

Section: Byzantium and Politics

‘Museum interpretations of Byzantium’

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This chapter is examining the interplay between contemporary interpretations of Byzantium and national identity politics in the exhibition constructions of two European national museums: the British Museum, London, UK and the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, Greece. Within the context of each museum’s different national, cultural and political framework this chapter analyses and explains the contemporary interpretation or constructed notion of Byzantine culture as a product of the interaction between cultural knowledge on Byzantium and national museum curatorial practices and discourse. Its special focus is on issues of identity making and nation building. It examines and understands two different, contemporary interpretations of Byzantium as effected through the narratives of each exhibition under study. Most importantly, as well as surprisingly, through each museum exhibition, it identifies and explains the function and significance of each interpretation in the construction of the national identity of the dominant culture or ‘imagined community’ⁱ each museum is part of. By understanding the relation of cultural ideas, beliefs and values to the exhibitionary meaning making processes, and by analysing and explaining the meanings of Byzantium as presented within each ‘exhibitionary complex’ⁱⁱ under study, this chapter argues that in both museums Byzantine history, culture and art are used for the explanation of the identity of the ‘nation’ and the (dominant) ‘culture’ of the country to which each museum belongs (i.e. Britain, Greece), and for the promotion of the desired image of the corresponding ‘nation’ (i.e. British, Greek). This meaning is presented as ‘natural’ and hence as the only ‘truth’ⁱⁱⁱ. In other words, it gives insight to the ‘myth’^{iv} of Byzantium, as seen and (re)presented within the different ideologies of each ‘national’ and cultural context

Particularly, this chapter demonstrates that the exhibitions have the effect of (re)constructing a narrative of national identity, a narrative of ‘same’ and ‘other’ through Byzantium, within a notion of Europe. Drawing on Derrida’s (1992) account of identity/difference, it could be said that the question of who, or what represents ‘otherness’ or the rationale of the same is complicated, as each is necessarily

tangled up with the other. But then, it could also be said that the question is not what we are, or what we were, but rather what we will become. This is answered by analysing the museums' interpretations, which use national historical narratives attempting to explain the identity of the imagined community of each country, based on who the imagined community were, and who they are, (by separating 'themselves' from the 'others') -thus, contributing to a future imagined community, through the (re)production/(re)construction of the ideology of a national identity. In other words, by analysing an imagined/constructed past and the (re)construction of an imagined/constructed present through the exhibitionary complexes, this chapter also provides insights into the conditions of the possibility of an imagined/constructed future – to put it better of a (re)imagined/(re)constructed future.

Following the 1992 Maastricht treaty, European social/political identity aimed to become unified and one might expect that European national museums would therefore present a 'unified' narrative of European identity. More particularly, this is a reference to the establishment of social/political unity: the 1992 Maastricht treaty did not only aim to increase the social dimension of the union. As Griveaoud (2011) explains, it also aimed at developing 'a new political comprehensiveness because the EU was now acknowledging the fact that it was one entity, which was formed by and worked for the citizens, rather than a body composed of different states, driven by their national interests' –their different, and in some cases conflicting national interests. Educational exchanges have been encouraged, aiming to overcome cultural differences through mutual respect for diversity, for example. As will be shown in the different exhibitionary complexes under study, the different European cultures are presenting their national identities within a notion of Europe, but also, they resist 'unification' (another illustration of such resistance in the present, could be the rise of populism/populist and nationalistic political 'parties' across the EU). The contemporary European identity is actually consisting of different European/national identities resisting 'unification'. Post-Maastricht Europe, as Lützeler (1994 : 9) explains, is a highly contradictory (but dynamic) post-modern structure. Social and cultural change in the EU today might be (and in fact, is) accelerated, but identity has been disrupted by unemployment, violence, migration, nationalism (Lützeler, 1994); in the global present of the current political, financial and Covid-19 crises, even more severely than in the past. What

has been intended as (the development of a) European identity in 1992, is today European identities, and hence the use of ‘identity(ies)’ here. This is the reason why, the interpretation of Byzantium/European identity(ies) as effected in the exhibitionary complexes of European national museums is of special interest in the present.

What makes the British Museum particularly important to this study, apart from its dominant academic and intellectual role in museum and curatorial studies, is that it dedicated a separate space of its permanent display to the Byzantine Empire only recently, in 2014. However, as shown in its archives (particularly, its *Trustees Minutes*), the main volume of the collection as we know it today was formulated mainly in the 1980s. Hence, exhibition and curatorial practices around Byzantium in the British Museum were formulated in the 1980s, but have been revised only in 2014. This indicates a change in the current understanding of Byzantium and gives the present study the opportunity to analyse and explain the current interpretations ideas and beliefs on Byzantine history, culture and art, as communicated through the British Museum’s exhibitionary complex. Similarly, the museum in Athens re-exhibited its permanent early Christian and Byzantine collections in 2004, and its permanent post-Byzantine collections in 2010 (Konstantios, 2008). The museum’s permanent exhibitions remained unchanged since its establishment in 1914, with only minor amendments in 2000 (Konstantios, 2008). The 2010 museum exhibition was neither aiming at the (re)presentation of a ‘unified national narrative’, nor would it try to ‘present the entire [Byzantine] age with [Greek] national time and its continuity in mind’ (Konstantios, 2008, p. 19). This was the aim of the museum in the past, when it was first established. Hence, the recent reinterpretation of the collection marks a shift to the understanding of Byzantium. This exhibitionary complex is therefore, also, a valuable source for the understanding of current interpretations ideas and beliefs on Byzantine history, culture and art (as communicated through it). In this sense, these exhibitionary complexes are closely related and can be considered as contemporaneous for the purposes of the present research. In addition, the chosen exhibitionary complexes, may be seen as illustrative of the current political and cultural transformations in Europe as they are part of the structure(s) within which they operate (e.g. the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union; rise of populism/nationalism).

Museum interpretations

The representation of past cultures in national museums is a complex subject, constantly changing, combining intellectual and curatorial fashions, cultural presuppositions^v, national and global politics, while making an effort to maintain a grasp on historical ‘truth’. The museums under study are no exception: they construct meaning based on cultural knowledge and understanding. Briefly, cultural knowledge interacts with the exhibitionary meaning making process, and as a result the values, ideas and beliefs of each imagined community are (re)produced/(re)constructed in each exhibitionary complex. This will be demonstrated in the narratives of each exhibitionary complex under study below, by analysing and explaining selected examples, illustrative of the chapter’s argument. Particularly, visual and textual analysis, which involves a critical engagement with the notion of visual culture will help to identify and explain the different museum interpretations of Byzantium. It will help understand the ways in which cultural and social subjectivities are either pictured or made invisible. For the interpretation of the visual images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes under study semiotic methods are essentially used. Within this framework, the present chapter provides new understandings, new interpretations and new critical perspectives on the constructive notion of the past culture of Byzantium as shaped through the curatorial practices of European national museums at the moment.

British Museum Byzantine exhibitionary complex: Rooms 41 (*Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300-1100*), and 40 (*Medieval Europe AD 1050-1500*).

According to the titles given to each room, the core idea that binds them together is the narration of the history of Europe from AD 300 to AD 1500. At first sight, the involvement of Byzantine culture within these two rooms, which according to their titles narrate the history of Europe, seems awkward. The themes in these rooms refer to the history of the formation of Britain e.g. *The Sutton-Hoo Ship burial: An Anglo-Saxon royal grave?*; *Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-650* (British Museum: room 41, 2020); *Celtic Britain And Ireland AD 300-1100* (British Museum: room 41, 2020), *The Wars of the Roses* (British Museum: room 40, 2020); also, to the history of Britain in relation to the history of Europe e.g. *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent AD 650-1100* (British Museum: room 41, 2020).

It will be demonstrated that these interpretations are the result of the (re)presentation/(re)production of the cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on its own identity and on Byzantium.

(a) Byzantium: a Roman continuity in the east

Byzantium in the British Museum is presented as leading in influencing the medieval world, but is also presented as essentially Roman: as a Roman continuity with only Roman elements composing its history, culture and arts. By looking at Byzantine influences on the cultures (re)presented in room 41, it will be explained that Byzantine influences are (re)presented as Roman influences, and thus, Byzantium is (re)presented as Roman.

One such illustrative example is the Byzantine influence on Ostrogoths. In room 41, under the theme *Great Migrations AD 400-750*, in the sub-theme entitled *Ostrogothic Italy* the museum text reads:

In the AD 490s the Ostrogoths established a kingdom in Italy where they were influenced by Roman traditions. Their first king Theoderic, made consul by the Byzantine Emperor, is named on the Byzantine-style square weight. The coins of King Baduila are also Byzantine in style and show the bust of Emperor Anastasius I. Despite these influences, Ostrogothic women still wore Germanic-style dress on arrival in Italy, like these radiate-headed (Knobbed) and birds' head brooches (The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 1. Ostrogothic Italy*, accompanying text, 2020).

The text refers to Roman influences on Ostrogoth people. According to the text, the Ostrogoths (who established their Kingdom in Italy) were influenced by the Roman traditions. However, an example of such influences here, is illustrated by the Byzantine-style square weight, which bears Theoderic's name, and by the Byzantine-style coins of King Baduila, which are exhibited in this sub-theme.

The ways in which the exhibition elements (objects, texts) relate to each other in sequence, (the Byzantine influenced objects mentioned above and the phrase 'Roman traditions'), provide a structure

or context within which signs make sense. In other words, they provide the structural forms through which signs are organised into codes or conventions for communication (Jakobson, 1971). The text refers to Roman traditions and explicitly links them to the Byzantine-style square weight and King Baduila's coins depicting Emperor Anastasius I (who was a Byzantine Emperor). Hence, Byzantium in this framework serves as evidence of Roman influence, and is thus (re)presented as Roman. Arnold, Bjornlie and Sessa (2016) explain that matters of cultural influence(s) on Ostrogoth people as well as Ostrogoth identity, (i.e. whether Ostrogoth were Goth and/or Roman or something else), is an extraordinarily complex matter 'that continues to provoke heated debate among modern scholars' (Arnold, Bjornlie and Sessa, 2016: 8). The accompanying text implies that the Byzantine-influenced Ostrogoth objects are products of Roman influence, since Byzantine influences are presented as Roman. Byzantium here, is interpreted and communicated as a continuation of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, in the following sub-theme entitled *The Domagnano Treasure*, the text reads:

These spectacular items are from a hoard of Ostrogothic jewellery suitable for an aristocratic woman. Made from gold and shimmering with garnets, their style reflects Byzantine influence on the Ostrogothic court (The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 2. *The Domagnano Treasure*, accompanying text, 2020).

Again, here, through these selections and their assembly, i.e. the combination of this text and these objects, (the items from a hoard of Ostrogothic jewellery) and the corresponding accompanying text, it is suggested that the Byzantine influences in Ostrogoth jewellery-making are Roman.

The sub-themes *Domagnano Treasure* and *Ostrogothic Italy* are both part of the syntagm of the theme *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples*. Therefore, the paradigmatic relations in the sub-theme *Domagnano Treasure* involve the same functional contrast with the sub-theme *Ostrogothic Italy*. The cultural knowledge that Byzantium is Roman is taken for granted and hence, Byzantine influences are interpreted as Roman influences; by saying Byzantine influences here, the text suggests Roman influences. These turns of phrase are not there by chance. They have been specifically selected and

combined in a particular way; their selection (over others) and combination is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with curatorial practices.

To sum up, the above examples, where Byzantine influence is interpreted as Roman influence, reveal that the exhibitionary complex is mythologically constructed ('myth' as used by Barthes', 1972) and that exhibition meaning making is based on British cultural ideas values and beliefs on Byzantium as a continuation of the Roman empire in the east.

(b) The Western Kingdoms as Roman continuities in the west

An illustrative example of the British Museum's understanding and use of the western kingdoms as responsible for the formation of Europe and European identity, as well as the formation of Britain, British identity and finally, English identity, is the representation of Theoderic's Ostrogoth kingdom as a Roman continuity in the west. As will be explained below, the interpretation of Theoderic's kingdom within the exhibitionary complex is based on the British cultural perception, according to which Theoderic's kingdom is explained as 'a continuation of the Roman Empire' (Catholic Encyclopedia 1912, cited in Mark, 2014; also, Arnold, 2014). The text of the sub-theme *Ostrogothic Italy* (as above, The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 1. Ostrogothic Italy*, accompanying text, 2020), offers valuable evidence for this. The phrases (a) 'the Ostrogoths established a kingdom in Italy, where they were influenced by Roman traditions' and (b) 'Their first king Theoderic [was] made consul by the Byzantine Emperor' suggest first, that the Ostrogoth kingdom is the continuation of the Roman Empire in the west (through the use of the words 'Italy' and 'Roman traditions') and second, that both Byzantium and Theoderic's kingdom are direct Roman continuities, which shared the same Roman traditions. Through the latter, it is suggested that not only did they have common Roman origins, but also common ideas and beliefs (the phrase 'made consul by the Byzantine Emperor' suggests these common ideas and beliefs). The use of these words (instead of others) is where 'decisions' in relation to meaning-making are accomplished and revealed. A consul in Byzantium was the highest-ranking member of the judiciary and member of the Byzantine Senate. The sequence in which this information is provided, i.e. immediately after explaining that 'the Ostrogoths established a

kingdom in Italy where they were influenced by Roman traditions' functions as a trigger for the interpretation of the Ostrogoth kingdom as the continuation of the Roman Empire in the west. The 'underlying' thematic paradigm here, implies that Theoderic had power and authority in Byzantium i.e. it implies that Theoderic played an important part in the strategic map and decisions of Byzantium, which was the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east. However, the text does not explain why the Byzantine Emperor made him consul. The presentation of this information would have shown that Theoderic and Byzantium did not share the same ideas and beliefs. It is known that Theoderic grew up as a hostage in Constantinople (Burns, 1991: 53). After spending ten years of his boyhood in Constantinople (Norwich, 1998), it is believed that he had received education that allowed him to have a 'functional literacy of Latin with reading skills in Latin capitals, including numbers and acronyms' and he 'understood the concept of separate writing systems, such as Greek and Latin', as well as 'the difference between Catholicism, Arianism and paganism' (Fischer, 2013, p. 99). It is believed that the above knowledge stood him in good stead (Norwich 1998) when he became the Gothic ruler of 'a mixed but largely Romanised barbarian people' (Mark, 2014). However, Fischer (2013, p. 99) argues that the society that Theoderic lived and acted in, in his years as a ruler was a 'kleptocracy'^{vi}. Fischer (2013) explains that 'a major factor for a rule to be termed as kleptocracy is the a priori existence of an imperialist power', and he supports the idea that Italy 'provided that backdrop for Theoderic' (Fischer, 2013: 99). For Fischer (2013), a kleptocracy can only exist as a subsidiary development to an Empire. This can explain why Theoderic sought for alliance with the Byzantines, but it does not explain why he would be treated with favour by the Byzantine emperors Zeno, Anastasius and Justin I, and why Zeno would make him consul under the guise of a reward: 'for his service to the empire in keeping at bay another Ostrogothic leader named Theodoric Strabo who harassed the empire, when he was not fighting for its cause' (Mark, 2014). Making Theoderic consul is a demonstration of Byzantine diplomatic tactics and not a demonstration of Theoderic's importance for Byzantium. Byzantium's strategy was to maintain an alliance with Theoderic, in order to manipulate him, by giving him a sense of power and authority. Theoderic would rule post-imperial Italy through the reign of the above consecutive Byzantine emperors (Fischer, 2013). However, Theoderic's kingdom and Byzantium did not share a common ideology (e.g. Moorhead, 1983). Theoderic's Kingdom could be said to be autonomous, and

even, not a continuity of the Roman ideas. Nevertheless, the interpretation at this part of the exhibitionary complex is that Theoderic's kingdom is a continuation of the Roman Empire in the west and that it shared the same Roman traditions, values, ideas and beliefs with Byzantium, which is the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east. Again, these 'facts' are not there by accident; they have been selected and combined in a particular way. The selection of those meanings (instead of others) is the outcome of curatorial work and a result of the interaction of cultural knowledge with curatorial practices. To sum up, Byzantium and Theoderic's Kingdom are presented as sharing the same Roman traditions; Byzantium is in the east and the Ostrogoth Kingdom in the west. Hence, what it is finally suggested here is that the Roman Empire continued as the Ostrogoth Kingdom in the west and as Byzantium in the east.

Another such example is the representation of the Frankish kingdom as a Roman continuity in the west. Under the theme, *Great Migrations*, in the sub-theme entitled *Roman Continuities: signet rings and brooch*, the Franks are presented as the ones who 'wanted to promote themselves as the rightful successors to Rome in the west'. This constitutes part of the interpretation of the Frankish kingdom as a Roman continuity in the west. The museum text reads:

These signet rings were used for sealing documents in Roman custom, showing that a level of literacy was kept alive by court and religious schools. Although the Franks originally spoke a Germanic language, official documents were written in Latin. The disc brooch, based on Late Roman medallion, shows Rome enthroned, reflecting the Franks' desire to promote themselves as the rightful successors to Rome in the West.

AD 500-600s Bequeathed by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, Compiègne, France (The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations AD 400-750. The Franks, 3. Roman Continuities: Signet rings and brooch*, accompanying text, 2020)

Here, it is suggested that the Franks were the continuity of the Roman Empire in the west from as early as the 500-600s AD and the signet rings and brooch dated between AD 500-600s are (used as) evidence of this continuity. According to the text, the Franks wanted to promote themselves as the rightful successors to Rome in the west. This indicates that it was their desire, but it also leaves space

for ambiguity: they wanted to be so, therefore they were not - or they wanted to be so and hence they were? Here, it seems that the museum did not want to impose a specific idea upon its interpretation. However, this has not been successful, as the narrative would not be expected to have an effect of confusing or 'mystifying' the visitor –mystification [as used by Barthes (1972)] would not be the expected outcome.

Nevertheless, the question is answered by the presentation of evidence that the Franks had been following the Roman customs from as early as the 500s e.g. sealing documents in Roman custom; showing that a level of literacy was kept alive by court and religious schools; official documents being written in Latin. Through presenting these factors as evidence the text actually suggests that they already were a continuity of the Roman Empire, in the sense of customs, education and language. Hence, here, it is revealed that the museum interprets the Frankish Kingdom as a continuity of the Roman Empire in the West. Therefore, the Ostrogoth kingdom and the Frankish kingdom are also placed in a sequence of continuity. The exhibitionary complex implies that the Franks were the successors to Rome in the west after the Ostrogoth, as this text follows the text examined above in sequence.

In the museum exhibitionary complex, all who today would be called western Europeans are presented as having had distinctive identities, e.g. *The Vandals*, *Gothic peoples: Ostrogoth; Visigoths*, *The Franks*, *The Lombards*. However, it has been explained that the exhibitionary complex demonstrates that the Ostrogoths and Franks had in common their Roman origin and for this, the Ostrogoths and Franks are placed in a sequential order.

(c) The Germanist theme: British identity as Anglo-Saxon, and therefore English

The interpretation of the Frankish kingdom as the continuity of the Roman Empire after the decline of the Ostrogoth Kingdom, is used for the (re)construction of the continuity of the Roman Empire in the timeline of Europe. This suggests that people who lived in Britain (i.e. the geographical area inhabited by Romans, Celts, Romano-Celt and later Anglo-Saxon related to the Romans) and the Roman-influenced/Celtic-speaking culture of those peoples of Britain were later appropriated as British; below, it will be demonstrated that the Roman-influenced Anglo-Saxons were later appropriated as English.

The most unexpected and surprising theme related to the *The Byzantine Empire* theme in sequence and the representation of the British identity as English is the centre piece of room 41, the *Anglo-Saxon ship burial* found at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk.

The Anglo-Saxon ship burial dates from the early 600s and is ‘one of the most spectacular and important discoveries in British archaeology’ (British Museum exhibition catalogue, 2020). As explained in the accompanying text (2020) the burial was arranged inside a wooden chamber built in the middle of 27-metre-long ship covered by a high earth mound. It is by far the richest grave yet discovered from early medieval Europe and is thought to have commemorated a leading figure, perhaps a king of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Anglia, ‘whose true identity remains an unsolvable mystery’ (British Museum exhibition catalogue, 2020). In the text it is also noted that:

The form of the long carved whetstone and glittering shoulder-clasps evoke Roman symbols of authority, perhaps, in a deliberate attempt to associate their Anglo-Saxon owner with the might of the old Roman Empire (The British museum: room 41, *Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Power and authority*, accompanying text, 2020).

The above reveals the portrayal of a prominent Anglo-Saxon person as associated with the Romans. According to the British, culturally accepted conception, the Anglo-Saxon period, which lasted from approximately AD 450 to AD 1066, includes the notion of the creation of *the* ‘English’ nation, although it has been argued that it was not until the late Anglo-Saxon period that England could be described as a nation state (Campbell, 2000: 19) and that the concept of ‘Englishness’ developed very slowly (Kumar, 2003; Perkins, 2000).

In the theme *Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-650*, Anglo-Saxon culture and language are presented as something ‘new’, and dominant. Based on the idea that the Anglo-Saxon period includes the notion of the creation of the English nation, here, it is argued that, by presenting the Anglo-Saxon ship burial as one of the most spectacular and important discoveries in British archaeology, the idea that Anglo-Saxons had an important role to the formation of the English nation (which however, in modern British culture is seen as different from the British, a broader term, which is used to refer to the identity of someone who is from England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland while 'English' is used

to refer only to the identity of people from England) is actually supported. Here, it is demonstrated that the museum negotiates matters of the English identity and ‘Englishness’.

By the phrase ‘the deliberate attempt to associate their Anglo-Saxon owner with the might of the old Roman Empire’ it is being suggested that the Anglo-Saxons associated with the ‘old’ Romans and not with the Byzantines; Byzantium here, is ignored despite the burial ship being dated from the early 600s. The use of the phrase ‘old Romans’ here, connotes the Romans of the western Roman Empire. The text in effect transmits the message of a relation between Anglo-Saxons and (those) Romans, but also, between English and (those) Romans. The implication here is that Anglo-Saxons who are responsible for the formation of the English cultural identity relate to the Romans and hence, the English nation traces its roots back to Roman times (not the Byzantine). Although the Anglo-Saxon culture and language are presented as something ‘new’ that replaced the Romano-British culture and language, here, the underlying belief complies with idea according to which those people relate to the ‘old Romans’. This might seem complicated, but it actually isn’t. It reflects the idea that the English [of the nineteenth century] often identified themselves with the classical Romans (Hingley, cited in Bell, 2007: 208).

The ship burial contained sixteen pieces of silver tableware and a set of ten silver bowls made in the eastern Mediterranean, ‘possibly for religious use’ (British museum: room 41, *Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Mediterranean silver*, 2020), a large Byzantine silver platter stamped on the back with the control marks of Emperor Anastasius I (reign AD 491-AD 518), two silver spoons from the Byzantine Empire with Greek inscriptions on their handles, a ladle and cup (not typically Byzantine) as well as a copper basin with animal motifs made in the eastern Mediterranean. The text reads:

The silverware probably reached Sutton Hoo through a network of gift exchange between rulers across Europe, bringing Byzantine luxuries to the Frankish realm (centring on present day France, Belgium and western Germany) and onwards to Anglo-Saxon England. Early Anglo-Saxons did not produce silver dining sets, they typically used wood and horns instead. The silverware may have been used for dining or perhaps, as a display of ‘royal treasure’. Exotic and costly, it would have demonstrated its owner’s status, wealth and connections (The British museum: room 41, *Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Mediterranean silver*, accompanying text, 2020).

Here it is suggested that Byzantine craftsmanship was more advanced than Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship, and that in the Anglo-Saxon cultural context Byzantine objects were perceived as 'exotic'. Also, it is suggested that in the 600s Byzantine objects were brought to Anglo-Saxon England as gift exchanges. Hence, the text implies that the Anglo-Saxons did not have direct relations with the Byzantines, as the gifts were brought to them 'through a network of gift exchange between rulers across Europe', and exclusively not between rulers of the Frankish realm. Through this 'account', it is being suggested that the Anglo-Saxons had relations with the Franks, who had relations with the Byzantines, and by implication, that the Anglo-Saxons did not have relations with the Byzantines. However, as Campbell explains, 'recent work has suggested considerable Byzantine influence on late 6th century Gaul, in particular on fashions' and 'there are indications that such influences appear in England also' (Campbell, 2000: 78). Although Carver (1989, cited in Campbell, 2000: 78) explains that the range of contacts indicated by the finds at Sutton Hoo does not imply that 7th century East Anglian merchants, were in direct contact with Syria or Byzantium, Campbell (2000) further explains that the density and nature of relations between England and Byzantium has a special interest in relation to the Gregorian mission; as he points out, 'if we knew what Gregory the Great thought when dispatching Augustine, we might find that realpolitik had played a part beside pastoral zeal' (Campbell, 2000: 79). The construction of this part of the exhibitionary complex is based on the commonly shared knowledge that the Gregorian mission, headed by Augustine of Canterbury, was sent by Pope Gregory the Great in AD 596 to convert Britain's Anglo-Saxons, resulting in the establishment of Christianity in southern Britain by the death of the last missionary in AD 635 (Mayr - Harting, 2010: 50).

The underlying ideology in this part of the complex is that Anglo-Saxons who are responsible for the formation of the English nation relate to the Romans, and that in the 600s they had active relationships with the Franks, but not with the Byzantines, who are (considered) 'other'. Also, that the Anglo-Saxon's conversion to Christianity, links to Western Christianity (hence, not to Byzantium). Byzantium here is presented as the different, 'other'. However, Anglo-Saxons possess Byzantine objects; they use them as symbols of wealth and power. Hence it could be said that there are Byzantine elements in Anglo-Saxon's culture.

For Derrida (1992) no identity is closed and pure; it is always affected by what it excludes and hence identity is in part constituted by what it opposes - the 'different'. The above is an illustration of Derrida's (1992) account: the (re)construction of national identity within the British Museum institutional framework is based on ideas of 'same' and 'other', on the ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on its 'own' identity: on who it thinks it is, i.e. Anglo-Saxons, and hence, English - and who it thinks it is not, i.e. Byzantium.

The above examples show that the significance of the choices in exhibitionary content are based on the interaction of a set of cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on its own identity and on Byzantium with curatorial practices. The product of this interaction is the (re)presentation/(re)production of a particular British identity. British identity is (re)presented/(re)produced as European, but also, as primarily Anglo-Saxon and hence, English - through the use of Byzantium as the 'different', the 'other' to European, and to British and thus, to English. The identity of different 'others' that constitute a particular English identity being offered here are: Byzantium and the Continent (i.e. Europe, without the British Isles). Byzantium at the British Museum Byzantine exhibitionary complex functions to explain the contemporary cultural identity of the British imagined community; however, it is not Britishness, in fact which is being explained -which would be more inclusive- but 'Englishness'; Englishness, as a shared sense of self, as the 'same'. It is a cultural identity constructed by the dominant cultural group, which sees itself as a group bound together by the culture and the history that makes this Englishness.

The Byzantine and Christian Museum

The exhibitionary complex in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens consists of the permanent museum display, which is divided into four parts. Each part is divided into several themes and sub-themes, spread across the museum rooms. The themes and sub-themes are articulated in a 'sequential thematic structure' (Nicks, 2002: 361) based on chronology and carry the following titles: *I. From the ancient world to Byzantium, II. The Byzantine World, III. Intellectual and Artistic Activity in the 15th century; IV. From Byzantium to Modern Era.*

In the themes I. *From the Ancient world to Byzantium* and II. *The Byzantine World*, Byzantium is (re)presented through the art, architecture, everyday utensils, burial customs and coins dating from the very first AD centuries to the decline of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Within these themes, the following interpretations will be identified and explained: (a) The Greek identity of Byzantium and (b) The Greek identity of lands once comprising the Greek territory, which have now been incorporated into Modern Turkey after conflicts and events during the post-Byzantine period i.e. East Trace, Asia Minor coastline, including Pontus in its northern part. The following interpretations will be also identified and explained in the themes III. *Intellectual and Artistic Activity in the 15th century*, and IV. *From Byzantium to Modern era*, through characteristic pieces of post-Byzantine art, architecture, garments, printed books, ecclesiastical and everyday utensils dating from the 15th century to the mid 19th century: (c) the continuation of Greek-Byzantine ideas after the fall of Byzantium, (d) The contribution of the *Greek* Byzantium to the Renaissance. The latter serves the explanation of the European nature of the Modern Greek identity.

The above interpretations enable the (re)construction of the identity of *the* ‘nation’ and *the* ‘culture’ of the country to which the exhibitionary complex belongs, i.e. the identity of *the* Greek nation and culture. Byzantium here is presented as the continuation of the Greek classical antiquity and is placed within the narrative of Greek history. However, what the museum essentially presents is actually ‘a’ Greek history/identity, being presented as ‘the’ Greek history/identity. The next section will illustrate these issues and arguments.

(a) The Greek identity of Byzantium

The idea of continuity of the ancient Greek world to the Byzantine world, and hence, the Greek identity of Byzantium is introduced in various parts of the exhibitionary complex. The most striking illustration of this idea is the interpretation of Byzantium as a Greek empire demonstrated through the selection of the following object right next to the introductory text and before the entrance of the first museum room. This object is the copy of the mosaic of the Chapel in San Vitale in Ravenna where Emperor Justinian I is represented. It is through the position of this object within the syntagm of the exhibitionary complex that continuity is suggested. This image functions as a visual statement, which suggests that Byzantium

after Justinian became a different, new state, which has its cultural roots back to ancient Greek culture and which was a Greek Empire.

The last lawful Roman Emperor could be said to have been Romulus Augustus (e.g. Edwell et al., 2015: 216). However, Emperor Justinian is thought to have been ‘the last Roman emperor to speak Latin as a first language’ (Wickham, 2009: 90), and his reign is thought to have been marked by the restoration of the Empire (Haldon, 2003: 17-19). Because of his restoration activities, which include his administration system and laws (Watson, 1985), Emperor Justinian has also been called the last Roman (e.g. Baker, 2002). According to this interpretation, Justinian’s successors should not be counted as Roman, but as something else. The introduction of the exhibitionary complex by this mosaic (re)produces this idea. This suggests that Byzantium, or the Byzantine Empire, which is presented within the rooms that follow, is not a continuation of the Roman Empire. Particularly, this places the beginning of this new Empire after the reign of Justinian. It could be said that this beginning is marked by the change of the official language of the Empire from Latin to Greek by Emperor Heraclius I in 620 AD (Davis, 1990). Hence, it is being suggested that this new Empire is a continuation of Greek antiquity and a Greek Empire. The position of this mosaic at the beginning of the exhibitionary complex demonstrates that the exhibitionary complex, which is unfolded within the following museum rooms, will present this Empire. The idea that Byzantium becomes a Greek Empire after Justinian’s reign, is also (re)produced/(re)constructed in the following parts of the exhibitionary complex. Initially, the introductory text of the theme I. *From the Ancient World to Byzantium*. reads: ‘The transition from the ancient world to the Byzantine was gradual [...] A milestone in this transition was the legalization of the Christian religion in 313 by the emperor Constantine the Great’ [...] (Byzantine and Christian museum: I. *From the Ancient World to Byzantium*, introductory text, 2020. The key message here is that Byzantium’s difference from the ancient world is Christianity. The text further reads:

In parallel, the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople in 330 represented a decisive shift in the empire's centre of gravity from the Latin West to the Hellenized East. The division into a western and eastern empire in 395 and the dissolution of the western half in 476 were significant stages along the way to the end of antiquity, which can be said to have breathed its last with the closure of the philosophical schools in 529, the onset of the barbarian invasions, and the decline of

the great urban centres after the sixth century (Byzantine and Christian museum: I. *From the Ancient World to Byzantium*, introductory text, 2020).

The key message here is that Byzantium is Greek. The West is characterised as Latin, but the East as Hellenized. The end of antiquity is placed between 529 AD, when Justinian closed down the Academy of Athens and the Arab invasions and the decline of the great urban centres after the sixth century. In this way, it is being suggested that the actual birth of Byzantium is between the 6th and 7th century. It is then, when the Greek language becomes the Empire's official language (e.g. Ostrogorsky, 1969; Ahrweiler, cited in Bakounakis, 2010). In the introductory text examined above, the beginning of Byzantium is placed in the 4th century. The debate of Byzantium as a name-construct comes to play. The information on the name-construct suggests that at the beginning, i.e. the 4th century, there are several parallel ideas, before the actual formation of Byzantium, and that the actual birth of Byzantium is between the 6th and 7th century, when Greek becomes Byzantium's official language. As explained above, the parallel ideas are referred to the museum text, but the images of the exhibitionary complex (re)construct the idea that Greek influence was prominent. Ahrweiler's (cited in Bakounakis, 2010) interpretation expresses precisely the ideology on Byzantium as presented within the exhibitionary complex:

Byzantium is the Greek language and orthodoxy, the two main components of Hellenism. Certainly, Byzantium was a multinational empire, but it was a Greek-speaking Empire. The fact that Byzantium was Greek-speaking saved across the Greek culture. When the great French historian Fernand Braudel wrote that there are no French, there are only francophones, and anyone who speaks French is French, he meant that the French language is the amalgamation of the entire civilization and traditions. And Byzantium is Greek-speaking from the 7th century (Ahrweiler, cited in Bakounakis, 2010).

Just as Braudel (1990) explained that the French language is the amalgamation of the entire civilization and traditions, so is the Greek language for Byzantium. Hence, the underlying idea in this part of the exhibitionary complex is that since Greek is Byzantium's official language, Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity, and also, a Greek Empire.

In conclusion, Byzantium here is interpreted as a continuation of the Greek antiquity. The 4th century Byzantium is interpreted as a different Empire from the Roman, which is significantly Hellenised. Subsequently, the actual birth of Byzantium is placed in the 7th century, when Greek becomes its official language. The 7th century Byzantium is interpreted as a Greek Empire.

(b) The Greek identity of lands once comprising the Greek territory

The introductory text of the exhibitionary complex presents information concerning the Hellenic territories included in Byzantium's territory: the Aegean, Asia Minor, Bithynia (Nicaea), Epirus and Pontus (Trebizond). The text reads:

In the sixth century it [Byzantium] was a vast, multinational and still multireligious state. In eleventh and twelfth centuries, still multinational, it extended over the Hellenic, Aegean and Asia Minor territories. In the thirteenth century, in 1204, it ceased to exist, after being abolished by the Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade, and was substituted by small states, in Bithynia (Nicaea), Epirus and Pontus (Trebizond) (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2020).

The reference to these territories triggers the commonly shared (among modern Greeks) background belief foundational to Greek identity in relation to these territories and consequently to Byzantium, and it is in this way that it is being suggested that Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity. In Greek literature, these territories are referred as the lost territories (the once Greek territories gradually annexed to the Ottoman Empire after the Battle of Mantzikert in 1071 and after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453) and are among the claims necessary to the political construct of the 'Great Idea'^{vii}. It could be said that, in addition to suggesting the Greek identity of Byzantium, and continuity with Greek antiquity, this reference is also suggesting these claims.

(c) The continuation of Greek-Byzantine ideas after the fall of Byzantium

The text that follows introduces the interpretation of the continuation of Greek culture and identity during the several transformations of the Empire after the fourth crusade, but also, after the fall

of the Byzantine Empire, by simultaneously showing to the rest of the medieval world the (still) dominant role of Greek Byzantium. The text reads:

The sack of Constantinople by the Frankish and Latin crusaders in 1204 delivered a crippling blow to the Empire, but also led to new relations and channels of contact (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II. *The Byzantine World*, introductory text, 2020).

The fourth Crusade that took place in 1204 is an event that divides modern historians; to some it signifies the beginning of the Latin restructuring of the Roman Empire (e.g. Tricht 2011). To others it is the point in history when Byzantine-Greek identity resists change, and remains intact despite the transformations (e.g. Bartusis, 1997). In other words, this point in history is used by some as proof of continuity of Greek-Byzantine identity, despite the several changes that took place when Latins and Franks sacked the city and established their kingdoms in Byzantium (the continuation of what Papanigopoulos called Hellenism). In other words, they use it to establish the formation of Modern Greece and Modern Greek identity, through a break in continuity, which however, is bridged by the interpretation of Byzantium's (a) resistance to change and (b) revival.

This second interpretation is (re)constructed within the museum exhibitionary complex, through the above quoted phrase. The way that information is combined in this phrase silences the decisive effect that the crusade had on Byzantium: the city was completely destroyed, and along with the city the 1000 years Empire of Byzantium (e.g. Phillips, 2005). It immediately balances the 'crippling blow', by referring to the positive aspects of it: those of the new relations and contacts. The reference to the relations and contacts triggers the following background knowledge: the accumulation of capital in the West, which allowed the development of industrial capitalism some centuries later, was opened by the first modern colonial empire, Venice, which was created after plundering the Greek territories, following the sack of Constantinople. The most important centres of this colonial empire were in the Ionian, the Peloponnese, Crete, Euboea, Cyprus, the Cyclades Thessaloniki, and Aegina. These centres remained parts of this newest colonial formation for many years or even centuries after 1204. At the same time, the Byzantine Empire shrank into the Greek successor states of Nicaea, Epirus and

Trebizond. The triggering of this knowledge actually functions to establish the continuity of the Greek-Byzantine identity through a break in what could be counted as continuity. This actually suggests that the first ‘nation-state’, or states of modern Greece were established in the late Byzantine era, through the formation of the first colonial empire, Venice. In addition to this, the exhibitionary complex attempts to show, that what had remained from the Byzantine Empire was still dominating the Eastern and Western world. This makes itself apparent in the text that follows the sentence analysed above:

Despite their persistent efforts, the Palaiologan emperors could do nothing to halt the political decline of the Empire following their restoration to the Byzantine throne in Constantinople in 1261. Nonetheless, the Palaiologan revival in the arts and letters was a vitally important cultural event that was to have a stimulating effect on both East and West (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II. *The Byzantine World*, the museum, introductory text, 2020).

The text explains that the efforts of the Palaiologan emperors were ineffective, but presents the history of the late Byzantium, from 1261 to 1453, as a rather gloomy story, which is exactly what Modern Greek historians do (e.g. Bartusis, 1997). The text highlights the Palaiologan revival in the arts and letters, which it regards as a ‘vitally important cultural event that was to have a stimulating effect on both East and West’. Through this contention, it is being suggested that Byzantium, despite the political instability, and despite its shrinkage, was still dominant, because Greek ideas and values were still prevailing and influencing the then known world. By saying that the Palaiologan revival in the arts and letters had a stimulating effect on both East and West’ the text actually suggests the contribution of Byzantium, of the Greek Empire, to the Renaissance. With regards to Byzantium’s last period, in the exhibitionary complex it is also explained that Byzantium:

reaches its artistic zenith, especially in painting. Saturated in the classical tradition, this great artistic culmination went on to serve as the foundation for yet another glorious phase, in post-Byzantine painting (Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens II.8. *The Palaiologan period, the final flowering of Byzantium*, introductory text, 2020).

Through this formulation, the text is suggesting that the Palaiologan period has contributed not only to the preservation of the classical tradition, but also to the period after the fall of Constantinople. Icons that are representative of the Palaiologan period, such as the icon of Virgin Mary Hodegetria, which was an especially popular icon in late Byzantium are used as proof of this. Such icons have been reproduced in the post-Byzantine period slightly modified and are still used in the present day as a prototype for the making of icons. In agreement with the above, the following text says that after Constantinople fell in 1453:

Byzantine civilization adapted to its new circumstances and continued to thrive. Rallying around the Orthodox Church, it remained the focal point of the Orthodox world and saw the Greeks and their culture through to the establishment of the modern Greek state (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II.9. *The fall of Constantinople*, introductory text, 2020).

This text reproduces the Greek cultural beliefs, ideas and values on the formation of Modern Greek identity by suggesting that although Byzantium fell in 1453, its culture survived and continued throughout history due to the Orthodox Church. Paparigopoulos (1871) whose work forms part of and has influenced the Greek culturally accepted^{viii} literature on Byzantium, explained this under his term ‘Hellenic Christianity’. This term signifies the interconnection of the ancient Greek world with Byzantium, the ‘Greek ethnicity’ of Byzantium and the Greek-Byzantine foundations of the Modern Greek Nation, essentially seeing Byzantium as a direct continuity of ancient Greek ideas, values and beliefs, with a substitution of the ancient Greek religion with Christian religion.

These beliefs, ideas and values are also reproduced in the theme IV. *From Byzantium to Modern Era*, which (re)presents the contribution of the Orthodox Church as crucial to the preservation of Byzantine culture and to its continuation through the so-called age of ‘darkness’ (the period of Turkish sovereignty in Greece after the fall of Constantinople and for the following 400 years). The church is explained ‘as a point of reference for the Christians: a nexus preserving Byzantine tradition, Greek Orthodox instruction and the Greek language, which would go on to contribute to the creation of a Greek national identity’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: IV. *From Byzantium to Modern Era*, introductory text, 2020). This summarises the main points of the interpretation of Modern Greek

identity as a continuation of Byzantium. Previously, Byzantium was (re)presented as the continuation of Greek antiquity and Byzantium itself as a Greek Empire. This part of the complex serves as proof of the continuity of Byzantine culture (and hence Greek culture) throughout the years of Turkish sovereignty and hence, of the continuity of Greek identity from the ancient past to the present through Byzantium. Therefore, the exhibitionary complex actually represents the idea of the ‘united and continuous Hellenism’, which as the former museum director explained was not the museum’s objective (Konstantios, 2008, p. 19). Although this was not the museum’s objective, it has been shown here, that these ideas, values and beliefs make themselves apparent within the exhibitionary complex.

(d) The contribution of the Greek Byzantium to the Renaissance

The Palaiologan period in the museum narrative is frequently referred to as the ‘Palaiologan Renaissance’ and is linked to the migration of Byzantine scholars and artists to the West, who are thought to have triggered the Italian Renaissance (also in Geanakoplos, 1958). The following examples are illustrative of the museum’s account of the contribution of the *Greek Byzantium* to the Renaissance, and therefore, of the European nature of the Modern Greek identity. Through the exhibitionary complex, it is being suggested that Byzantium contributed to the Renaissance. This idea is (re)constructed here and functions as another proof of the continuation of Greek-Byzantine ideas, values and beliefs after the fall of Byzantium. Specifically, here it is suggested that before the fall of Constantinople, Byzantine ideas travelled across the west through scholarly clerics and laymen who immigrated to the west. The museum text reads:

From as early as the 14th c. and above all in the 15th c., just when everything seemed to be leading to the collapse of the Byzantine Empire and the Fall of Constantinople, there was a remarkable upsurge in activity in intellectual and artistic circles. Scholarly clerics and laymen, chiefly pursuing the theological questions of the age, produced noteworthy philosophical and theological treatises. Many of them become extremely active in the West. They familiarize the Western world with basic works of classical and Byzantine literature, thus contributing to the European Renaissance (Byzantine and Christian museum: III. Intellectual and Artistic Activity in the 15th century, introductory text, 2020)

By this formulation, the text suggests that the Renaissance humanism, i.e. the study of classical antiquity, was triggered by Byzantine clerics and laymen who spread the basic works of classical (and Byzantine) literature to the west. The underlying idea here is that in Byzantium the study of classical texts never actually stopped and that the classical texts were saved by the Byzantines. This is indicative of both the museum's interpretation of Byzantium's Greek identity, and of the continuity of Greek identity (Hellenism) after the fall of Byzantium, and consequently, and perhaps, most importantly, of the European identity of the Modern Greeks. Vasiliev (1952) explains that in the 19th century it was thought that the Italian Renaissance was called forth by the Greeks who fled from Byzantium to Italy before the Turkish danger, especially at the fall of Constantinople in 1453 (Vasiliev, 1952: 713). For example, he says that 'a Russian Slavophile of the first half of the nineteenth century, J. V. Kireyevsky (cited in Vasiliev, 1952) wrote: When after the capture of Constantinople, the fresh and pure air of Hellenic thought blew from the East to the West, and the thinking man in the West breathed more easily and freely, the whole structure of scholasticism collapsed at once' (Kireyevsky, cited in Vasiliev, 1952: 713-714). This idea is reproduced in the above text, in support of the Greek continuity in Europe and hence, the European element of the Modern Greek identity.

Byzantium in the Byzantine and Christian museum exhibitionary complex is interpreted as: a continuity of Greek antiquity, a Greek Empire and responsible for the continuation of Greek culture and identity (Hellenism) from antiquity to the establishment of the Modern Greek State. Continuity with Greek antiquity is suggested in terms of language, artistic and architectural traditions, ideas and beliefs, and for the same reasons Byzantium is seen as a Greek Empire. It is also suggested that these elements were strong enough to survive throughout history. The Church is seen as key to the continuity of the Greek language and Orthodox traditions during the years of the Ottoman conquest. In addition, the Greek-Byzantine influences on the Renaissance are interpreted as part of the idea of continuity, but also of the Modern Greek identity's European-ness. Through the above, it has been demonstrated that the exhibitionary complex (re)presents/(re)produces the Greek cultural ideas, values and beliefs on Greek-Byzantine identity. More specifically, it has been demonstrated that this particular representation and interpretation of Byzantium is stemming from the cultural knowledge of Greeks on their 'own'

national identity: the Greek, the Byzantine, the Orthodox, the European elements, all of which make the modern Greek national identity.

Conclusions

This Chapter has provided a cross-cultural perspective of current understandings of the past culture of Byzantium. Throughout this research it has been argued that the representation of Byzantine culture in each case study is a cultural-ideological or ‘mythical’ construct – product of the ideological nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in each museum’s curatorial practices. It has been demonstrated that the representation of Byzantium in each museum is actually the (re)construction and (re)production of each imagined community’s identity/Byzantium. As there are different elements combined within an identity, identity is a combination of identity and difference characterised by a concurrent repeatability and differentiability -hence the use of the prefix (re) as in (re)presentation, as well as (re)construction/(re)production- the imagined community in each country (re)constructs/(re)produces its identity, through the combination of the different elements combined within its identity, in relation to the different, the ‘other’. The identities communicated through the two exhibitionary complexes are established in relation to Byzantium, i.e. in relation to that which the imagined communities are: either Byzantium the different, invited in identity, invited in the ‘same’ as in the British Museum or Byzantium the identity, the ‘same’ as in the Greek museums.

Specifically, this chapter analysed and explained that the (re)presentation of Byzantium in the British museum is a product of the interaction of the ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on same and other with curatorial practices: Byzantium is (re)presented as the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east, as the other to British identity (invited in the British identity, and hence constitutive part of the British identity). British identity is (re)presented as a continuation of the Roman Empire in the west, and hence, European, and primarily Anglo-Saxon -thus, English. Byzantium serves the exhibitionary complex’s narrative as the other to the British national identity: the other to the European-English national identity. The choices in images and texts negotiate and document the development of the English identity through the ages: from Roman Britain to middle ages. Simply, British history is narrated in relation to European history, and more particularly, in relation to the history

of the formation of Europe and in relation to Byzantium, in order to explain the English history. The British nation is presented as primarily emerging from the Anglo-Saxons and secondarily from the Franks, who converted to Western Christianity. Europe emerges from all the kingdoms that are presented as continuations of the Roman Empire in the west. Byzantium is the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east, but it is also explained as different, other. Within the exhibitionary complex, no reference is made to the contribution of Byzantium to the formation of Europe, as it is thought of and seen by contemporary scholars (e.g. Hughes, 2014; James, 2014; Ahrweiler 2012 and so on). However, the beliefs, ideas and values reflected in the above explanations are compatible with the British imagined community's interpretation of Byzantium as different, other, and of the British nation as European, but predominantly, English.

The (re)presentation of Byzantium in the Greek museum is also a product of the interaction of the ideas, values and beliefs of the Greek imagined community on identity and other with curatorial practices: Byzantium is (re)presented as a continuation of the Greek antiquity, as a Greek empire, and as responsible for the continuation of Greek culture and identity (Hellenism) from antiquity to the establishment of the Modern Greek State. Byzantium serves the exhibitionary complexes' narratives as the same; the same to the Modern Greek national identity, as opposed to the other, the non-Byzantine, the non-Christian, the non-Orthodox, the non-Greek (invited in the Greek identity and hence constitutive part of the Greek identity). Continuity with Greek antiquity is suggested in terms of language, artistic and architectural traditions, ideas and beliefs, and for the same reasons Byzantium is seen as a Greek Empire. It is also suggested that these elements were strong enough to survive throughout history. The Church is seen as key to the continuity of the Greek language and Orthodox traditions during the years of the Ottoman conquest. In addition, the Greek-Byzantine influences on the Renaissance are interpreted as part of the idea of continuity, but also of the Modern Greek identity's European-ness. Through the above, it has been demonstrated that the exhibitionary complex (re)presents/(re)produces the Greek cultural ideas, values and beliefs on Greek-Byzantine identity. More specifically, it has been demonstrated that this particular representation and interpretation of Byzantium is stemming from the cultural knowledge of Greeks on their 'own' national identity: the

Greek, the Byzantine, the Orthodox, the European elements, all of which make the modern Greek national identity.

By analysing the above exhibitionary complexes, this chapter was allowed to account for the different interpretations of Byzantium as effected through the two European national museums. However, it was also allowed to account for the cultural and political implications of the presuppositions in the exhibitionary meaning making process. On the one hand, the national museums are ‘naturalising’ their imagined community, i.e. their ‘nation’ through their exhibitionary complexes (this is a cultural implication of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices). On the other hand, the presented ideology within their exhibitionary complexes is entangled with the image of the imagined community that each country in effect promotes (this is the political implication of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices).

The exhibitionary complexes, may also be seen as offering an illustrative account of the cultural implications of the current political transformations in Europe. The exhibition constructions although ‘revised’ and contemporaneous, do not reflect the current understandings of Byzantium as found in literature. They reflect practices of (national) identity making and nation-building instead. The exhibition constructions can be seen as examples that may demonstrate some aspects of what is at stake in re-viewing ‘new’ forms of nationhood, as well as of citizenship and civic participation in Europe currently. In a Europe that’s been driven by nationalistic ideologies of the past, informed by the neo-liberal agenda of the present. What is depicted here, could also explain what should be avoided in the reconfiguration of the notion of nationhood as well as citizenship, an act(ion) that’s been deemed necessary by most European governments at present.

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List of museum texts

The British Museum

The British Museum (2020) Room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 1. Ostrogothic Italy*, accompanying text

The British Museum (2020) Room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 2. The Domagnano Treasure*, accompanying text

The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations AD 400-750. The Franks, 3. Roman Continuities: Signet rings and brooch*, accompanying text, 2020

The British museum (2020) room 41, *Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Power and authority*, accompanying text

The British museum (2020) Room 41, *Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Mediterranean silver*, accompanying text

Byzantine and Christian Museum

Byzantine and Christian museum (2020) I. *From the Ancient World to Byzantium*, introductory text

Byzantine and Christian Museum (2020) museum entrance hall, introductory text

Byzantine and Christian Museum (2020) II. *The Byzantine World*, the museum, introductory text

Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens (2020) II.8. *The Palaiologan period, the final flowering of Byzantium*, introductory text

Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens (2020) II.9. *The fall of Constantinople*, introductory text

Byzantine and Christian museum (2020) III. *Intellectual and Artistic Activity in the 15th century*, introductory text

Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens (2020) IV. *From Byzantium to Modern Era*, introductory text

Notes

ⁱ The 'imagined community' following Anderson's (1991) concept of 'nation' is a group of people who perceive, and construct themselves as part of that group, which would form the 'culture' and the 'nation' in each country. In other words, given that each country contains many different cultures, including a 'national' culture, 'imagined community here, refers to a socially constructed community, imagined or constructed by those people who claim to represent the 'correct' national culture in each country. More strongly, it refers to 'an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson, 1991, p. 6), which constructs its identity, its 'national' identity, based on ideas, values and beliefs of who they think they are (i.e. a unitary or dominant 'self' which in this case would mean the 'same') and consequently, of who they think they are not (thereby implicitly creating and excluding the different, which in this case would also mean the 'other').

ⁱⁱ The term 'exhibitionary complex' is borrowed from Tony Bennett (1995) in order to define the particular things this chapter is interested in looking at in the museum exhibitions. Briefly, the 'exhibitionary complex' contains the objects on display and the exhibition narratives as they are constructed by the museum through texts in the object labels and introductory panels of the exhibition. However, the term 'exhibitionary complex' apart from signifying the visual elements of the display, is also indicative of museum power relations and incorporates the notion of 'exhibition as a practice' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, 2006, p. 37). Exhibition as a practice, with all its cultural and political extensions, power relations, as well as communication and interpreting agents. As will be shown here, the exhibitionary complexes are complex political and cultural constructions, which result in the presentation of 'mythological' constructs of Byzantium as the only 'truth' to their audiences, and consequently, of 'national' identity and dominant cultural values of the country in which each museum belongs to.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Truth', as Foucault (1976) has it: 'a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements' (Foucault, 1976, p.14) [...] linked 'by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it' (Foucault, 1976, p.14; Rabinow, 1984, p. 74). As Foucault further explains, the 'regimes of truth' are the result of scientific discourse and institutions, and are reinforced, but also, redefined constantly and can 'in fact be integrated into any function (education, medical treatment, production, punishment)' (Foucault, 1977, p. 206). It is in this sense that the dominant culture's knowledge(s), regimes of truth and general politics can be integrated into museum curation and 'naturalise' ideological constructions (i.e. dress them up as 'objective' and make them count as the only 'truth').

^{iv} 'Myth' is used here in the sense of the Barthesian 'myth', which is another term for ideology. Barthes (1972, p.128) explains that the very principle of 'myth' is to turn history into nature. By this, he draws on the concept of Marxist ideology aiming to reveal the ways in which the results of people's actions in history are turned into what appear to be the result of laws of nature. According to Marx and Engels (1970, p. 47) ideology works like a 'camera obscura', which inverts the image of social reality, presenting itself as objective and universal; also, it not only represents, but also is the interests of the ruling class (Marx and Engels, 1970, pp. 64-68). Ideology, 'myth' according to Barthes (1972), is a set of values, rules and agreements through which certain historical meanings, which operate in the interests of one particular dominant social or cultural group, are constructed and presented as natural and universal and given to an entire society. The 'myth' of Byzantine culture in the framework of the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes under study is perceived as a cultural reality concerning Byzantine culture among the layers of signification within the constructed images and texts of each Byzantine exhibitionary complex. The functions of ideological narratives concerning Byzantine culture manifest themselves in the sense of the Barthesian 'myth' within the constructed images and texts of the museums' current Byzantine exhibitionary complexes. For Barthes (1972) these choices on exhibitionary meaning depend on the set of ideas, values and beliefs through which one particular dominant social or cultural group constructs a 'reality' and presents it as universal and 'given' to an entire society.

^v Presuppositions are highly influential in the process of meaning making; they are the basis for interpreting and constructing meaning. Presuppositions here, refer to the set of cultural ideas, beliefs and values concerning the interpretation of Byzantine culture and art that are fixed in the minds of the dominant cultural group, or better, the imagined community of each country, and also concern the identity and nature of the imagined community of each country to which the museums/museum curators belong.

^{vi} A 'kleptocracy' is a society whose leaders make themselves rich and powerful by stealing from the rest of the people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020)

^{vii} The term 'Great Idea' refers to political and nationalistic ideals popularised in the Greek world from the second half of the 19th century. The Great Idea is a diverse concept, deriving from the political and nationalist context of this period, 'making it problematic for historical research' (Margaritis, 1999, p. 203). The emergence of this idea in the collective consciousness of the Modern Greek state is not self-existent or instantaneous, but 'it seems to come as a result of the emergence of the phenomenon of the conscious nationalist movements in Europe in the 19th century employing the particular elements of Greek society' (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 192). The 'Great Idea' was the axis of the internal and foreign policy of Greece until the third decade of the 20th century. The onset of the 'Great Idea' was to broaden the Greek borders to include areas with Greek populations that were under foreign domination. More Particularly, the Great Idea, the ideological expression of Greek nationalism, had as its goal 'the liberation of all Greeks who were under Turkish sovereignty and their integration into a nation-state with its capital in Constantinople' (Veremis, 1999, p. 31). Also, the 'Great Idea', was inspired as a term for demagogic reasons, from the first Constitutional Prime Minister of Greece, John Koletis in the mid 19th century and particularly in 1844 (Vlachodimou, 2008). It is worth mentioning that Koletis based his entire policy on the 'Great Idea'. 'The Great Idea' endeavors to regain the lost territories of the Byzantine Empire and it remained the aim of all Greek governments until August 1922, when it was finally abandoned after the catastrophe of Asia Minor (Skopetea, 1988).

^{viii} Culturally accepted literature in each country is formed by culturally accepted publications on Byzantium (academic and non-academic) such as for example the first volumes of the history of the Greek nation produced after the establishment of the Modern Greek state in 1830 (particularly the work of Paparigopoulos) and literature about and around them, the national curriculum of each country and available history

schoolbooks, with particular emphasis on the 1950s and 1960's, when Byzantium was (re) invented, on the decade of 1980s, where historical revisionism practices were put into action and on the last decade, where Byzantium is being retheorised. The history and art history literature proposed by the museums under study, through their own publications, or books on Byzantium sold in their shops and history schoolbooks, is also included in the culturally accepted history literature explored in this context.