

# Byzantium in the Popular Imagination

## New Directions in Byzantine Studies



This series showcases the work of writers who are setting new agendas and working at the frontiers of the field, exploring Byzantium's peripheries (geographically, socially), promoting innovative research methods and demonstrating the empire as dynamic, complex and fluid – the crossroads between East and West.

### Series editor

Dionysios Stathakopoulos, University of Cyprus

### Advisory board

Kostis Smyrlis, New York University (NYU)

Vlada Stanković, University of Belgrade

Claudia Sode, University of Cologne

### New and forthcoming titles:

*Politics and Government in Byzantium: The Rise and Fall of the Bureaucrat Class*,  
Jonathan Shea

*From Byzantine to Norman Italy: Mediterranean Art and Architecture in Medieval Bari*, Clare Vernon

*Byzantium in the Popular Imagination: The Modern Reception of the Byzantine Empire*,  
edited by Markéta Kulhánková and Przemysław Marciniak

*Theodore Metochites: Patterns of Self-representation in Fourteenth Century Byzantium*,  
Ioannis D. Polemis

*Byzantine Spain: A History of Spania*, Jamie Wood

*Byzantine Sardinia: A History*, Salvatore Cosentino

# Byzantium in the Popular Imagination

*The Modern Reception of the  
Byzantine Empire*

Edited by  
Markéta Kulhánková and  
Przemysław Marciniak

**I.B. TAURIS**

LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

I.B. TAURIS  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK  
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, I.B. TAURIS and the I.B. Tauris logo are trademarks  
of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2023

Copyright © Markéta Kulhánková and Przemyslaw Marciniak, 2023

Markéta Kulhánková, Przemyslaw Marciniak and Contributors have asserted their right  
under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Editors of this work.

For legal purposes the Acknowledgements on pp. 41, 100, 221, 236, 258 constitute  
an extension of this copyright page.

Series design by Rebecca Heselton  
Cover image © Byzantine Tales

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted  
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,  
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without  
prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any  
third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this  
book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret any  
inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased  
to exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-0-7556-0728-0  
ePDF: 978-0-7556-0729-7  
eBook: 978-0-7556-0730-3

Series: New Directions in Byzantine Studies

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

To find out more about our authors and books visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)  
and sign up for our newsletters.

# Contents

List of Figures	vii
List of Contributors	ix
Introduction: The Many Faces of the Reception of Byzantium <i>Przemysław Marciniak</i>	1
Part 1 Byzantium on Display: Scholarly Debates, Political Uses, Modern Reconstructionism	
1 Popularizing Byzantine Architecture: The 1900 Paris World Exhibition, Balkan Nationalisms and the Byzantine Revival <i>Fani Gargova</i>	11
2 East or West? Byzantine Architecture and the Origins of French Medieval Architecture in the Scholarly Debate, Nineteenth Century <i>Francesco Lovino</i>	33
3 Byzantium as a Political Tool (1657–1952): Nations, Colonialism and Globalism <i>Ivan Foletti and Adrien Palladino</i>	45
4 The Prince and the Greeks: The Byzantine Baptizers of Prince Vladimir in Modern Russian Sculpture, Mosaic and Church Architecture <i>Roman Shliakhtin</i>	67
5 Museum Interpretations of Byzantium <i>Sofia Mali</i>	81
Part 2 Byzantium and Modern Media	
6 Byzantium in Comics <i>Lilia Diamantopoulou</i>	109
7 Games of Byzantium: The Image of the Empire in Three Strategy Videogames <i>Marco Fasolio</i>	123
8 From History to Propaganda and Back: Byzantium in the Romanian Historical Cinema <i>Florin Leonte</i>	147
9 Imagination of Byzantium and the Byzantines in Modern Turkish Popular Literature and Cinema <i>Buket Kitapçı Bayrı</i>	159
10 Byzantium in Greek Cinema and Television <i>Konstantinos Chryssogelos</i>	177
Part 3 Byzantium and Literature	
11 ‘Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts’: Byzantium in Czech Historical Fiction <i>Markéta Kulhánková</i>	193

12	Imagining Action: Explanation in Twentieth-Century Historiographical and Fictional Rewritings of the <i>Chronicle of Morea</i> <i>Matthew Kinloch</i>	207
13	The Barbarians Will Always Stay: Rose Macaulay and the Futility of Empire <i>Olof Heilo</i>	225
14	M. Karagatsis's Byzantinism in his <i>Sergios and Bacchos</i> (1959) <i>Katerina Liasi</i>	239
15	Fantastic(al) Byzantium: The Imagery of Byzantium in Speculative Fiction <i>Przemysław Marciniak</i>	249
	Conclusion: No Longer a Forgotten Empire? <i>Przemysław Marciniak</i>	261
	Afterword: Forging Textual Realities, or How to Write a 'Byzantine Mystery Story' <i>Panagiotis Agapitos</i>	264
	Index	272

## Byzantium in Greek Cinema and Television

Konstantinos Chryssogelos

### Greek cinema and television in context

Any study that attempts to outline the reception of Byzantium in Greek filmography, for both the big screen and television, including television series, should first take into consideration the development of Greek cinema over the years. As is the case with the filmic production of other countries, such as Germany and Brazil, scholars and film critics argue that there is a line separating post-war Old Greek Cinema (hereafter OGC) from New Greek Cinema (hereafter NGC), the latter emerging in 1970, with Theo Angelopoulos's *Reconstruction* (*Αναπαράσταση*) (Rafaïlidis 1970: 16; Karalis 2012: 143–45; Stassinopoulou 2015: 832) but also comprising a few earlier films from the 1950s and 1960s (Bakogiannopoulos 1999: 37–55; Kolovos 2002: 132, 142–45; Valoukos 2011: 37–42). Other scholars stress the artificiality of such a distinction, contending that continuity, rather than rupture, is the key to approaching Greek cinema as a whole (Chalkou 2008: 1–9; Stassinopoulou 2012: 139–40; Poupou 2013: 164). Be that as it may, the juxtaposition of OGC and NGC is a convenient methodological tool, especially for the synoptic character of the present survey, that allows us to put in order the multifaceted history of Greek post-war cinema, provided it does not lead us to downplay the undisputed artistic value of many pre-1970 films, or to overestimate any film that is thought to belong to NGC.

Within this framework, it is important to note that the existence of the so-called OGC did not cease after 1970, although many directors and actors associated with it were gradually absorbed by the rising power of a new medium that competed with the big screen throughout the 1970s, and ultimately won – namely, television (Bakogiannopoulos 1999: 38; Soldatos 2020a: 279, 299). Thus, the 1970s were by and large dominated by films of NGC which, more often than not, failed to achieve the commercial performance of earlier cinema (Karalis 2012: 181–82; Soldatos 2020a: 312). As for television, after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, a significant number of filmmakers and actors within the NGC, some of whom had suffered considerable hardship in the previous years (prosecutions, exile, etc.), found a place in the new medium (see the third section of this chapter).

At first, the co-existence of what came to be called the OGC and NGC was anything but peaceful. As the former was gradually deteriorating (Soldatos 2020a: 286), making

a transition to television, advocates of NGC emphasized the qualitative difference between the 'old' and the 'new'. According to them – and this attitude is shared by several film critics to this day – OGC's sole purpose was to make a profit, therefore its poor-quality production comprised mainly either melodramatic or overblown films, with directors consciously avoiding tackling the country's social and political issues (Kolovos 2002: 130–34; Soldatos 2020a: 332). Conversely, the work of the NGC, so the same critics argue(d), was to provide social commentary and the reconsideration of Greek history, and this in an innovating and ground-breaking way, namely by employing new techniques or conversing with past masterpieces of world cinema – something that, in their opinion, OGC had failed to do (Karalis 2012: 148; Soldatos 2020a: 278). It should be stressed here that the quest for a new cinematic language, both in terms of content and form, resulted in divergent artistic approaches. This shows that the directors associated with the beginnings of NGC could hardly be viewed as members of a homogeneous group of filmmakers (Valoukos 2011: 41–42; Stassinopoulou 2015: 847), although as regards content a left-wing, or anti-right-wing, reading of current socio-political aspects of Greece was more or less the norm (Valoukos 2011: 41).

Inevitably, this preoccupation with society and current politics left little room for period dramas, except those that dealt with the Greek Civil War (1946–49) or the events leading up to it. Such films were part of the left-wing environment that had already taken over the Thessaloniki Film Festival before the fall of the dictatorship (Soldatos 2020a: 294) and could be regarded as a response to OGC films from around the same period, which were filled with right-wing and/or nationalistic rhetoric, akin to that employed by the fascist regime but also not completely alien to future right-wing governments (Soldatos 2020a: 172). Despite the lack of period dramas in NGC, it is logical to assume that, if such films were produced, they would express the same 'iconoclastic' attitude. On the other hand, films of this genre, especially those glorifying different events from the Greek War of Independence (1821–30/32), were not uncommon in OGC, especially in the second half of the 1960s and the first years of the 1970s (Stassinopoulou 2015: 841–42; Soldatos 2020a: 170–78).

Even if OGC was receptive to period dramas, some historical eras were naturally more difficult to recreate, due to budget restrictions and the relative absence of reliable sources on several aspects of everyday life and culture. In this way, Byzantium's long history, as well as the first centuries of Ottoman rule (fifteenth–seventeenth centuries), are mostly, albeit not completely, absent both from OGC and NGC. Focusing on Byzantium, Greek cinematic production includes, to my knowledge, six feature films, three TV series and one TV movie, over the period from 1960, with *Kassiani Hymnographer* (*Κασιανή υμνογράφος*), to 2003 with *The Stage Actresses* (*Οι θεατρίνες*). Their artistic merits notwithstanding, all these productions are closely related to the historical and cultural context at the time of their making. Thus, for them to be properly construed, the status of Greek cinema at a given historical moment and its interaction with contemporary cinematic trends in Greece and abroad – although the latter will be discussed only briefly in this chapter – should be taken into consideration. Moreover, as we shall see, the dichotomy between OGC and NGC, both aesthetically and in terms of evolution in time, is also pertinent to this discussion since it allows us to highlight



several aspects of the films and series in question. It should be noted, however, that of the three TV series, two seem to have been erased or simply lost, whilst one is only available in a private collection (Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 252, n. 24). It is self-evident that in such cases we must rely exclusively on secondary sources.

### Days of love, mystery and glory (1960–71)

The first Byzantine-themed film of Greek cinema was *Kassiani Hymnographer* (1960), directed by Ilias Paraskevas and written by 'Kostas Papageorgiou, the Athenian', as stated in the opening credits. The screenplay is reportedly based on a theatrical work written by the latter (Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 252), although I have not been able to confirm this. The film is set in the ninth century, and it relates the story of Kassiani, the famous ecclesiastical and secular poetess. The plot includes the famous bride-show in the imperial palace, in which she was rejected by future Emperor Theophilus in favour of Theodora, due to the bold and intelligent answer she gave to his misogynistic remark, and her subsequent decision to lead a monastic life (Silvas 2006).

For anyone familiar with the historical facts, it is obvious that Papageorgiou took many liberties. For instance, in the film, the bride-show takes place in the year 800, during the reign of Michael II, although it was actually held in 830, shortly after Michael's passing (Garland 1999: 96). The basic premise of the plot, namely the secret love affair between Kassiani and Theophilus, also defies historical truth, as does the marriage between Kassiani and the fictional character Aquila, a Byzantine general. Moreover, the film suggests that it was Theophilus who put an end to the second iconoclast era, allegedly awe-struck by Kassiani's piety after she received the monastic tonsure, although it is well known that the veneration of the icons was restored by Theodora after her husband's death. On the other hand, certain subtle details, such as the mention of the rebel Euphemios, who revolted in Sicily during Michael's reign (Bekker 1838: 81–83; Treadgold 1997: 436), or the presence of a court jester by the name of Denderis (Bekker 1838: 91; Garland 1999: 99), suggest that the said changes were made by the screenwriter intentionally, probably in an attempt to make the scenario more intriguing or simply because they were more attuned to the kind of story he wanted to tell.

Interestingly, as far as genre is concerned, *Kassiani* seems to be a Greek appropriation of the 'sword-and-sandal' movies, that is, Hollywood epics about the Roman Empire set in the time of early Christianity, which were in vogue during the late 1950s and the early 1960s (Detweiler 2009: 110; Reinhartz 2009: 420–21). Although with a considerably lower budget and many technical limitations, *Kassiani* follows the pattern of these films, such as *Ben Hur* (1959), where the adventure and the romance of the first part progressively give place to the utter triumph of the Christian faith. In the same way, *Kassiani* sees its protagonist entangled in a passionate affair, which eventually costs her husband his life during an impressive sword-fight with her lover. After all this commotion, Kassiani repents and decides to dedicate herself to God. The last part of the film, which is mostly made up of long sequences inside the convent, is essentially

a glorification of Greek Orthodox monasticism. In the American counterpart, the part which concerns Christian devotion is traditionally accompanied by ethereal music; in the case of *Kassiani*, this is replaced by Greek Orthodox chants. It is also worth noting that, in the Greek film, the Byzantine setting has been somewhat 'Romanized', as attested by the clean-shaven male cast, although in the ninth century many more beards would be expected (*ODB* 1: 274).

Aesthetically and semantically, *Kassiani*, with its mixture of romance and adventure, and the absence of any social or political commentary, is a typical example of what exponents of NGC would regard as OGC. Yet, it could also be considered as exceptional due to its subject, as well as for Paraskevas's attempt to direct the Greek version of a Hollywood Roman epic. Nonetheless, the film's commercial performance was anything but spectacular (Soldatos 2002: 194) and its impact extremely limited; neither Soldatos nor Karalis includes it in their respective *Histories of Greek Cinema*. In any case, *Kassiani* bears witness to the fact that the so-called OGC of the 1960s was perfectly capable of experimenting creatively with formulas and motifs that came from abroad, something the proponents of NGC have been reluctant to admit.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Giorgos Skalenakis's *Imperiale* (*Βυζαντινή Ραψωδία*, 1968). It is worth noting that the film's Greek title (*Byzantine Rhapsody*) is the same as the working title of Costis Palamas's verse-epic *The King's Flute* (*Η φλογέρα του βασιλιά*) (Agapitos 1994: 5). It also corresponds with Palamas's own characterization of his poem 'The Widow's Son' ('Ο γιός της χήρας'), which usually prefixes the said work (Bouboulides 1974: 209). Seemingly driven by the personal ambition of actor Thodoros Roumbanis, who was the producer, composer and protagonist of the project, *Imperiale* relates the tragic passion between an unnamed general and the 'augusta' of Byzantium who, in several summaries of the film, is identified with Zoe (Koliodimos 2001: 85), the niece of Basil II. Astrologers foretell the end of the world, and the empress resolves to spend her last day on earth with her lover, whom she had exiled to a distant fortress some years ago, so as to not jeopardize her position at court. As it turns out, the astrologers' prediction was nothing but a hoax, therefore the empress decides to return to the palace and reclaim her throne. Meanwhile, the emperor, also unnamed, has secretly arrived at the fortress. In one of the last scenes, the empress is made to believe that her husband has proclaimed her dead and so she rushes to ride back to the capital. However, her lover is unwilling to let her go; in the final scene he shoots her with an arrow and kills her.

If the augusta is indeed Zoe and the film is set in the year 1000, as other sources report (Karalis 2012: 125), then the plot is completely fictional. Zoe was first married in 1028 and, by that time, she was fifty years old (Garland 1999: 137). However, we know that she was involved in many affairs throughout her reign and was a self-centred and egotistical woman (Garland 1999: 136–38, 146), all of which correspond to the way the augusta is portrayed in the film. Such a character is in keeping with the film's major theme: how different people react to the imminent end of the world. More specifically, the general is driven exclusively by his unrequited passion for the augusta and wishes to spend his last day with her. At the beginning of the film, he is ready to invade the capital but then aborts this plan when he sees his beloved augusta arriving at the fortress. For her part, Zoe seeks her lover only because she is made to believe the

end is nigh, but she has no qualms about leaving him when she realizes that the hoax may cost her the imperial throne.

Fascinating as all this sounds, *Imperiale* comes across as a rather disjointed blend of disparate elements. It is turgid and overdramatic, filled with prolix soliloquies that often make little sense, and includes an unnecessarily lengthy sword-fighting sequence, as well as several scenes of Greek Orthodox liturgy. We may assume that Skalenakis – or Roumbanis – wanted to offer the audience the ‘complete Byzantine experience’, including religious devotion, court intrigues and impressive duels. However, in the end, the only redeeming factors are the captivating landscape of the medieval fortress and the physical beauty of the two main protagonists, Thodoros Roumbanis and Betty Arvaniti. The audience evidently thought likewise, for the commercial performance of *Imperiale* was moderate at best, although some sources report that the reception abroad, especially in the USA, was more favourable (Karalis 2012: 125; Soldatos 2020a: 261–62). Opinions on the artistic value of the film vary. Mitropoulou (1980: 265) regards it as an unworthy work in the filmography of Skalenakis, whom she praises for his other films. Soldatos laconically notes its peculiar character (2020a: 261–62), whereas Karalis regards it as an underrated masterpiece (2012: 125, 223). For my part, I concur with Mitropoulou and Soldatos.

Three years later, Panagiotis Konstantinou wrote and directed *Iliogenniti* (*Ηλιογέννητη*, 1971), which was brought to my attention by Professor Vrasidas Karalis. A film that has fallen into oblivion, briefly discussed only by Kolioidimos (2001: 187), *Iliogenniti* is set in the fourteenth century, in an unspecified province of the empire. Iliogenniti, the daughter of a just landowner by the name of Kallergis is forced into marrying Markos, the son of his greedy opponent, Mavrolikos. Kallergis hopes the union will put an end to the rivalry. However, Iliogenniti falls in love with Stratis Karlas, who is being employed by Kallergis but, in reality, has returned to his hometown to avenge Mavrolikos for the murder of his father, Yorgis, and the confiscation of his land. After the sudden death of Mavrolikos, halfway through the film, Stratis continues to seek justice for his deceased father, whereas Iliogenniti strives to shun the planned wedding. Kallergis’s attempt to bring peace to the land is in jeopardy, as the tension between Stratis and Markos builds. The plot culminates in the duel between the two young men, which is stopped thanks to the intervention of Iliogenniti, who accepts marriage to Markos and urges Stratis to back down. However, Markos realizes that she is in love with Stratis and thus agrees to let her marry him instead. In the last scene, presumably just before the wedding ceremony, Kallergis exclaims that ‘the age of evil has given way to ‘the age of good’.

A major theme in *Iliogenniti* is the daughter’s obligation to her father. The audience witnesses the heroine’s struggle as she tries to free herself from these restrictions and follow her own desire, namely her love for Stratis. Bearing in mind the era, a complete emancipation is not to be expected, but it seems that, by the end of the film, Iliogenniti has at least managed to have her voice heard. As regards the other characters, Konstantinou’s intention to bring the story to a happy end by any means renders some of their actions less believable. For instance, Markos is depicted alternately as a brute and an upright person, although it could be argued that, to some extent, these nuances constitute the most intriguing aspect of the film. Finally, in relation to

the era it purports to portray, *Iliogenniti* takes place in late Byzantium only by name. Except for the fashion – although 1970s haircuts can be seen – evidence of a Byzantine milieu is scarce, not to mention the major historical inaccuracy of rifles being used as weaponry (on Byzantine weapons, see *ODB* 3: 2192; Haldon 2008). References to the central power speak vaguely of ‘the governor of the State’ or the ‘government’, and there is also a passing reference to the ‘Saracens’, with no further elaboration. It should be noted too that many of the characters’ names, such as Iliogenniti, Mavrolikos, Stratis and Markos, make the whole story seem more like a modern Greek folk tale than a period drama set in Byzantium.

The three films discussed are related to the poetics of what is now called OGC – at least the lighter side of it, for the ‘old (post-war) cinema’ produced many daring movies as well. As is the case with Greek blockbusters of the 1960s and early 1970s, these films deal primarily with romance and love, often in an affected way, their main purpose being to captivate, fascinate or move the audience, rather than to make it ponder over the contemporary socio-political problems of Greece. By 1971, when *Iliogenniti* was released, NGC had already made its appearance, whereas the fans and the crew of the ‘old cinema’ had begun turning their attention to television. Given that the big screen would not show any interest in Byzantium for some years, the next chapter belongs rightfully to the new medium.

### Life in the catacombs (1973–76)

According to Agathos and Papadopoulos (2016: 245–50), there are four Byzantine-themed TV series, although one could challenge the inclusion of the adaptation of Alexandros Papadiamantis’s third novel, *I gyftoroula* (*Η γυφτοπούλα*, 1974) in their list. The series is set in fifteenth-century Byzantium, but it is best construed as one of the many adaptations of classic Greek novels that appeared on Greek television in the 1970s, by such celebrated authors as Nikos Kazantzakis, Angelos Terzakis, M. Karagatsis and others (Kyriakos 2019: 42, n. 19). In other words, the focus in this case should be more on Papadiamantis, whose second novel had also been adapted for television in 1973 (Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 247), or modern Greek prose literature in general, than on Byzantium. On the other hand, two TV 1970s series set in Byzantium, *En Touto Nika* (*Εν τούτῳ νικά*, 1973) and *Porphyra and Blood* (*Πορφύρα και αίμα*, 1977), should be seen in the light of their writer Nikos Foskolos’s past and future success as a screenwriter, and, to a lesser degree, a director.

Foskolos, a representative of ‘commercial cinema’ in the 1960s and 1970s, was one of the most prolific and profitable screenwriters of his era (Karalis 2012: 133–34), with successes including the scenarios for *Blood on the Ground* (*Το χόμα βάφτηκε κόκκινο*, 1965), which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best International Feature Film, and the phenomenally successful *Lieutenant Natasha* (*Υπολοχαγός Νατάσα*, 1970). In 1971 he began collaborating on TV projects, and that same year he wrote the screenplay for *Unknown War* (*Άγνωστος πόλεμος*, 1971), which enjoyed unprecedented enthusiasm (Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 245). Sadly, both this and his two Byzantine-themed series are unavailable to the public, with *Unknown War*

and *Porphyra and Blood* in all probability permanently lost. According to Agathos and Papadopoulos (2016: 246), in *En touto nika*, which is set in the court of Constantine the Great, both he and his mother, Helena, were presented ‘in a rather hagiographic way’, whereas in *Porphyra and Blood*, which was based on the then recently published award-winning novel *Romanos Diogenis* (1974) by Kostas Kyriazis, Foskolos ‘was criticized for using his usual mannerisms and the pompous vocabulary known from his films and TV series’ (249). Furthermore, Foskolos’s own comment on *En touto nika* (cited in Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 246), in which he interprets Byzantium as a Greek Orthodox empire that relates to both the sophisticated and the popular audience, in that the latter has always been fascinated by ‘thrones, kings ... love affairs, wars’, shows how he approached the era: Byzantium is a spectacle and a space for affirmation, not reconsideration. We may note here that this perception is like what we witness in *Kassiani Hymnographer* and *Iliogenniti – Imperiale* is a different beast.

Since the fourth Byzantine-themed TV series (*Alexios Kallergis/Αλέξιος Καλλέργης*, 1984), which in reality is set in Crete during the Venetian occupation, is probably lost as well (Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 252, n. 24), we move on to the TV movie *1000 years ago: The Feast of Calends in 976 AD (1.000 χρόνια πριν: Γιορτή Καλενδών 976 μ.Χ., 1976)*, a Greek/French coproduction, which was broadcast on 31 December 1976 on Greek and French television simultaneously (Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 250–51). This intriguing film is the first visual work on Byzantium that saw the large-scale collaboration of artists who were associated either with OGC or NGC. The project was developed during Roviros Manthoulis’s tenure as art director of the Greek National Television; his 1966 film *Face to Face (Πρόσωπο με πρόσωπο)* had been blacklisted by the fascist regime, forcing him to live in exile for some years (Karalis 2012: 120). The screenplay for *1000 Years Ago* was written by the renowned playwright and lyricist Iakovos Kambanellis, brother of Giorgos, who had starred as Aquila in *Kassiani Hymnographer*. It was based on a story by Giorgos Stamboulopoulos, yet another director whose film *Open Letter (Ανοικτή επιστολή, 1968)* had been censored by the dictators (Soldatos 2020a: 251–52). The cast of the film included many celebrated actors of OGC, whereas the soundtrack was by the acclaimed composer Stavros Xarhakos.

*1000 Years Ago* visualizes New Year’s Eve in the year 976, i.e. a thousand years before 1976, with the celebration of the Calends, a custom deriving from Roman times. According to primary Byzantine sources, this celebration lasted four days and included the consumption of large amounts of wine and food, as well as merry songs, dances and mimic performances (*ODB* 1: 367–68; Kaldellis 2012). The Calends was a period during which people relaxed, reconciled with their rivals and enjoyed themselves. All the above is included in the film, which is a true feast of joyful entertainment; a carnivalesque ritual in which people make fun of authority, but also of each other and themselves, and this in the complete absence of religion. This was indeed a bold representation of Byzantium, especially in comparison to previous attempts, although it does not go as far as to challenge established notions on power and religion. The TV special focused on the secular, even heathen, aspect of the empire, a loud and frenetic spectacle that was appropriate for New Year’s Eve celebrations. The music and the choreography were inspired by modern Greek folk dances, thus stressing the

continuity of folk culture throughout the centuries – a similar statement was made in Nikos Koundouros's *Young Aphrodites* (*Μικρές Αφροδίτες*, 1963; music by Yannis Markopoulos), which is set in ancient Greek times. It is also worth mentioning that the cover of Xarhakos's album of the film's score, 976, depicts a cupid (or a cupid-like angel) playing the flute – so much for the Christian empire of the Greek Middle Ages!

*1000 Years Ago* could be regarded as the counterpoint to Foskolos's series about Byzantium, inasmuch as we can judge from secondary sources with regard to the latter; at the same time, it could be viewed as the link that at once connects and juxtaposes the ideology and the aesthetics of OGC and NGC. Most importantly, though, it is the project that brought together the representatives of both sides. Just like the celebration of the Calends, it was an opportunity to reconcile, but as soon as the feast was over, it was time for each party to go its own way. Truly, when Byzantium re-emerged in Greek filmography, towards the end of the 1980s, it was claimed exclusively by NGC.

### The era of iconoclasm (1987–2003)

By the second half of the 1980s NGC, which according to some critics had by then changed its character, abandoning overt political criticism in favour of introspective social commentary (Valoukos 2011: 45–48; Karalis 2012: 201, 217–18), had hit a wall. Except for a few films, its cinematic production had never appealed to OGC's audience, and the core of its followers was originally formed by journalists, critics, intellectuals, filmmakers and youngsters, all of whom sought or encouraged new means of expression. However, over the years NGC alienated many of its fans, who felt that the movement was overproducing tedious, pretentious films which no one would watch. In 1987, the time seemed to be ripe for the disgruntled to make a statement, which took the form of constant booing during the screening of films that they thought fitted the said negative bill (Soldatos 2020a: 404). Among them was *Doxobus* (*Δοξόμπους*), a film about fourteenth-century Byzantium, directed by Fotos Labrinos, an accomplished director in the field of Greek documentaries, and written by Panos Theodoridis, an archaeologist and an intellectual (Chryssogelos 2019: 267).

A difficult and demanding film to watch, but also one of the most intriguing cinematic experiences on Byzantium ever, *Doxobus* is set in the time of the Civil War between the elderly Andronikos II and his grandson and future Emperor Andronikos III. Beautifully shot, albeit too elliptical in its narrative style, the film explores the many faces of power in a district and episcopate of today's Northern Greece, and by extension how life, society, and economy in a nearby small village by the name of Doxobus are affected, and eventually changed, by the war. A close study has revealed that the screenwriter did an impressive job in writing the scenario, by employing a vast array of primary and secondary sources (Chryssogelos 2019: 270–75). For his part, Labrinos undertook the difficult task of recreating an era about which our knowledge is limited, and this by using the documentary style with which he was already familiar (Stefani 2009: 13; Chryssogelos 2019: 267–68). Scholars have argued, although laconically, that Labrinos was particularly influenced by Andrei Tarkovsky's seminal *Andrei Rublev*, released in 1966, the 'abstract-symbolic cinema' of Hungarian filmmaker Miklos Jancso and

the films of Armenian director Sergey Parajanov (Kyriakidis 1999: 119; Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 253).

Be that as it may, the result is a slow-paced film, dense and rich in historical detail, which needs multiple viewings to be comprehended fully. Apparently, Labrinos's purpose was to demolish the notion of a Greek and solely Christian empire, by counter-suggesting that Byzantium was a nexus of corrupted religious leaders, oppressed multi-ethnic inhabitants and persecuted heretics (Chryssogelos 2019: 278–79). Given that the authoritative voice of modern Greece, namely its official state ideology, regards Byzantium as a Greek Orthodox empire that constitutes an integral component of the current nation's glorious past, we may assume that Labrinos's intention in *Doxobus* was to speak not merely about the Middle Ages but also about the present and future of modern Greece. This assessment urges us to reconsider the film's political aspect and so to challenge the view regarding the emergence of a more reserved and withdrawn cinematic code in the second half of the 1980s (Chryssogelos 2019: 277), at least in some striking cases.

It is certainly interesting to note that *Doxobus* was not the only film at the 28th Thessaloniki Film Festival that tackled Byzantium and its cultural heritage. Dimos Theos's *Captain Meïdanos* (*Καπετάν Μείντάνος*), a cerebral and equally challenging film, dealt with the inadequacy and ultimately the inability of the human mind to recreate the past and thus reconstruct history, especially the images of those who took part in it. The tone is set already in the first scene of the film, in which the protagonist quotes John of Damascus's famous assertion that 'the icon and that which is depicted on the icon are two different things' (*ἄλλο γάρ ἐστιν ἡ εἰκὼν καὶ ἄλλο τὸ εἰκονιζόμενον*) (Kotter 1975: 125; Kyriakos 2006: 38–40). Therefore, Byzantine theological discourse about the icon was an important aspect of the film's reflections, as confirmed by the director in a contemporary interview (cited in Soldatos 2002: 246–47), even though the plot itself was not set in Byzantium. To these we may add Kostas Sfikas's experimental film *Allegory* (*Αλληγορία*, 1986), a copy of which I have not been able to find. According to its description in a leaflet that was edited for the 27th Thessaloniki Film Festival, the film's topic is 'the spiral development of history', which is represented in the form of two axes, one horizontal and one vertical. In the leaflet it is argued that the horizontal axis is that 'of the cyclical world of the Byzantine mountains, with the lands of the symbols of fallen antiquity and secularized Christianity' (cited in Kyriakidis 1999: 117 and Soldatos 2020a: 398). It is not clear what this means, but it does suggest that Byzantium was an indispensable component of the whole experience. Whatever the case, it seems that for some reason, which needs to be explored further, by the second half of the 1980s, specific aspects of the Greek Middle Ages had become part of the NGS and its concerns.

A few years later, Giorgos Stambouloupoulos, whom we have already encountered as the author of the story on which the screenplay for *1000 Years Ago* was based, wrote and directed *Two Suns in the Sky* (*Δύο ἡλιοὶ στον οὐρανὸ*, 1991), which is set in the time of Theodosios the Great (379–395), and takes place – although not actually filmed there – in Alexandria (Egypt), Antioch and Thrace. The plot follows a Byzantine commander by the name of Lazarus, who is accompanied by a historian named Athanasios, the 'Two-minded' (*δίβουλος*), and his efforts to extinguish the remnants of the old religion,

along with non-Orthodox heresies; a seemingly easy task which is carried out by means of torture and violence but is eventually hindered by the opposition of the theatre actor Timotheus, formerly a heretic of Alexandria – presumably an Arian, not a Gnostic, as argued by Agathos and Papadopoulos (2016: 254; on Theodosios's anti-Arian policy, see Treadgold 1997: 71–73 and Greatrex 2008: 240) – and later a devotee of Dionysos in Antioch. As Stamboulopoulos himself relates on his website (stamboulopoulos.com/films/two-suns-in-the-sky), the project met with immense difficulties, but was eventually brought to fruition, in this way endowing Greek cinema with yet another quality film about Byzantium. The filmmaker also adds that his motivation was to explore the historical process through which Greeks became Christians, and to present a response to the reinforcement of religion in Eastern Europe, in the aftermath of the fall of communism.

The main theme of *Two Suns* is the juxtaposition between Orthodox Christianity as an oppressive state religion (Karalis 2014) and the ancient Greek spirit, which is characterized by spiritual freedom (Agathos and Papadopoulos 2016: 254). Closely following and creatively appropriating the plot of Euripides's *Bacchae*, from which the title 'two suns in the sky' is taken (v. 918), Stamboulopoulos identifies Lazarus with Pentheus and human justice, and Timotheus with Dionysos, or Dionysios's son, and divine justice. An important aspect of the film's poetics is the metaphor of stage acting, associated not only with Timotheus and his staging of *Bacchae*, but also with Christian preaching in church. The latter appears in two scenes where a bigoted clergyman in Antioch, standing on his 'stage' and addressing his 'audience', condemns theatres and actors, in a passionate hate-speech. Although his name is not mentioned, this cleric could well be John Chrysostom, a deacon and priest in Antioch during Theodosios the Great's reign (*ODB* 2: 1057), as the sermon in the first scene contains direct references to Chrysostom's twelfth homily on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (cf. *PG* 61: 102–25). In other instances, the advocates of Orthodoxy – hermits, stylites – are seen quoting the New Testament, especially those passages that teach the faithful to obey secular power. It is self-evident then that, for Stamboulopoulos, self-repression and conformity are deeply embedded in Orthodox Christian mentality. To the contrary, Timotheus contends in one scene, as he speaks to the audience, that the spectator should make up his/her [*sic*] own mind about the meaning of the plays staged before his eyes.

If *Doxobus* is the meeting point of history and cinematic art, *Two Suns* dramatizes the transfiguration of history into myth. Following a revolt in Antioch incited by Timotheus, Lazarus is desperately and obsessively trying to capture the constantly fleeing stage actor. At one point he succeeds in incarcerating him, but Timotheus manages to miraculously escape in, just as Dionysos did in *Bacchae*. The pursuit starts anew, but now in Thrace, 'the land of the Greeks'. To his amazement, Lazarus discovers that, there, Timotheus is worshipped as a god. As the Christian commander finds himself unable to cope with the otherworldly land, which is inhabited by pagans pretending to be Christians – yet another use of the 'acting-metaphor' in the movie – he gradually falls into madness. In the penultimate evocative scene, Lazarus is drawn, as if by magic, into the Dionysian ritual of the actors, played out in the wilderness. As in *Bacchae*, he is mutilated by the Maenads, while the deified Timotheus, dressed



in white, watches from above. Did this really happen? The whole story is narrated by Athanasios, the historian who accompanied Lazarus, but by that point he had deserted his commander. In the final scene – which shows a Christian funeral procession, but most probably not of Lazarus's body, as argued by Agathos and Papadopoulos (2016: 254) – Athanasios assures the audience that he wrote down things as they really happened. But we are left wondering whether the 'two-minded' historian is to be trusted after all.

Within this context, Agathos and Papadopoulos's assertion (2016: 254), that 'Before Alejandro Amenabar's *Agora* (2009), Stambouloupoulos took a position in favor of the last Gentiles who were fighting a losing battle against the Christians', could be discussed further. In my view, *Agora* does not side openly with the Gentiles, whose manners are occasionally depicted as equally savage. It is true that Amenabar lays more emphasis on the Christians, whose religious leader Cyril is instigator of their crimes. However, the film condemns religious obscurantism, whereas it praises humanist atheism, portrayed by the free-thinking philosopher Hypatia. Her stand is the exact opposite of that of the religious mobs roaming around Alexandria and fighting against each other, which behaviour results in the destruction of the city's famous library. For his part, Stambouloupoulos does not seem to condemn religious mysticism, which he traces among both the Gentiles and the Christian heretics, but rather Orthodox Christianity as a *sine qua non* component of state oppression.

In 2003, the world of Byzantine theatre, although now that of the mimes, was revisited by Panagiotis Portokalakis in his film *The Stage Actresses* (*Oi θεατρίνες*), discussed briefly by Agathos and Papadopoulos (2016: 255) and Soldatos (2020b: 88–89). I was only able to find a poor-quality copy of the movie, with badly distorted sound, from which I was able to understand that Portokalakis juxtaposes the carefree world of the mime actresses and the strict environment of a well-respected family. Some of the characters' names, such as Antonina, Valens and Comito, suggest that the plot is set in early Byzantium, perhaps in the time of Justinian – Antonina was the name of Belisarius's wife and Comito that of Theodora's sister; both sisters were female mimes in their youth (Garland 1999: 11). The first scene constitutes a meta-narrative comment on the film's setting, possibly made by a group of red-clothed buffoons, who appear occasionally and lend the story a humorous tone. Portokalakis's take on Byzantium is at first more light-hearted than that of *Doxobus* and *Two Suns in the Sky*, but the story evolves into a tragedy with dark overtones. Without doubt, one can discern similar reflections regarding the establishment on one hand and the alternative universe of theatres and folk and street art on the other. Moreover, it is tempting to assume that in the scenes depicting the Byzantines' entertainment, including mimic performances, Portokalakis harks back to *1000 Years Ago*.

## The past and the future

As shown, films and series on Byzantium cover many periods of the empire's long history, although the earlier productions differ in their approach from the later ones. Let us reiterate that the distinction between OGC and NGC is useful, provided it does

not impose a fatalistic aesthetic evaluation in favour of the latter. All six films, with their focus either on romance and adventure, or politics and society, have their artistic merits, regardless of the ideological standpoint of each filmmaker and screenwriter.

As regards TV series, the unavailability of those written by Foskolos makes it difficult to draw definite conclusions, although it is reasonably to suppose that they would have been like his overall exuberant style. On the other hand, *1000 Years Ago* is an intriguing TV movie in its own right, which relates both to *Two Suns in the Sky*, due to Stambouloupoulos's involvement, and *The Stage Actresses*, for the snapshots of everyday entertainment. Finally, we saw that 'Byzantium' could also mean more than 'Byzantine-themed period films', namely a space for various reflections and experimentations.

In place of a concluding remark, we may wonder what the future holds. As I began working on this chapter, I received a message from director Konstantinos Antonopoulos. He kindly informed me that he is preparing a short film – already in pre-production – and a feature film on Byzantium, both set in the reign of Justinian II (late seventh/early eighth century). This message is a sharp reminder that there are no boundaries between art and history, and papers on the reception of Byzantium in Greek cinema are merely efforts to assess the past, in anticipation of the future.

## Bibliography

- Agapitos, P. (1994), 'Byzantium in the Poetry of Kostis Palamas and C. P. Cavafy', *Kampos*, 2: 1–20.
- Agathos, T. and Y. C. S. Papadopoulos (2016), 'Imperial Palaces and Village Huts: Byzantium in Greek Cinema and Television', *Mediterranean Chronicle*, 6: 243–59.
- Bakogiannopoulos, Y. (1999), 'O Neos Ellinikos Kinimatografos (1967–1999)', in A. Kyriakidis (ed.), *I Elliniki matia. Enas aionas ellinikou kinimatografou*, 37–55, Thessaloniki: Festival kinimatografou Thessalonikis.
- Bekker, I. (1838), *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus* (CSHB 45), Bonn: E. Weber.
- Bouboulides, Ph. (1974), "'O gyios tis chiras" tou K. Palama (filologikes paratiriseis)', *Dodoni: epistimoniki epetiris tis Filosofikis Scholis tou Panepistimiou Ioanninon*, 3 (1974): 205–16.
- Chalkou, M. (2008), *Towards the Creation of "Quality" Greek National Cinema in the 1960s*, Glasgow: University of Glasgow.
- Chrysosgelos, K. (2019), 'The Byzantine Heritage in Greek Cinema: The (Almost) Lone Case of Doxobus (1987)', in D. Slootjes and M. Verhoeven (eds.), *Byzantium in Dialogue with the Mediterranean: History and Heritage*, 267–83, Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Detweiler, C. (2009), 'Christianity', in J. Lyden (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, 109–30, London: Routledge.
- Garland, L. (1999), *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Greatrex, G. (2008), 'Political – Historical Survey, c. 250–518', in E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon and R. Cormack (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, 232–48, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haldon, J. (2008), 'Military Technology and Warfare', in E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon and R. Cormack (eds.), 473–81, *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Kaldellis, A. (2012), 'The Kalends in Byzantium, 400–1200 AD: A New Interpretation', *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 13 (1): 187–203.
- Karalis, V. (2012), *A History of Greek Cinema*, New York and London: Bloomsbury.
- Karalis, V. (2014), 'Religion and Greek Cinema', *Filmicon*. Available online: [http://filmiconjournal.com/blog/post/35/religion\\_and\\_greek\\_cinema](http://filmiconjournal.com/blog/post/35/religion_and_greek_cinema) (accessed 29 November 2020).
- Kolioidimos, D. (2001), *Lexiko ellinikon tainion apo to 1914 mechri to 2000*, Athens: Ekdoseis Genous, Alimos.
- Kolovos, N. (2002), *Neoelliniko Theatro (1600–1940) – Kinimatografos, Tomos V': O Ellinikos Kinimatografos*, Patras: Hellenic Open University.
- Kotter, P. B. (1975), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, III: Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres (Patristische Texte und Studien 17)*, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter.
- Kyriakidis, A., ed. (1999), *I elliniki matia. Enas aionas ellinikou kinimatografou*, Thessaloniki: Festival kinimatografou Thessalonikis.
- Kyriakos, K. (2006), 'Mythologikes anafores sto kinimatografiko ergo tou Dimou Theou', in S. Kersanidis (ed.), *Dimos Theos*, 33–41, Athens: Aigokeros.
- Kyriakos, K. (2019), 'Ὡς ναύαγια αἱ λέξεις ... I proslipsi tou ergou tou Alexandrou Papadiamanti ston kinimatografo, sto theatro kai stin tileorasi', Athens: Aigokeros.
- Mitropoulou, A. (1980), *Ellinikos Kinimatografos*, Athens: Papazisis.
- Oxford Dictionary of Byzantine Studies* (1991), A. Kazhdan (ed.), 3 vols, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Poupou, A. (2013), 'Book Review: New Greek Cinema 1965–1981: History and Politics by Stathis Valoukos, Athens: Egokeros, 2011', *Filmicon*, 1:160–66.
- Rafailidis, V. (1970), 'Ellinikes tainies megalou mikous: Anaparastasi', *Synchronos Kinimatografos*, 9–10: 13–16.
- Reinhartz, A. (2009), 'Jesus and Christ-figures', in J. Lyden (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, 420–39, London: Routledge.
- Silvas, A. M. (2006), 'Kassia the Nun c. 810–c. 865: An Appreciation', in L. Garland (ed.), *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800–1200*, 17–39, Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- Soldatos, Y. (2002), *Ellinikos Kinimatografos. Enas aionas*, Athens: Kochlias.
- Soldatos, Y. (2020a), *Istoria tou ellinikou kinimatografou, tomos A'*, Athens: Aigokeros.
- Soldatos, Y. (2020b), *Istoria tou ellinikou kinimatografou, tomos B'*, Athens: Aigokeros.
- Stassinopoulou, M. A. (2012), 'Definitely Maybe: Possible Narratives of the History of Greek Cinema', in L. Papadimitriou and Y. Tzioumakis (eds.), *Greek Cinema: Texts, Histories, Identities*, 131–43, Bristol and Chicago: Intellect.
- Stassinopoulou, M. A. (2015), 'The "System", "New Greek Cinema", Theo Angelopoulos: a Reconstruction (1970–1972)', in L. Dreidemy, R. Hufschmied, A. Meisinger, B. Molden, E. Pfister, K. Prager, E. Röhrlich, F. Wenninger and M. Wirth (eds.), *Bananen, Cola, Zeitgeschichte: Oliver Rathkolb und das lange 20. Jahrhundert. Band 1*, 832–47, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag.
- Stefani, E. (2009), '19 Questions for Fotos Lamprinos', in *Fotos Lamprinos*, 11–13, Thessaloniki: Festival kinimatografou Thessalonikis.
- Treadgold, W. (1997), *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Valoukos, S. (2011), *Neos Ellinikos Kinimatografos (1965–1981). Istoria kai politiki*, Athens: Aigokeros.