citizenship was accompanied by the emergence of the word *subiectus* (subject), which by the 6th century became the preferable term for describing the relation of the inhabitants of the empire with the state, represented by

6. GILBERT DAGRON, *Naissance d’une capitale : Constantinople et ses institutions de 300 à 451*. Paris 1974, pp. 47 and 119–146.

7. PAUL J. ALEXANDER, *The Strength of Empire and Capital as Seen through Byzantine Eyes*. *Speculum* 37 (1962) pp. 339–357.

the emperor.⁸ This development implies a transformation of the perception of Roman political identity, which increasingly stems from the emperor, who from the 4th century on is Christian and resides in Constantinople. Christian imperial ideology portrayed the emperor as imitator of Christ; the emperor's rule was aimed at guiding his subjects (if not the entire Christendom) to salvation. YANNIS STOURAITIS has conclusively suggested that Christianity and loyalty to the *basileus* were the core elements of Eastern Romanness for much of the population of Romania in the 12th century.⁹ He equally stresses that popular historical memory of the Rhomaioi under Ottoman rule centered on Constantinople and on its emperor, not on the glories of Ancient Rome.¹⁰

The observations of STOURAITIS reveal another weakness of KALDELLIS' proposition: his reconstruction of East Romanness is based on and reproduces narratives of East Roman political and literary elites (even these narratives changed significantly in the late Byzantine period, when Byzantine elites often envisaged a connection of East Romanness to Hellenism).¹¹ At the same time, KALDELLIS purposely excludes from his discussion texts from monastic/ecclesiastical circles that show little interest in Roman citizenship and the ancient roots of the Roman polity (p. 63). These views could perhaps reinforce the notion that the 4th century did mark the beginning of a new era. To bring an example from the Syriac speaking world, JACK TANNOUS has convincingly argued that the Syriac speakers participated in Romanness only through the connection of Romanness with Christianity, which was achieved by the conversion of Constantine. The Christian *basileus* in Constantinople was seen as an eschatological figure by Syriac-speaking Christians of all confessions, even outside the empire.¹² The interplay between Romanness and Christianity gave ecumenical authority to the Roman emperor, which is a dimension of Romanness that KALDELLIS refuses to accept (p. 60).

The systematic silence of alternative views of Romanness, whether they were held by ethnic, religious, or social groups within the empire, does not allow for the appreciation of the pluralism of Eastern Roman society. By the same token, it cannot serve an agenda of 'decolonization', as KALDEL-

8. CHRYSOS, *Roman Political Identity*, pp. 10–11.

9. YANNIS STOURAITIS, *Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium*. *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017) pp. 70–94, at pp. 76–79.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–88.

12. TANNOUS, *Romanness in the Syriac East*, pp. 461–479.

LIS implies the 'East Rome' field will do (given that the concept of 'Byzantium' serves a Western European worldview), for it projects on the totality of the population of the empire KALDELLIS' interpretation of the views of certain elite groups. KALDELLIS' singular vision of Romanness is central for the concept of 'East Rome', which is based on the premise 'that there was only one Roman tradition, one Roman people in continual evolution' (p. 47). These points become important if one pays closer attention to KALDELLIS' definition of the subject of 'East Rome'. I quote the relevant passage in full (the emphases are mine):

In sum, the rubric 'east Rome' enables us to cope with long processes of gradual change, from the first to the nineteenth century, while respecting the identity of our subjects. East Rome first began to take shape among the Romans who settled in the east or native easterners who, as new Romans, were lifted up into the citizenship - and leadership cadres of the ancient imperium. Then, for a millennium, east Romans constituted the surviving Roman polity in the east. Finally, they became subjects of another empire, the Ottoman (p. 54).

It becomes apparent that the major innovation of the 'East Rome' concept is the fact that it does not focus on the Roman empire, but on the (East) Romans. It aspires to track the history of the people who in KALDELLIS' view qualify as East Romans. The existing field of Byzantine Studies focuses on the history of the Byzantine/East Roman Empire and consecutively examines its culture, economy, society, etc. In my understanding, the reference point of our field is the state/empire, not the people. This offers stable ground for research, as the main subject of the field is well-defined and universally accepted. By placing the people at the center of a proposed new field of study, KALDELLIS builds on a much less solid base. The concept of East Rome, seen as the history of the 'East Romans', renders questions of collective identity (which are extremely controversial by nature) existential for the new field. What is more, the highlighted phrase 'while respecting the identity of our subjects' makes this discussion – for the reasons outlined above – even more controversial and difficult.

Despite these objections, the prospect of a unified Roman imperial history is exciting, and in this regard KALDELLIS' proposition can be seen as an important first step towards a new narrative of Roman history. Perhaps an approach similar to the one of JOHN BURY that focuses on the continuous

history of the Roman empire (neither of the Romans, nor of its Eastern half), would better serve this new narrative.¹³

Moving our focus for an instant from the argument to the language of the book, one could say that it is written in a provocative manner. An unfortunate example, in my opinion, is KALDELLIS' attitude towards Greek universities and their departments of Philology (pp. 84–85). He claims that their approach to texts is narrowly philological and the work of their students is limited to the publication of 'trivial texts'. He even doubts the ability of philologists to properly understand the texts they edit, and comments, regarding those producing critical editions, that he is not convinced that 'being able to transcribe and even correct grammatical mistakes in a text proves that one understands what it is saying or even what any particular sentence means'. Such unfair and unfriendly statements can be hurtful to colleagues who serve our field and produce excellent scholarship under extremely difficult conditions.

Whether or not one is convinced by it, the book under review puts forward a bold proposition which questions the very foundation of our scholarly discipline. KALDELLIS invites his readers to reflect on a range of key aspects of East Roman history, terminology, methodology, and periodization. Such reflections can only have a positive impact on research. I highly recommend reading *The Case for East Roman Studies*.

Keywords

historical methodology; Eastern Roman Empire

13. JOHN B. BURY, *A History of the Later Roman Empire: From Arcadius to Irene (395 A.D. to 800 A.D.)*. Vol. 1. London – New York 1889, pp. iv–xii.