



## BOOK REVIEW

Philip de Souza, Waldemar Heckel & Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *The Greeks at War. From Athens to Alexander*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford 2004, 288 pages, paperback ISBN: 1 84176 856 1  
 [Email: [info@ospreypublishing.com](mailto:info@ospreypublishing.com)].

The term “popularizing” in scientific literature can be extremely misleading, as it carries inherent undertones of compromise and a generalizing view that limits the potential of the work. Even the term “Essential”, in the name of a series of publications concerned exclusively with historical events might as well cause the raise of an eyebrow to those who spend years in research and analysis of History. However, the claim of a series such as the “Essential History” by Osprey Publishing lives up to its true potential as it succeeds to convey the essential knowledge of a much-related period of the classical history to a public that is not necessarily consisted of experts. The secret is to have a specialist to break the essential information down to sizeable material for those who might have not heard of it before, also catering for those who might benefit by a wholesome, detailed and well documented account of what is perhaps familiar, but is now placed in a broader scope and a more general perspective.

In the case of the present volume, we get not one, but three experts who combine their long experience of research in the field of Classics and History, in order to present us with a “handsome book, which will reach out to

those teaching and learning the subject matter” (*Essential Histories* 27).

Dr. Philip de Souza FRHistS is the author of numerous articles and essays on Greek and Roman history, and Lecturer in Classics at University College in Dublin. Waldemar Heckel is a Professor of Ancient History at the University of Calgary and he has written numerous articles on the history of Alexander the Great. Dr. Lloyd-Llewellyn-Jones is a lecturer in Classics and Ancient History at Exeter University. He works and publishes on Greek socio-cultural history, particularly the reception on antiquity in the arts and modern popular culture. He has recently worked as a historical advisor on Oliver Stone’s picture “Alexander”.

The book might refer to a general public, but they manage to furnish us with all the information that would otherwise be found in footnotes (or endnotes) in the usual “grey boxes”; reference to both ancient sources and modern scholarship is found on almost every page. Yet it is difficult to compromise style. In page 251 the authors linger on details concerning the right version of the name of Mazeus’ successor, referring to different historical sources; however, they neglect the complex background of Philotas’ execution and

Parmenio's assassination/execution – a matter of great controversy among both ancient and modern scholarship (p. 250). On the other hand, they find it easy to condense successfully in short paragraphs more complicated arguments, as, for example, in the case of the reasons behind Athens' stance against Persia in 491 B.C. (p. 28).

The treatment of the theme of war, especially the wars of Alexander, by movies is a pleasant and certainly illuminating addition. Still, one cannot help wondering for the objectivity of the author, as he admires the merits of Oliver Stone's latest picture, at the production of which he was employed as an historical advisor. On the whole, this last section manages to shift attention to the depiction of war as it is often not depicted in literature and movies: the bloody and ugly human side of it, that has lit-

tle to do with heroics. This section attempts to put war in its rightful perspective.

One of the greatest assets of the book is certainly the excellent iconography. The superb quality of the illustrations make the edition not only attractive, but it also adds to the

The advice for "Further Reading" (pp. 271-272) certainly does not exhaust the vast bibliography on the subject, but it is in accordance with the aim of the book – and the series – to induce the greater public to the scope of a specific historical period. And it does it well.

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**Jonathan Harris**, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, London and New York: Hambledon & London, 2003, pp. XVII+259, 8 black-and-white plates, 5 maps. ISBN 1-85825-298-4.

This monograph, produced by the promising young British byzantinist J. Harris, lecturer in Byzantine Studies at Royal Holloway College of London University, has appeared ten years after the English translation of Ralph-Johannes Lilie's important synthesis *Byzantium and the Crusader States* (Oxford, 1993; rev. by A. Savvides, in *Βυζαντικά* 17 [Thessalonike, 1997], pp. 555-556), a seminal work of more meticulous scholarship than the present book under review (in fact Harris acknowledges the German byzantinist's 'formidable scholarship', among that of three more eminent British byzantinists, on p. IX). Harris' book, however, has its merits since it is written in a fluent style, depicting a rather complex historical period clearly and rather analytically for the broader reading public. While Lilie's narrative ends in 1204, Harris has taken up his own until the latter part of the thirteenth century in the context of Byzantine-crusader relations, ending in A.D.1291 with the fall of Acre to the Mamluks (chapters nine and ten: Recovery/ Survival).

The scholar, however, will find this book wanting as far as references to the primary Byzantine sources go (e.g. adoption of English

and German translations [with no parallel reference to the Greek editions] of Anna Komnene, Eustathios of Thessalonike, Nikephoros Gregoras, John Kinnamos, Michael VIII's Autobiography, Michael Psellos and utilization of old and uncommented editions, as in the case of Kekaumenos' *Strategikon*, with no reference to the editions/ translations by G. Litavrin [1972] and D. Tsougarakes [1993]). In fact, the author's unfamiliarity with Greek is plainly manifested in his list of secondary works, where not a single title in Greek appears (yet, Harris is a professional byzantinist). He should have benefited however from the significant portions on Byzantine-crusader relations in important modern Greek syntheses like J. Karayannopoulos' *Ιστορία του Βυζαντινού κράτους*, III 1 (A.D. 1081-1204), Thessalonike 1990 and Aikaterine Christophilopoulou's *Βυζαντινή ιστορία*, III. 1 (A.D. 1081-1204), Athens 2001 (rev. by A. Savvides, in *Byzantinoslavica* 63 [Prague, 2003], pp. 271-281) as well as by other monographs or shorter contributions he apparently ignores. His unfamiliarity with the Byzantine sources is also attested by the fact that he has not consulted important *Quellenstudien* and that he cites long amended errors

(e.g. the non-existent surname "Akominatos" in the case of Michael Choniates [pp. 220 n.10, 228]; see on this A. Savvides, "Notes on the Byzantine 'phantom'-surname of Acominatus", *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 79.2 [=new series 8.2] [Alexandria-Johannesburg 1997], pp. 156-162). In fact, Harris has not even cited secondary works published in Greece (even though in English or in other western languages), with the notable exception of T. Lounghis' 1980 *Ambassades byzantines*). His estrangement from modern Greek byzantinology seems to be almost total.

Such bibliographical shortcomings, though not impairing the flow of Harris' narrative, in fact detract from the book's authoritative contribution as a whole. Some erratic interpretation of the Byzantine sources' translators seem to have been incorporated here, while on the other hand crucial comments on the part of notable editors (e.g. J.-L. van Dieten's of Niketas Choniates' *Chronike diegesis*) would have rendered a better outcome. The first three chapters (The Empire of Christ/ The rulers of the Empire/ The search for security) serve as an introduction to the main topic (with an interesting section on the topography and main monuments of Constantinople on pp. 4-12). Byzantine-crusader relations themselves are treated in chapters four to nine (The passage of the First Crusade/ Jerusalem and Antioch/ Innovation and continuity/ Andronicus/ Iron not gold/ The fall of Constantinople).

The book contains some interesting points, like the thesis that "... the disaster of 1204 was the result of an attempt on the part of the Byzantines to implement and sustain their ideology and foreign policy in circumstances which left their actions open to misinterpretation" (p. XVII) and the view that "The idea that conflict between the Byzantines and the crusaders arose because of the narrow-

mindedness of the Byzantine elite ... has very little to recommend it' (pp. 30-31). Harris' text runs smoothly and pleasantly, though the scholar would at times require more corroborative evidence. Some points of interest are presented adequately: The Seljuk emir of Smyrna, Tzachas/ Chaka bey, whose death is often albeit erratically dated to 1093, correctly appears alive in 1098 (p. 68; in fact he was eliminated much later, in 1105-1106: see A. Savvides, *Βυζαντινοτουρκικά μελετήματα*, Athens: Herodotos, 1991, pp. 71-102). Nur al-Din's and Saladin's connections with Byzantium within the context of their strife against the crusaders are treated adequately in chapters seven and eight (cf. also A. Savvides, "Comneni, Angeli, Zengids and Ayyubids to the death of Saladin", *Journal of Oriental & African Studies* 3-4 [Athens 1991-92], pp. 231-235 and more recently «Νουρεντίν και Σαλαδίνος, οι μεγάλοι αντίπαλοι των σταυροφόρων και οι σχέσεις τους με το Βυζάντιο το 12<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα», *Στρατιωτική Ιστορία* no. 61 [Athens, September 2001], pp. 16-25).

Other points however are either underrated in the narrative or presented without pertinent bibliography. For example, in a book on Byzantine-crusader relations the role of the kingdom of Cilician Armenia should have been presented in more detail: not a single important publication on this topic appears here (e.g. major contributions by T. Boase, W. Rudt de Collenberg, R. Edwards, V. Stepanenko, S. rarpie der Nersessian, V. Ter-Ghevondian), while of its important Rupenid rulers only Thoros I is mentioned once, on p. 105 (see details in A. Savvides, «Το μεσογειακό κράτος της Κιλικιακής ή Μικράς Αρμενίας κατά τον ύστερο μεσαίωνα μεταξύ Βυζαντίου, σταυροφόρων και Ισλάμ», *Corpus* 50 [Athens, 2003], pp. 72-81 with detailed refs). Moreover, more should have been said here on the character and role of the 'Turcoples' (Christianized Turkish mercenaries in Byzantine

and crusader armies in the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> cc.) than a simple unexplained reference on p. 26 (cf. refs in A. Savvides, "Late Byzantine and Western historiographers on Turkish mercenaries in Greek and Latin armies: the Turcoples", in R. Beaton-Charlotte Roueché [edd.], *The making of Byzantine history. Studies dedicated to Donald M. Nicol*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1993, pp. 122-136 and A. Savvides, "Tourkopouloi", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vo. X [Leiden 2000], pp. 571-572). Tatikios, referred to as 'a Byzantine general' (p. 65), was in fact a Turcople chieftain (see A. Savvides, "Taticius the Turcople", *Journal of Oriental & African Studies* 3-4 [Athens, 1991-92], pp. 235-238). The Rum Seljuk sultan Kilij Arslan I's relations with the crusaders after the Byzantine recapture of Nicaea in 1097 are somewhat 'drowned' on p. 59 (see now A. Savvides, "Kilij Arslan I of Rum, Byzantines, Crusaders and Danishmendids, A.D./1092-1107", *Βυζαντινά* 1 [Thessalonike, 2000, publ. 2001], pp. 365-377), while in the account of the devastating events of the Latin conquest of Constantinople (12-13 April 1204) (p.145 ff.) no reference is made to Theodore I Laskaris' brother, Constantine (XI) Laskaris, who however can justifiably be considered as Constantine the Eleventh (in 1204-1205) –hence Byzantium's last emperor, the Palaiologan Constantine is in fact the Twelfth not the Eleventh (as on p. 21) (on this see A. Savvides, "Constantine XI Lascaris, uncrowned and ephemeral 'basileus of the Rhomaioi' after the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade, 1204-1205", *Βυζαντινά* 7 [Thessalonike, 1987], pp. 141-174 and «Συμπληρωματικά στοιχεία για τον εφήμερο Βυζαντινό αυτοκράτορα Κωνσταντίνου ΙΑ' Λάσκαρι», *Βυζαντινά* 19 [1999], pp. 195-210). Also, the 'open defiance' on the part of the Greeks after 1204 (p. 165), would warrant at least a brief mention to Leo Sgouros, who opposed the crusaders in northeastern Peloponnese between 1204 and 1208 (see A. Sav-

vides, "A note on the death of Leo Sgurus", *Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies* 12 [Birmingham, 1988], pp. 289-295 and now in detail in Photeine Vlachopoulou's M.A. dissertation, *Λέων Σγουρός*, Thessalonike, 2002). Finally, I cannot agree with Harris' view that the antiquated appellations of foreigners by Byzantine historiographers and other authors are 'hopenessly outdated terms' (p. 29); on the contrary, the careful student of such terms will notice a refined attempt on the part of Byzantine writers to locate the Empire's medieval neighbours as closely and accurately as possible (see A. Savvides, «Η γνώση των Βυζαντινών για τον τουρκόφωνο κόσμο της Ασίας, των Βαλκανίων και της κεντρικής Ευρώπης μεααα από την ονοματοδοσία», Πρακτικά Β' Διεθνούς Συμποσίου του ΚΒΕ/ΕΙΕ «Η επικοινωνία στο Βυζάντιο», Athens, 1993, pp. 711-727 and «Οι Βυζαντινοί απέναντι στους λαούς του ανατολικού και του βαλκανικού μετώπου (με έμφαση στα τουρκόφωνα φύλα)», *Βυζαντινό κράτος και κοινωνία. Σύγχρονες κατευθύνσεις της έρευνας*, Athens, 2003, pp. 125-155; cf. A. Savvides-B. Hendrickx, *Introducing Byzantine history: a manual for beginners*, Paris. Herodotos, 2001, pp. 73-76).

To sum it up, this is a book well fitted to inform the lay reader about one of the most complex periods in the later medieval history of the southeastern Mediterranean world. The author's frequent insistence in clarifying various aspects and issues of Byzantine history (though *prima vista* redundant) succeeds in keeping the interest of his unspecialized reader, who is unable to take the intricacies of the Eastern Empire for granted.

On the other hand, the scholar will often pause, wondering whether he has only recently seen much of what appears here on Byzantine topics time and time again (and moreover rather inadequately supported here in connec-

tion with Greek primary sources). What moreover perplexes the reader of this book (at least it has perplexed its present reviewer), is the author's assertion that 'while yet another book on the crusades may require explanation or even an apology' (quite so in view of the massive bibliography in western languages), yet 'one on the Byzantine empire does not' (p. IX). This is rather odd coming from a scholar of the younger generation fortunate enough to be able to keep pace with the rapid progress of byzantinological publications (though apparently Harris' familiarity is limited to English and the main western languages). If however one could agree with the view that the progress in byzantinological production is more often than not of a quantitative rather than a qualitative nature, one could certainly not agree with Harris' statement that 'Byzantium ... remains one of the least known and little studied of past human civilizations' (p. IX). This may have been true several decades ago; a simple perusal of the annual

bibliographical sections of *Byzantinoslavica* (until 1994) and *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* suffices to prove the field's development in recent decades. What has however passed into oblivion in this book is a considerable amount of scholarly work done in Greece (either in modern Greek or in other languages).

Finally, a comment on the front cover of the book: did it have to be so unhistorical? Did the crusader besiegers of Shaizar have to be portrayed as attacking Nikephoras (sic) III Botaneiates (whose short reign ended fifteen years before the commencement of the First Crusade)? The illustration could at least have shown Alexios I!

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