

Stephenson, Paul. *The Byzantine World*. London: Routledge, 2010. Pp. xxi, 606. \$250 . ISBN 978-0-415-44010-3.

Reviewed by:

Glenn Peers
University of Texas
gpeers@mail.utexas.edu

Table of Contents at this link and below:

<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415440103/> In a time of challenged library budgets, we cannot take for granted the necessity of weighty and expensive compendia of particular periods or cultures. Such projects need to make clear that necessity through special adaptations to the demands of audience--both demands and audience need careful specifying in advance--and utilities that make those demands satisfiable. The preface makes clear from the first sentence the genesis of the volume under review: "conversation at the International Congress of Byzantine Studies, held in London in summer 2006." As an attendee of the Congress, I can attest to the high degree of expertise available at that gathering, but as far as I can remember, only those with that high degree attended. If an editor were adapting a wide range of papers from such a forum, then a reader should expect specialist discussion. Some chapters indeed fall into that forbidding territory, while others attempt synthesis and fundamental explanations. The editor also admits on that first page that the series to which this volume belongs, The Routledge World, has no fixed format, and he differentiates his approach here not only from other volumes in the series, but also from *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* and the *Cambridge History of the Byzantine World*--and one assumes of *A Companion to Byzantium*, edited by Liz James and also published this year. To be sure, the only element in common among all the Routledge World volumes is the application of the definite article. While not making a real claim in itself, that article forces an editor to sidestep charges of completeness, as if anyone could accuse one of containing a world between two covers. And the editor makes clear that the collection "covers a very great deal, but far from all, that will interest a student of the Byzantine World." Again, that article and the capitalized world. I don't intend to bring a charge of essentializing against the editor, but the milder form used for James's volume, *A Companion to Byzantium*, is equally succinct, but certainly more realistically self-deprecatory.

In any case, if one came to *The Byzantine World* expecting it all, one would be disappointed, but not very, because the book contains real wealth. But who is the reader coming to the book, according to the editor? A student, who is part of "a wider audience of those interested in Byzantine civilization, culture and history." That wider audience is "diverse, messy indeed, for it embraces advanced undergraduates, postgraduate and postdoctoral scholars in all fields of Byzantine and medieval studies, Barnes and Noble browsers and Amazon searchers, Wikipedians seeking more authoritative updates...and anyone who has bought or read a narrative history of Byzantium and been left wanting a little more." Teachers of undergraduate classes also gather in this crowd of those who would use and encourage use of this volume. This audience is "messy, indeed," and in the first place, how does one make a volume speak to it? The title, it must be said, is an impediment, because in a competitive shelfspace, a handbook and dictionary may appear more likely sources for specific questions (how did Byzantines calculate and record dates? an example of a question not obviously answered here for a consulter of the table of contents or of the index), and a Cambridge history for treatment of period or other general matters (a critical narrative of the tenth century? the same). A great deal is to be found here, of course, and it can be found in succinct and fresh work: the volume contains thirty-five essays by thirty-one scholars, and the essays average between fourteen and fifteen pages. The bibliography (pp. 510- 76) is substantial, naturally. The essays can be

tremendously stimulating syntheses that provide ways forward from solid understanding (for example, Anthony Kaldellis's two essays, on women and children, and on historiography; Tia Kolbaba on Latin Christians; Thomas Dale on San Marco in Venice; in conjunction with Tassos Papacostas on the Holy Apostles and medieval models; and Leonora Neville on husbands and strong wives). The messy group of readers the editor imagines would be well served to start in those places in order to satisfy their need for a little more--here they would find strong statements of the situation with careful arguments about new directions and emerging meanings. **The best essays are terrifically productive. The interest and necessity of military manuals are perfectly clear to me after reading Denis Sullivan's essay.** However, a good number of essays play strongly, even exclusively to specialists. The final section, "The World of Byzantine Studies," contains six essays that will appeal to those of us entirely devoted to the field (perhaps), but few others, I believe. That limited appeal is a pity, because that particular world is full of interest and has determined so much of what Byzantinists do. The first three sections are The Byzantines and Their World, The Written World, and Heaven and Earth: Byzantine Art and Architecture. These divisions help somewhat, but readers will still have to look carefully at the chapters to find the right content, because chapter titles are not always transparent or informative. Sorting out the right chapter for a question could well alienate readers unfamiliar with the scholars and terms applied in the titles.

The range of essays, therefore, is great, and titling will guide some readers, but not all. In those cases, searching and indexing are key. The index is twenty-five pages long but weak in subentries. Sometimes the entries are counterintuitive, so that churches are listed first by name and then city or place; and the authors in the volume are also indexed, because the editor mentions them in his introductions to the four sections. The weakness of an index is perfectly understandable nowadays, if still highly regrettable. The alphabetization of the *Oxford Dictionary* is a nearly absolute control, and here in *The Byzantine World* we need that control at the back of the book, too. The former is also available online, and even though the index to *A Companion to Byzantium* is weaker than *The Byzantine World*, it exists in an electronic version, too. Not only can one determine quickly if an issue or figure is treated, one can also make easy postings of essays for students to access. No such mechanisms exist for *The Byzantine World*. Routledge has not committed to online versions yet for this series, and libraries and everyone else must resort to the printed volume. In this case, the press has done a terrible disservice, in undermining the achievement of the authors and in frustrating the accessibility for the messy crowd eager to enter Byzantine worlds contained in this volume. For such an audience, every flexibility needs to be on offer in order to justify the cost of the volume to institutions and individuals. Their demands on the book will likely be met only through their eagerness, their perseverance, and their intelligence--unless they turn to the computer screen first.

Table of Contents:

Part 1: The Byzantines and their World

1. Michael Angold, The Byzantine Political Process at Crisis Point 2. Paul Stephenson, The Rise of the Middle Byzantine Aristocracy and the Decline of the Imperial State 3. Cécile Morrison, Money, Coins and the Economy 4. John Haldon, The Army and Military Logistics 5. Anthony Kaldellis, The Study of Women and Children: Methodological Challenges and New Directions 6. Leonora Neville, Strong Women and their Husbands in Byzantine Historiography 7. Shaun Tougher, Cherchez l'homme! Byzantine Men: A Eunuch Perspective 8. Gnter Prinzing, Slaves and Slavery 9. Christopher Livanos, Monotheists, Dualists and Pagans 10. Tia Kolbaba, The Virtues and Faults of the Latin Christians

Part 2: The Written World

11. Catherine Holmes, Political Literacy 12. Denis Sullivan, Byzantine Military Manuals:

Prescriptions, Practice, and Pedagogy 13 J.M. Featherstone, *De Cerimoniis and the Great Palace* 14. Emmanuel Bourbouhakis, *Rhetoric and Performance* 15. Stratis Papaioannou, *Letter-writing* 16. Christopher Livanos, *Trends and Developments in the Byzantine Poetic Tradition* 17. Anthony Kaldellis, *The Corps of Byzantine Historiography: An Interpretative Essay* 18. Youval Rotman, *Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Byzantine Italy: Medieval Conflicts in Local Perspective* 19. Alice-Mary Talbot, *The Miracles of Gregory Palamas* by Philotheos Kokkinos 20. Joseph Munitiz, *Writing for the Heart: the Spiritual Literature of Byzantium*

Part 3: Heaven and Earth: Byzantine Art and Architecture

21. Bissera Pentcheva, *What is a Byzantine icon? Constantinople versus Sinai* 22. Vasileios Marinis, *Defining Liturgical Space* 23. Warren T. Woodfin, *Celestial Hierarchies and Earthly Hierarchies in the Art of the Byzantine Church* 24. Henry Maguire, *Unofficial Art and the Resistance to Orthodoxy* 25. Robert Ousterhout, *Constantinople and the Construction of Medieval Urban Identity* 26. Nikolas Bakirtzis, *The Practice, Perception and Experience of Byzantine Fortification* 27. Jonathan Shepard, *Imperial Outliers: Building and Decorative Works in the Borderlands and Beyond* 28. Tassos Papacostas, *The Medieval Progeny of the Holy Apostles: Trails of Architectural Imitation across the Mediterranean* 29. Thomas Dale, *Sacred Space from Constantinople to Venice*

Part 4: The World of Byzantine Studies

30. D. Roderich Reinsch, *The History of Editing Byzantine Historiographical Texts* 31. Despina Christodoulou, *Byzantium in Nineteenth-century Greek Historiography* 32. Paul Stephenson, *Pioneers of Popular Byzantine history: Freeman, Gregorovius, Schlumberger* 33. Srdan Pirivatric, *A Case Study in the Emergence of Byzantine Studies: Serbia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* 34. Johann P. Arnason, *Byzantium and Historical Sociology* 35. Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's European Future*