

My aim in the chapters that follow is to highlight some of the interesting questions that arise if one tries to understand Byzantium and its society. They do not provide a history, nor do they cover all the facets that need to be addressed. Rather, they concern questions and reflections that have preoccupied me and continue to do so. I am interested throughout in methodological issues, for Byzantium is an undertheorized field as well as an understudied one.

The book consists of five essays on particular themes. I have included references to some of the secondary literature, though obviously these are highly selective, and no doubt also personal. Some of the issues I consider in this book will be familiar to my fellow-Byzantinists, though perhaps less so to others. This is not another general history of Byzantium, of which there are many already, in addition to the excellent guides and handbooks already mentioned.⁹ In particular, it omits many aspects of Byzantine history and culture that would be essential to such a work. Nor is my aim to provide another apologia for Byzantium. Instead, this series of essays is designed to confront some of the issues that arise from the situation I have just outlined, and to address the question of where (if at all) Byzantium stands in relation to current historiographical trends and major historical themes, to which it often stands in a relation of tension. My hope is to explain why that should be so, and how the question can or should be tackled.



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