A Chronology of the Byzantine Empire

Also by Timothy Venning

CROMWELLIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Also by Jonathan Harris

GREEK ÉMIGRÉS IN THE WEST, 1400–1520

BYZANTIUM AND THE CRUSADES

PALGRAVE ADVANCES IN BYZANTINE HISTORY (*editor*)

A Chronology of the Byzantine Empire

Edited by

Timothy Venning

With an introduction by

Jonathan Harris

palgrave
macmillan

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2006 978-1-4039-1774-4

First published 2006 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-51365-9 ISBN 978-0-230-50586-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230505865

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

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

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A chronology of the Byzantine Empire / edited by Timothy Venning; with an introduction by Jonathan Harris.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Byzantine Empire—History—Chronology. I. Venning, Timothy.

DF552.C55 2005
949.5'02'02—dc22

2004065799

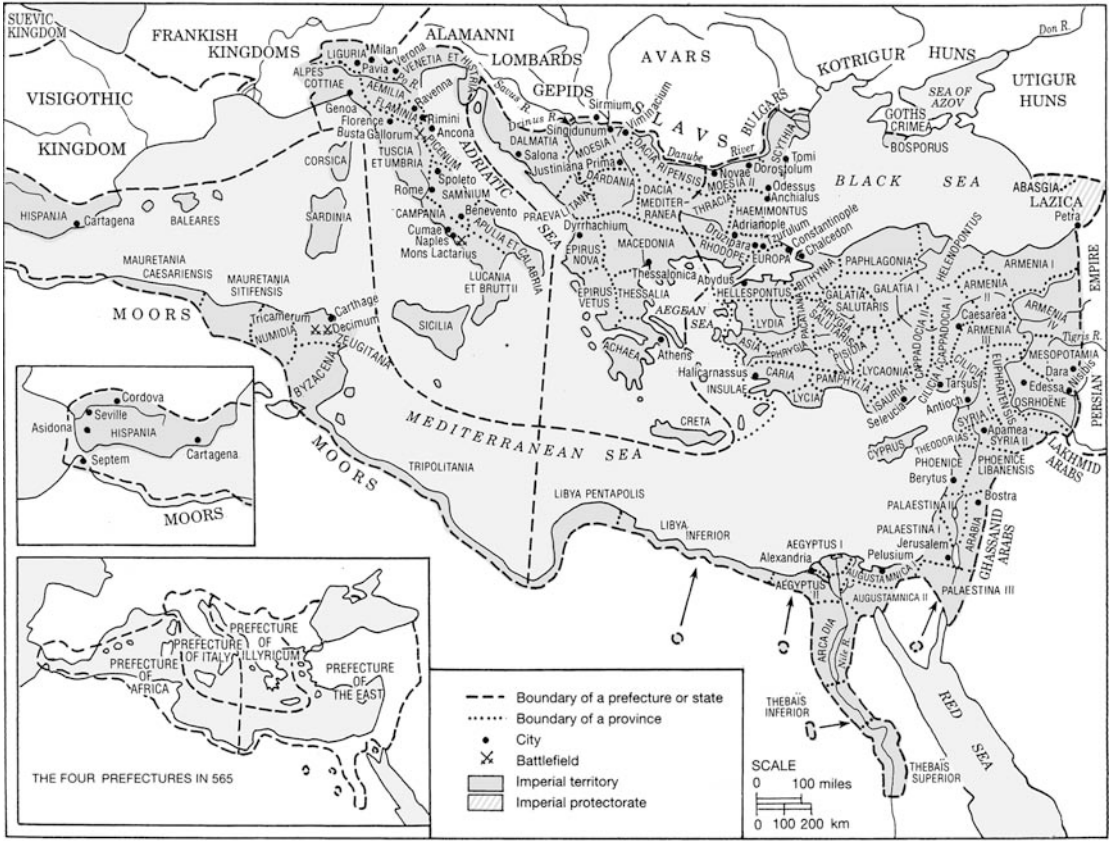
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06

Contents

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to the editorial staff at Palgrave Macmillan, in particular to Luciana O'Flaherty for supporting this long-term project of mine and to Ann Marangos for her sterling work on editing and the index. I would also like to pay tribute to the inspirational teaching of my lecturers at King's College London in the late 1970s, my notes from whose course formed the original kernel of this book – particularly Julian Chrysostomides, Averil Cameron, and the late Donald Nicol.

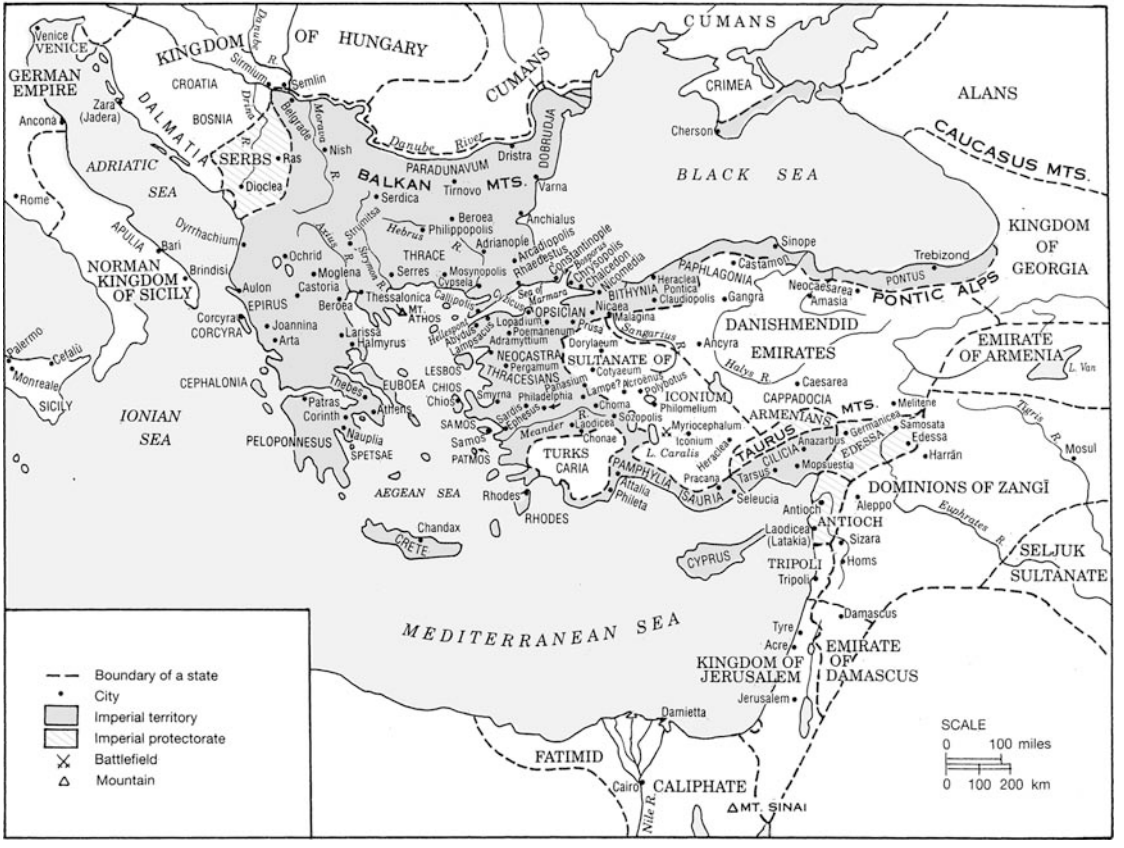
TIMOTHY VENNING
LYMINGTON 2005



Map 1 The Eastern Roman Empire, c. 565

Map 2 The Empire, c. 780

Map 3 The Empire, c. 1025



Map 4 The Empire, c. 1143

Map 5 The Empire, c. 1282

Map 6 The Empire, c. 1350. Page 359, from *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vol. set, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan, © 1991 by Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

Introduction

Jonathan Harris

The Byzantines were as aware as any of us of the passing of the years. The historian and princess, Anna Komnene (1083–c.1149), lamented that 'the stream of time, irresistible, ever-moving, carries off and bears away all things that come to birth and plunges them into utter darkness'. They also understood the need to record and analyse the past. 'The science of History', Komnene went on, 'is a great bulwark against this stream of Time: in a way it checks this irresistible flood, it holds in a tight grasp whatever it can seize floating on the surface and will not allow it to slip away into the depths of Oblivion'.[1]

Yet in spite of that realisation the Byzantine empire, or Byzantium as it is also known, is an era of human history that has come very close to oblivion. Unlike the countries of Medieval western Europe which were able gradually to evolve into the societies we know today, Byzantium was violently overthrown and submerged under an alien culture during the fifteenth century, following the capture of its capital city, Constantinople, by the Ottoman Turks on 29 May 1453. As a result, many of the physical monuments of the Byzantine period have disappeared without trace. Although the great cathedral of the Holy Wisdom or Hagia Sophia still stands in Istanbul, the modern name for Constantinople, many of its other great churches, monasteries and palaces no longer exist. Moreover, while historians of western European can examine well-preserved documents produced by medieval courts and governments in collections such as the Venetian State Archives, the Archives Nationales in Paris, and the National Archives in London, almost nothing of this nature has survived from Byzantium. There can be no doubt that such documentation was produced and carefully preserved by the Byzantine court. Judicial records, for example, were kept in daily registers which were then stored in vaults beneath the seating area of the Hippodrome in Constantinople.[2] None of these documents has survived to the present day, leaving a huge gap in our understanding of the workings of Byzantine society.

In the centuries that followed the fall of Constantinople, the memory of Byzantium suffered a second blow. When western Europeans became interested in studying the literature and preserved the surviving artefacts of ancient Greece and Rome, that enthusiasm and curiosity did not extend to the society that had continued the literary traditions of the one and the political institutions of the other. Throughout the eighteenth and for much of the nineteenth centuries, Byzantium was almost universally written off as a dark and obscurantist theocracy, given over, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) declared, to 'the most shameful debauchery and corruption, the blackest betrayals, murders and poisonings'.[3] Only in the later nineteenth century

did attitudes change and the systematic study of Byzantium begin. Even today, Byzantium remains, for most people, a rather mysterious and obscure period of a very remote past.

In their attempts to piece together the history of the Byzantine empire, scholars have encountered two difficulties both of which are connected with the measurement of time. The first was establishing the chronological parameters of Byzantine history. There was not too much difficulty deciding when it was that the Byzantine empire came to a close. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 brought the long succession of Byzantine emperors to an abrupt end, although one could continue to 15 August 1461 when Trebizond, the last independent Byzantine territory, surrendered to the Ottomans. Much more problematic has been deciding when it was that Byzantine history can be said to have begun.

As far as the Byzantines themselves were concerned their empire had been inaugurated by the emperor Augustus following his victory over Mark Anthony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. They referred to themselves as 'Romans' and their empire as the Roman empire. After all, a direct line of succession could be traced from Augustus to the last emperor who died defending the walls of Constantinople in 1453. From a more recent perspective, however, that was hardly satisfactory. It was only too clear that Byzantium was a body politic which was very different from the empire of Augustus. It was Christian in religion. Its capital city was Constantinople rather than Rome. Its language was Greek rather than Latin, and for most of its history it dominated a far smaller territory than that of the Roman empire at its height. To denote the difference German scholars of the nineteenth century coined the terms 'Byzantine empire' and 'Byzantium'. Not everyone agreed with the new terminology. The English Byzantinist, J.B. Bury (1861–1927), insisted to the end in referring to the 'East Roman Empire'.[4] In general, however, the words stuck.

Yet if most scholars had now reached an agreement on a name for the empire, the problem remained of when it had begun, or rather when one could cease to speak of a Roman empire and start to discuss a Byzantine one. Several possible starting points have been proposed. One is the accession of Diocletian (284–305), since this emperor began to implement some of the reforms which characterise the change from a Roman to a Byzantine world. Others are the death of Theodosius I in 395, the fall of the western half of Roman empire in 476, the reign of Justinian (527–65), or that of Heraclius (610–41).

The most convincing dates, however, are those associated with the Emperor Constantine I or the Great. Born in what is now Nish in Serbia, Constantine was proclaimed emperor at York, in the Roman province of Britain in July 306, following the death of his father, the Emperor Constantius. More than any other individual, Constantine was responsible for the changes which marked the shift from Rome to Byzantium.

The first of these changes was the Christianisation of the empire. In 312, on the eve of a battle against a rival for the imperial throne, Constantine had some kind of

vision which convinced him that the God of the Christians was promising him victory over his enemy. The next day, at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge just outside Rome, Constantine won a famous victory and he was quick to pay his debt. Not only did he proclaim toleration for the Christian church, which in the past had been subject to sporadic persecution, but he also took to subsidising it from public funds. Constantine's personal conversion to Christianity seems to have been slow and tentative, but there can be no doubt that he was a Christian by the end of his life, when he received baptism on his death bed. Thereafter all the emperors, with the exception of Julian (361–63), were Christians and by the end of the fifth century Christianity was the official religion of the empire.

The second development associated with Constantine was the inauguration of a new capital. For some time, the Roman emperors had been having great difficulty in defending their frontiers from incursions by Germanic tribes across the Rhine and Danube and by the Persians into Syria. They had therefore largely abandoned Rome as a base, since it was much too far from the scene of the action. Instead the emperors tended to reside at Milan, Ravenna or even Trier in the western half of the empire, and at Antioch or Nikomedia in the East. Constantine, however, decided to adopt a new base and his choice fell on the city of Byzantion. The place had certain very clear advantages: it stood at the bridge between Europe and Asia, on a narrow and easily defensible promontory. On its north side lay the Golden Horn, one of the finest natural harbours in the world. It was relatively well placed for reaching both the Danube and eastern frontiers. In 324 Constantine resolved to found a completely new city on the site. This he inaugurated in a solemn ceremony in 330 and remained in his own honour, calling it Constantinople, the city of Constantine.

It therefore seems logical to begin Byzantine history with Constantine, either with his proclamation as emperor in York in 306, his victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312 or his inauguration of Constantinople in 330, though it always has to be remembered that the developments of Constantine's reign had begun earlier, under Diocletian.

Consequently Byzantine history, as we understand it, covers a very long period, of over a thousand years. In has become customary to divide this long span into three. The first period runs from about 330 to about 610 and is often referred to as 'Late Antique', 'early Byzantine' or 'Late Roman', since it was a time of transition. Following Constantine's reforms, the empire enjoyed a period of stability until the defeat of the emperor Valens by the Goths at Adrianople in 378. Thereafter the frontiers came under increasing pressure, culminating in the end of imperial rule over the western half of the empire, including Gaul, Spain and Britain, by 476. In the following century an attempt by Justinian I to reconquer the western empire enjoyed some success but left the treasury exhausted. By 600, the empire was once more in crisis as its frontiers gave way to Avar and Slav invasions in the Balkans and Persian attacks in Syria.

The years 610 to 1204 are often said to constitute the 'middle period' of Byzantine history. From this time on, Greek completely replaced Latin as the language of the empire. Under Heraclius (610–41) the situation was briefly restored but from 636

onwards the Arabs conquered the Byzantine eastern provinces of Syria, Palestine and Egypt to form the new Islamic caliphate. By 678, Constantinople itself was under Arab siege and it looked likely that the empire would be overrun. It survived, however, and it also weathered a grave internal crisis over Iconoclasm, the attempt by some emperors to ban the veneration of pictures or icons of Christ and the saints. By the mid-tenth century, the empire had recovered and was starting to reconquer some of its lost territory from the Arabs. The defeat of the Byzantines by the Seljuk Turks at Manzikert in 1071 threw them onto the defensive once more and the attempt by Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) to enlist western help against the Turks helped to precipitate the First Crusade in 1099. The Byzantines had an uneasy relationship with these expeditions launched by their fellow Christians to recapture Jerusalem and that tension came to a head in April 1204 when the army of the Fourth Crusade captured and sacked Constantinople.

Finally the period 1204 to 1453 is regarded as 'Late Byzantine'. The Byzantine emperor, Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–82), recovered Constantinople from the crusaders in 1261 and reconstituted a rather smaller version of the empire. Unfortunately, the restored Byzantine empire proved incapable of defending its eastern frontier. By 1354 the Turks had conquered the whole of Asia Minor (what is now Turkey) and had crossed to Europe. Under the leadership of the Ottomans, they embarked on the conquest of the Balkans, laying the foundations of the Ottoman empire. The last century of the empire's existence was taken up with desperate efforts by the emperors to hold off the Turks in the hope that help would be sent by the Christians of western Europe. These efforts ultimately proved unavailing and Constantinople was finally taken by the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmed II (1451–81), in 1453.

That, broadly speaking, set the chronological parameters of Byzantine history. There remains the second difficulty encountered by scholars when they embarked on their systematic study of Byzantium: the establishment of an exact sequence of events and dates within that long period. There were abundant sources of information from which a chronology could be extracted. Although most archival documentation from Byzantium has been lost, there was a flourishing tradition of historiography, written in Greek, within the empire and many such works have survived until the present day. They range from major literary histories, such as Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, to short family chronicles which individuals would write in the margins of manuscripts or anywhere else where there was space. These histories and chronicles are our major sources of information about Byzantine society and history.

When it comes to dates, the chronicles are by far the most important source. First and foremost of them was that compiled by Eusebius (c.260–339), bishop of Caesarea in Palestine and an older contemporary of Constantine the Great. First published in the 280s, the chronicle was revised in about 326 so that it began with the Old Testament Patriarch Abraham and ended with the situation in the early fourth century AD. It enjoyed wide circulation, especially after it was continued up to 378 and translated into Latin by St Jerome (c.345–419),[5] and it provided a model for future

generations of chroniclers such John Malalas and the anonymous author of the so-called *Paschal Chronicle*.[6] Two of the most influential of the Byzantine chroniclers were George Synkellos (died c.813) and his continuator, the monk Theophanes Confessor (c.760–818). Theophanes provided a carefully worked out chronological system, beginning each year with tables that gave the year since creation and the birth of Christ, the current year of the Byzantine emperor, and those of the Persian and Arab rulers, the Pope and the four patriarchs of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem. This work has provided a basis for the chronology of the seventh and eighth centuries AD, a notoriously obscure period.[7] The chronicle tradition continued, with gaps, throughout the Byzantine era. For the later period we have a wealth of short chronicles and that compiled by the courtier, George Sphrantzes (1401–c.1478), who kept a record of the events of his lifetime, including the fall of Constantinople in 1453 which he personally witnessed.[8]

Literary histories differed from chronicles in that they were modelled on the more complex language and style that were to be found in the works of the ancient Greek historians, such as Herodotus and Thucydides. To take some famous examples, Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* covers the period 1078–1118 and especially the reign of her father, the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos. Procopius of Caesarea's *History of the Wars* describes the campaigns fought in the years 527 to 554 by Justinian I.[9] The *Chronographia* of the statesman and scholar Michael Psellos (c.1022–c.1080) recounts events in Constantinople from 976 to 1077 and the *History* of Niketas Choniates covers the years 1118 to 1207.[10] Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who was active in the 1480s wrote an account of the period 1300 to 1463, in a style reminiscent of Herodotus.[11] There are, of course, many others too numerous to mention here.

Given this wealth of historical writing, it might be thought that the establishment of a chronology of the Byzantine empire would be an easy task. In fact, the task has been a long and arduous one, involving intense scholarly debate. Part of the difficulty arises from the way in which the Byzantines themselves established chronology. As regards past years, we have become used to numbering them in accordance with a system worked out some 1500 years ago by a monk called Dionysius Exiguus. This system designated the birth of Christ as occurring in the year 1 and subsequent years were reckoned from that. This introduction is being written in 2004 'in the year of Our Lord' (*Anno Domini* or AD). Years prior to 1 AD are designated 'Before Christ' or BC, in English at least. Introduced into western Europe from the seventh century on, this system is now used throughout the world, although AD and BC are sometimes replaced with the less specifically Christian CE (Common Era) and BCE (Before the Common Era).[12]

The Byzantines did not use this system and had their own way reckoning past dates. Unfortunately, they did not have just one. In Late Antiquity, Byzantine chroniclers tended to use the dating systems which they had inherited from the Classical world. One was the Roman system of dating by Consulship, though this was fast going out of fashion as the appointment of consuls was by now very irregular and had long since lost any meaning.[13] Another form of dating inherited from

the Classical world was Olympiads. These were periods of four years between celebrations of the Olympic games beginning in 776 BC. Thus we are told by the sixth-century writer John Lydus, that the city of Byzantion was originally founded during the thirty-eighth Olympiad, which works out somewhere between 624 and 628 BC.[14]

Then there was dating by indiction, especially for events in the recent past. Indictions were cycles of fifteen years from 1 September, used to mark the official administrative year of the Roman state for tax purposes. They were referred to as First, Second, Third Indiction etc, up to Fifteenth, whereupon the cycle would begin again at the First Indiction. Unfortunately, although the years within any particular cycle were numbered, the cycles themselves were not, so that indictions are of little use in dating unless they were used in conjunction with some other system.[15] This was, in practice, what most early Byzantine chroniclers did. The author of the *Paschal Chronicle*, for example, dated an invasion by the Huns across the Danube to 'Olympiad 305, Indiction 10, consulship of Eudoxius and Dioscurus' which must be sometime in 442 AD.[16]

For the early Byzantines, however, Olympiads, consulships and other methods inherited from the past left a great deal to be desired. They had been developed in a pagan society to date secular events, whereas in the newly Christian empire what was wanted was a way of dating events of the Old Testament, especially the Creation, and the life of Christ, particularly the Incarnation. The first Byzantine chronicler, Eusebius, set out to rectify this deficiency by counting back from indications given in the Bible in order reconcile events with Olympiads. Eusebius was motivated not by mere antiquarian curiosity, but had a polemical purpose of showing that Christianity was as ancient, and therefore as respectable, as other institutions of the Graeco-Roman world. His chronicle began with Abraham, and was written in parallel columns recording Hebrew, Greek, Roman events. People like the Greeks dropped out as they were conquered, so that by the time he reached his own day in the early fourth century, all history, Christian and pagan, had been incorporated into a single column.[17]

Largely thanks to the work of Eusebius, in the following centuries the Byzantines were able to adopt a more specifically Christian system for numbering the years, from the Creation of the world (*Annus Mundi* or AM).[18] Once again, unfortunately, in Late Antiquity and for part of the Middle Byzantine period, there was no agreement as to exactly when it was that Creation had taken place. In the later sixth century, John Malalas appears to have believed that it happened in around 5967 BC, though some manuscripts of his work have different dates.[19] The seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle* used 5509 BC.[20] George Synkellos reckoned it to have occurred in 5501 BC, while Theophanes Confessor used the year 5492 BC, the so-called Alexandrian era.[21] After the ninth century, however, the equivalent of 5508 BC was generally accepted. Thus George Sphrantzes, using this standard reckoning, recorded that John VIII Palaiologos (1425–48) set out for the Council of Florence in 6946 AM which we would call 1437 AD. Theophanes, using the

Alexandrian era, dated the beginning of Iconoclasm to 6218 AM which we would call 726 AD and not 710.[22]

When it came to months and days the Byzantines often used the same system as we do. As in the Medieval west, however, it was common in the Middle and Later periods to refer to a saint's day, rather than to a day of the month. Anna Komnene describes the arrest of a would-be assassin of Alexios I, Nikephoros Diogenes, 'on the evening on which honour is paid to the great martyr Theodore'. St Theodore Stratelates was allegedly a Roman general martyred for his faith and his feast falls on 9 February, though Komnene is probably referring to the evening of the day before the feast.[23] Another complication is that the Byzantines did not begin the year on 1 January, as has become standard in the modern world, but on 23 September before 462 AD and on 1 September thereafter. That means that Byzantine years do not correspond exactly with ours. Theophanes' 6262 AM is the equivalent of 1 September 769 to 31 August 770 AD. George Sphrantzes records that John VIII Palaiologos sent a peace-making mission to his two quarrelsome brothers in the Peloponnese 'in the year 6945'.[24] This would have to have happened, by our reckoning, sometime between 1 September 1436 and 31 August 1437.

The Byzantines then certainly had sophisticated dating systems, albeit rather diverse and inevitably subject to change over the centuries. Using the various dating systems in their writings to establish a chronology has presented a challenge to scholars but one which has generally been overcome by careful study. There are, however, other factors which create obstacles to an smooth chronology. One of them is that, inevitably, Byzantine historians often made mistakes and omissions. Theophanes is one year out in his reckoning of the years from 609/10 until 772/3, although this can be corrected from the indictions which he always gave.[25] Anna Komnene left a space to insert the year and indiction of the arrival of Peter the Hermit and the first wave of the First Crusade at Constantinople but apparently forgot to fill them in.[26] Different sources ascribe different dates to the same event. Niketas Choniates tells us that the clash between the forces of the regency and those of Maria the Porphyrogenita in the area around Hagia Sophia took place in May 1181. Another contemporary witness, Eustathios of Thessalonica, says that it happened in April.[27] Other events were not even mentioned, probably because they did not appear important at the time. Michael Psellos and others who wrote about events in the eleventh century completely failed to mention the ecclesiastical squabble of 1054 when three Roman legates excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople. Finally, there were also periods when no one wrote history at all, such as the seventh and eighth centuries and the later fourteenth century. For these periods we often have to rely on later and possibly very inaccurate accounts.

Errors, gaps and omissions are not the only problems. In the literary histories, specific dates are often very hard to come by because their authors did not aim to give a year-by-year account of events but tended to take a more thematic approach to the past. Laonikos Chalkokondyles, for example, was not interested in establishing an exact chronology but in exploring the reasons behind the success of the

Ottoman Turks.[28] Michael Psellos openly stated that in his *Chronographia* 'the years have not been numbered by Olympiads nor divided into seasons . . . but I have simply drawn attention to the most important facts': his real aim was to construct a memoir and defence of his own political conduct.[29]

The chronological information given in such works is therefore often either minimal or non-existent. The seventh-century writer, Theophylact Simocatta, tells us that a military campaign was launched 'at the beginning of Autumn' but omits to give us a year.[30] Procopius of Caesarea is slightly more helpful. He notes, for example, that 'the winter drew to its close, and the fifteenth year ended in this war'. It is, however, difficult to tell what the fifteenth year is counted from.[31] Yet for an important event like the Nika insurrection in Constantinople, Procopius gives no date at all.[32] Anna Komnene tells us that she was born on 1 December in the Seventh Indiction which gives no clue of the year or of the cycle she was using. Only from context can it be worked out that she was born in 1083.[33]

Consequently, the chronology of Byzantine history has had to be pieced together over the past hundred and fifty years by a process of painstaking scholarship and often protracted debate. Some gaps can be filled in from other, non-historical, sources. For example, it was for a long time believed that the Ottoman Turks must have captured the city of Adrianople in 1362, only eight years after their capture of Gallipoli in 1354, although no chronicle or history supplies a precise date.[34] A poem composed in Adrianople around 1366, however, clearly indicates that the city was still in Byzantine hands at that time, so that 1369 now seems a more likely date.[35]

Other clarifications have been made by reference to contemporary historians writing in other societies, such as those writing in Latin in western Europe. It is from the anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum* that we can make up for Anna Komnene's forgetfulness and work out that Peter the Hermit and his followers arrived at Constantinople on 1 August 1096.[36] In spite of the silence of Michael Psellos, it is known that the excommunication of the patriarch of Constantinople took place at around nine o'clock in the morning on 16 July 1054, because one of the legates involved wrote a short account of the whole affair.[37]

Comparison with Arabic accounts is often particularly helpful, since the contemporary Islamic world had a sophisticated chronological system in which years were (and are) counted from the Hijra (AH), the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina on the equivalent of 15/16 July 622 AD.[38] Sometimes Arabic sources enable us to date an important event. It is only from the Arab record that we know that John I Tzimiskes (969–76) mounted his first expedition on the eastern frontier into Mesopotamia in 972, taking Nisibis on 1 Moharrem 362 AH (12 October 972).[39] Moreover, Arabic sources often describe and date events which are not even mentioned by the Byzantine historians. From a biographer of the Ayyubid Sultan, Saladin (d.1193), for example, we learn that on 1 Jumada I 588 AH (15 May 1192) an embassy from the Byzantine emperor Isaac II Angelos (1185–95) reached Saladin's court, to discuss action against the western crusaders who had seized the island of Cyprus the previous year.[40] The Byzantine historian of the period, Niketas Choniates,

says nothing of these negotiations, except to say that they were a mere rumour.[41] We know from Michael Psellos that Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) was in diplomatic contact with the Fatimid caliph of Egypt, though the historian does not say when or even what the correspondence was about. Typically he prefers to dwell on his own skill in drawing up the letters to be sent to Egypt.[42] It is the Arab historian Ibn al-Athir who describes how in 439 AH (1047) Constantine IX renewed an earlier treaty of 418 AH (1027) which permitted the emperor to restore the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and provided for the Friday bidding prayer in the mosque in Constantinople to be said in the name of the Shi'ite Fatimid Caliph, rather than of his Abbasid rival in Baghdad.[43]

Contemporary accounts in other languages also help to fill in the chronological gaps. For the notoriously obscure seventh century, there is the work of the Armenian bishop, Sebeos.[44] It is thanks to an account of a journey to Constantinople by a Russian traveller that we know of an attempted seizure of power by John VII Palaiologos on 'Wednesday of the second week after Easter' 6898 AM (13 April 1390), an episode which Laonikos Chalkokondyles completely ignores.[45]

Natural phenomena such as earthquakes and comets are another helpful supplement to the vague chronology of Byzantine historians since they can often be verified and dated in other ways. Anna Komnene, for example, mentions what she calls a comet, which appeared in the sky shortly before the invasion of the Byzantine Balkans by the Norman prince, Bohemond. This is almost certainly the large meteor noted by Chinese astronomers in February 1106.[46] Similarly, Komnene describes how her father, Alexios I, used his foreknowledge of a solar eclipse to overawe some envoys from the unsophisticated Pecheneg people. This too can be precisely dated, to 2 October 1084.[47]

Although the main chronological outline of Byzantine history has now been established, there remain some elusive dates for which no other source or corrective has been found and which will probably never be known. One example is the famous battle of Manzikert in 1071 when the Emperor Romanos III Diogenes (1068–71) was defeated and captured by the Seljuk sultan, Alp Arslan. We know that the battle took place on a Friday but whether on 5, 19 or 26 August is still a matter for debate.[48] Even less precise is the date of the treaty made by John V Palaiologos (1341–91) with the Ottoman emir, Murad I (1362–89) in the early 1370s. The treaty was clearly of great significance as it marked the moment when the shrunken and impoverished Byzantine empire became a tributary vassal state to the Ottoman Turks. John even sent his son Manuel to the sultan's court with instructions to accompany the Ottoman ruler on his military campaigns. Only one source mentions the treaty, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, but as usual he gives no date, other than to say that it occurred after John V returned to Constantinople from Italy.[49] We know that John returned on 18 October 1371 and that, by the spring of 1373, Byzantine troops were serving in the Ottoman armies. Beyond that nothing is known so that the treaty can only be dated very approximately to 1372 or 1373.[50]

All this serves to emphasise that the course of Byzantine history can never be known as precisely as can events in the more recent past. There will always be an element of doubt remaining and it is likely that, in the future, even dates of which we are relatively sure now will have to be revised in the light of new research. Nevertheless is no reason why the sequence of dates as it has been established so far should not be laid out and made available to students and researchers. This is what Timothy Venning has done, selecting 274 AD, the approximate date of Constantine's birth, as his starting point and taking the time line forward to 1502 when Andreas Palaiologos, the nephew of the last Byzantine emperor died in exile in Rome. His work brings home how long a slice of human history and experience is contained in what we call the Byzantine empire. It is also a formidable bulwark against the stream of time.

Notes

1. Anna Komnene (Comnena), *Alexias*, ed. D.R. Reinsch and Athanasios Kambylis, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 40, 2 vols (Berlin and New York, 2001), vol. 1, p. 5; trans. E.R.A. Sewter, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 17.
2. John Lydus, *On Powers, or The Magistracies of the Roman State*, ed. and trans. A.C. Bandy (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 160–3.
3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discours si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les moeurs', in *Du Contrat Social et autres oeuvres politiques*, ed. Jean Ehrard (Paris, 1975), p. 7; George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J.M. Hussey (2nd edn, Oxford, 1968), pp. 4–5.
4. J.B. Bury, *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire from the Fall of Irene to the Accession of Basil I (A.D. 802–867)* (London, 1912).
5. St Jerome, *Chronicon*, ed. Rudolf Helm, Eusebius Werke 8 (Berlin, 1956); trans. M.D. Donalson, *A Translation of Jerome's Chronicon with Historical Commentary* (Lewiston NY, 1996)
6. John Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. J. Thurn, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 35 (Berlin and New York, 2000); trans. E.M. Jeffreys, M.J. Jeffreys, and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas* (Melbourne, 1986); *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, 2 vols (Bonn, 1832); trans. M. and M. Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale 284–628* (Liverpool, 1989).
7. George Synkellos, *Chronographia*, ed. B.G. Niebuhr, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, 2 vols (Bonn, 1829); trans. William Adler and Paul Tuffin, *The Chronography of George Synkellos: a Byzantine Chronicle of Universal History from the Creation* (Oxford, 2002); Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1883–5); trans Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813* (Oxford, 1997).
8. *Die Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, ed. Peter Schreiner, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 12, 3 vols (Vienna, 1975–7); George Sphrantzes, *Memorii (Chronicon Minus)*, ed. V. Grecu (Bucharest, 1966), pp. 2–147; trans M. Philippides, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes, 1401–1477* (Amherst MA, 1980), pp. 21–95.
9. Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars*, ed. and trans. H.B. Dewing and G. Downey, Loeb Classical Library, 5 vols (London and Cambridge MA, 1914–28).
10. Michael Psellos, *Chronographie, ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance (976–1077)*, ed. E. Renauld, 2 vols (Paris, 1926–8); trans. E.R.A. Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, Harmondsworth, 1966); Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. J.-L. Van Dieten, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae

11, 2 vols (Berlin and New York, 1975); trans. H.J. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984).

11. Available in two editions: Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *Historiarum Libri Decem*, ed. I. Bekker, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae (Bonn, 1843), and *Historiae Demonstrationes*, ed. E. Darkó, 2 vols (Budapest, 1922–7); trans. of Books I–III by N. Nicoloudis, *A Translation and Commentary of the Demonstrations of Histories* (Athens, 1996), and of Book VIII by J.R. Melville-Jones in *The Siege of Constantinople: Seven Contemporary Accounts* (Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 42–55.
12. C.R. Cheney and M. Jones, *Handbook of Dates for Students of British History* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–2.
13. Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980), p. 190; Brian Croke and A.P. Kazhdan, 'Chronology', in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A.P. Kazhdan, 3 vols (Oxford, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 448–9.
14. John Lydus, p. 245. On Olympiads, see V. Grumel, *La Chronologie*, Traité d'études Byzantines 1, ed. P. Lemerle (Paris, 1958), pp. 191–2; Croke and Kazhdan, 'Chronology', pp. 448–9.
15. On indictions see Cheney and Jones, *Handbook of Dates*, pp. 2–4; Grumel, *Chronologie*, pp. 192–203; Croke and Kazhdan, 'Chronology', p. 448.
16. *Chronicon Paschale*, vol. 1, p. 583; trans. M. and M. Whitby, p. 73.
17. Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge MA and London, 1981), pp. 111–20; Brian Croke, 'The Origins of the Christian world chronicle', in *History and Historians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Brian Croke and A.M. Emmett (Oxford, 1983), pp. 116–31, at 123–5.
18. Grumel, *Chronologie*, pp. 73–128; Croke and Kazhdan, 'Chronology', p. 449.
19. Malalas, *Chronographia*, pp. 357–8; trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott, p. 247; Roger Scott, 'Malalas, *The Secret History*, and Justinian's propaganda', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 39 (1985), 99–109.
20. *Chronicon Paschale*, trans. Whitby and Whitby, p. xxiii.
21. George Synkellos, *Chronographia*, vol. 1, pp. 1–2; trans. Adler and Tuffin, p. 1; Mango, *Byzantium*, pp. 193–4; A.S. Proudfoot, 'The sources of Theophanes for the Heraclian dynasty', *Byzantion* 44 (1974), 367–439, at 372.
22. Sphrantzes, *Memorii (Chronicon Minus)*, pp. 56–7; trans. Philippides, p. 49; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, vol. 1, p. 404; trans. Mango and Scott, p. 559.
23. Komnene, *Alexias*, vol. 1, p. 273; trans. Sewter, p. 283.
24. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, vol. 1, p. 444; trans. Mango and Scott, p. 614; Grumel, *Chronologie*, p. 128; Sphrantzes, *Memorii (Chronicon Minus)*, pp. 56–7; trans. Philippides, p. 49.
25. Proudfoot, 'Sources', 374–5.
26. Komnene, *Alexias*, vol. 1, pp. 296–7; trans. Sewter, p. 308.
27. Choniates, *Historia*, vol. 1, p. 236; trans. Magoulias, p. 133; Eustathios of Thessalonica, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, trans. J.R. Melville Jones (Canberra, 1988), pp. 24–5; Charles M. Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West, 1180–1204* (Cambridge MA, 1968), pp. 323–4.
28. Jonathan Harris, 'Laonikos Chalkokondyles and the rise of the Ottoman Empire', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 27 (2003), 153–70.
29. Psellos, *Chronographie*, vol. 1, p. 152; trans. Sewter, p. 191.
30. Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor and P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1972), p. 230; trans. M. and M. Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (Oxford, 1986), p. 167.
31. Procopius, *Wars*, vol. 5, p. 37.
32. Procopius, *Wars*, vol. 1, p. 219.
33. Komnene, *Alexias*, vol. 1, pp. 183–4; trans. Sewter, p. 196.
34. Ostrogorsky, *History*, p. 536.
35. E.A. Zachariadou, 'The conquest of Adrianople by the Turks', *Studi Veneziani*, 12 (1970), 211–17 and reprinted in E.A. Zachariadou, *Romania and the Turks* (London, 1985), no. XII
36. *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, trans. R. Hill (Oxford, 1962), p. 2.

37. Humbert of Silva-Candida, *Brevis et succincta commemoratio*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 vols (Paris, 1857–66), vol. 143, cols 1001–4.
38. Grumel, *Chronologie*, pp. 280–96.
39. M. Canard, 'La date des expéditions mésopotamiennes de Jean Tzimiscès', *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*, 10 (1950), 99–108, at 107.
40. Baha al-Din ibn Shaddad, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, trans. D.S. Richards (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 201–2.
41. Choniates, *Historia*, vol. 1, pp. 409–10; trans. Magoulias, p. 225; Jonathan Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades* (London, 2003), pp. 129–32.
42. Psellos, *Chronographie*, vol. 2, p. 64; trans. Sewter, p. 253.
43. Abbas Hamdani, 'Byzantine Fatimid relations before the Battle of Manzikert', *Byzantine Studies* 1 (1974), 169–79, at 173–4.
44. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, trans. R.W. Thomson, 2 vols (Liverpool, 1999).
45. George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople* (Washington, DC, 1984), p. 100.
46. Komnene, *Alexias*, vol. 1, p. 368; trans. Sewter, p. 378. Cf John Williams, *Observations of Comets from BC 611 to AD 1640 Extracted from the Chinese Annals* (London, 1971), p. 60; Grumel, *Chronologie*, p. 473..
47. Komnene, *Alexias*, vol. 1, pp. 207–8; trans. Sewter, p. 221. Cf K. Ferrari d'Occhieppo, 'Zur Identifizierung der Sonnenfinsternis während der Petschenegenkrieges Alexios I. Komnenos (1084)', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 23 (1973), 179–84.
48. Ostrogorsky, *History*, p. 344; J.-C. Cheynet, 'Mantzikert. Une désastre militaire?', *Byzantion* 50 (1980), 410–38, at 412; Alfred Friendly, *The Dreadful Day: the Battle of Manzikert 1071* (London, 1981), p. 178.
49. Chalkokondyles, ed. Bekker, p. 51; ed. Darkò, vol. 1, p. 34; trans. Nicoloudis, p. 149.
50. Peter Charanis, 'The strife among the Palaeologi and the Ottoman Turks, 1370–1402', *Byzantion* 16 (1942–3), 286–314, at 292–3; Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1993), pp. 276–7.

Further reading

General Overviews of the Whole Byzantine period

Michael Angold, *Byzantium. The Bridge from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001).
John Haldon, *Byzantium 300–1453* (Stroud, 2000).
Jonathan Harris, ed., *The Palgrave Guide to Byzantine Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Christian Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford University Press, 1986).
Rowena Loverance, *Byzantium* (British Museum, 1994, 2nd edn.).
Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: the Empire of New Rome* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980).
Cyril Mango, ed., *The Oxford History of Byzantium* (Oxford University Press, 2002).
George Ostrogorsky, *A History of the Byzantine State* (Blackwells, 1968, 2nd edn.).
Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford University Press, 1997).
Warren Treadgold, *A Concise History of Byzantium* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

The Early Period 330–602

Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (Thames and Hudson, 1971).
Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity* (Routledge, 1993).

Averil Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire* (Fontana, 1993).
J.A.S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian: the Circumstances of Imperial Power* (Routledge, 1996).
A.H.M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (Penguin, 1972).
John Moorhead, *Justinian*. (Longman, 1994).

The Middle Period 602–1204

Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204* (Longman, 1997, 2nd edn.).
Michael Angold, *The Fourth Crusade* (Longman, 2004).
Jonathan Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades* (Hambledon and London, 2003).
Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple. Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2001).
Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000).
Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival 780–842* (Stanford University Press, 1988).
Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium 600–1025* (Macmillan, 1996).

The Later Period 1204–1453

D.M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453* (Cambridge University Press, 1993, 2nd edn.).
Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople* (Cambridge University Press, 1965).

Original Sources in Translation

Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G.A. Williamson and A. Louth (Penguin, 1989).
Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (AD 354–378)*, trans. W. Hamilton (Penguin, 1986).
Procopius, *The Secret History*, trans. G.A. Williamson (Penguin, 1966).
Michael Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, trans. E.R.A. Sewter (Penguin, 1966).
Anna Comnena (Komnene), *The Alexiad*, trans. E.R.A. Sewter (Penguin, 1969).

Byzantine Art and Architecture

John Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Yale University Press, 1997).
Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
J. Freely and A.S. Çakmak, *The Byzantine Monuments of Istanbul* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Phaidon, 1997).
Thomas F. Mathews, *The Art of Byzantium* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998).
David Talbot-Rice, *Art of the Byzantine Era* (Thames and Hudson, 1963).