

Article

# History and Religion as Sources of Hellenic Identity in Late Byzantium and the Post-Byzantine Era

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**Abstract:** Recently, seminal publications highlighted the Romanitas of the Byzantines. However, it is not without importance that from the 12th century onwards the ethnonym Hellenē (Ἑλληνή) became progressively more popular. A number of influential intellectuals and political actors preferred the term Hellenē to identify themselves, instead of the formal Roman (Ρωμαῖος) and the common Greek (Γραικός). While I do not intend to challenge the prevalence of the Romanitas during the long Byzantine era, I suggest that we should reevaluate the emerging importance of Hellenitas in the shaping of collective and individual identities after the 12th century. From the 13th to the 16th century, Byzantine scholars attempted to recreate a collective identity based on cultural and historical continuity and otherness. In this paper, I will seek to explore the ways Byzantine scholars of the Late Byzantine and Post Byzantine era, who lived in the territories of the Byzantine Empire and/or in Italy, perceived national identity, and to show that the shift towards Hellenitas started in the Greek-speaking East.

**Keywords:** Romanitas; Hellenitas; Graecitas; Hellenē; Greek; Byzantine Empire; identity; consciousness

## 1. Introduction

The question of Modern Greek identity is certainly timely (Steiris et al. 2016, p. vii). Recently, the Greek Minister of Education Niki Kerameus stated that History in primary and secondary school curricula “should be aimed at shaping national consciousness” (<https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2019/09/06/education-minister-history-textbooks/>). Her comment caused a heated debate between rival political parties, because the question of what it means to be Greek today is of prime importance not only for academics but also for the entire Greek society. Two hundred years after the Greek war of Independence (1821), the discussion surrounding the so-called *ελληνικότητα* (Greekness) is crucial. Although the term was introduced in 1851 by Constantine Pop (1816–1878), a Greek novelist, and was used extensively by scholars in the 1930s, there is no consensus on the conceptual content of the term (Tziouvas 1989, pp. 31–38). There is a dispute whether, in order to define Greekness, we should focus on national consciousness or identity. In this paper, I shall adopt the analytical distinction between national consciousness and national identity according to Natia Tevzadze (Tevzadze 1994). She has argued that national consciousness refers to an inherent process of self-identification and absorption in a given community. It is an introverted and defensive mechanism of self-acknowledgement. Those who seek a national consciousness presuppose the existence of distinct cultural characteristics and genealogies, i.e. a mix of history, memories and sentiments that people are called to adopt. Consequently, those who perceive Greekness as a kind of consciousness presuppose likeness and identification. On the other hand, national identity is based on the sum of differential characteristics, such as otherness, the sum of features that differentiate a nation from others (Gellner 1983, pp. 6–7; Tevzadze 1994, pp. 437–40). This is an extroverted process of hetero-identification. National identity is a cultural or institutional

construction, which is rather fluid. As a result, consciousness and identity represent two different approaches on nations.

As well as the term Greekness, I would like to propose the term Hellenitas to describe the ethnocultural identification with ancient Greeks that appeared in Late Byzantium. I deem the introduction of this term necessary, as I contend that Hellenitas is different from Graecitas, the self-identification as Greek (*Γραικός*), which was common throughout the Byzantine period. Hellenitas represented an attempt to create a new connection with the ancient Greeks that stressed the emphasis to the most illustrious period of Greek antiquity, from the Greco-Persian wars until Alexander the Great, in an attempt to assist the Greek-speaking population of the Eastern Roman Empire, the so-called Byzantine, to regain their pride, when the Westerners disputed their Romanitas. Vacalopoulos' thesis, according to which the origins of Greek nationhood are to be traced to the Late Byzantium, since the sack of Constantinople and the partition of the empire after 1204 did instill the idea of a Greek "nation" in Byzantine hearts and minds, serves as the starting point of my views on Hellenitas (Vacalopoulos 1970). Contrariwise, Graecitas was a different notion, established during the long Roman period, focusing on the diachronic presence of the Greeks as a *populus* and not as a *genos* or nation. Meanwhile, Graecitas represented an attempt to undermine whatever would be connected with the pagan element of the ancient Greek culture. There is no evidence that the ethnonym *Graeci* signified any kind of self-identification with the ancient Greeks. It was an identity, which could easily coexist with Romanitas, while Hellenitas represented largely a break with Romanitas. Romanitas is a set of political and cultural concepts by which the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire attempted their identification with the ancient Romans in the broad context of the *translatio imperii*.

My aim is not to discuss common views on a supposed diachronic Hellenic identity or consciousness (Vryonis 1978, pp. 237–56). To the contrary, I intend to show that, predominantly from the 13th to the 16th century, Byzantine scholars attempted to recreate a collective identity based on cultural and historical continuity and otherness (Vacalopoulos 1970, pp. 126–35). To my view, they shared common memories and cultural traits and they felt a connection with Greece (the territory, the memory and the ideal) as their homeland. Despite the fact that this endeavor took place before modernity, I claim that it was a discussion focused primarily on identity and not on consciousness, as the majority of modern scholars would expect. During the late Byzantine centuries, a major shift occurred in the East, and prominent members of the Byzantine intelligentsia challenged Romanitas and Graecitas in order to revisit their collective identity.

In my view—since I accept the ethno-symbolist approach, according to which the pre-modern ethnic views contributed heavily to the configuration of modern national identities—the debate about Hellenitas in Late Byzantium proves that the Byzantine intelligentsia sought to shape a proto-national community (Smith 1991, pp. vii–x; Smith 1995, pp. 3–23; Smith 2004, pp. 33–61; Smith 2005, pp. 404–15; Smith 2009, pp. 23–59). Their goal was a new nationhood, the identification with a community culturally and territorially circumscribed (Stouraitis 2018, p. 126).

In these terms, I attempt to scrutinize the ways Byzantine scholars of the Late Byzantine and Post Byzantine era, who lived in the territories of the Byzantine Empire and/or in Italy, perceived national identity, and to challenge Lamers's views (Lamers 2015) by showing that the shift towards Hellenism started in the Greek-speaking East. The Byzantine scholars attempted to redefine their identity based on the ethnonym Hellene (Ἑλλην), a common cultural and historical awareness, Hellenic language, and their perceived otherness predominantly from the Latins and the Turks (Smarnakis 2015, pp. 222–25). My aim is to show that the Late Byzantines used the Hellenic label in an ethnic way, as they did not afraid to refer to the Hellenic γένος or ἔθνος, despite the ambiguities of the terms in the pre-modern period. Kaldellis argued, "the Byzantines' view of their own Roman identity was a national one, making Byzantium effectively a nation-state. Being a Roman was premised on common cultural traits, including language, religion, and social values and customs, on belonging to the ἔθνος or γένος on that basis, and on being a 'shareholder' in the polity of the Romans" (Kaldellis 2017, p. 173). On the contrary, Stouraitis held that the Roman identity pertained

to an intellectual and political elite in Constantinople (Stouraitis 2014, pp. 175–220). While Kaldellis criticized Stouraitis’s argument and presented a rather persuasive defense of his position, I think that Stouraitis’s argument is more accurate regarding Hellenitas in Late Byzantium and the Post-Byzantine era. Taking Stouraitis’s view as a starting point, I would like to support that principally in the 15th century the intellectual elite shifted, for several reasons, towards a Hellenic identity. Kaldellis anyway agreed that Hellenitas was an elite pursuit (Kaldellis 2017, p. 197). Although the elites used the ethnonym in other instances and not just for themselves, I admit that there is no evidence so far that Hellenitas was a movement embraced by the masses. However, I would like to revisit dominant views, in contemporary Greek and international bibliography, according to which the modern Greek identity was a byproduct of the Age of Enlightenment and represented a major departure from the previous tradition (Kitromilides 2009, pp. 21–32; Myrogiannis 2012, pp. 83–130). This article expands and supplement my views that were initially presented a few years ago (Steiris 2016, pp. 173–99).

## 2. Modern Scholarly Debate on National Identity in the Late Byzantium

Kaldellis recently summarized the modern scholarly debate by asking the question “Who were the Byzantines, then?” (Kaldellis 2019, pp. 29–32). Seminal publications shed more light to the discussion, attempting to reinterpret and highlight the Romanitas of the Byzantines (Constantinidou and Lamers 2019, pp. 1–25; Kaldellis 2007; Kaldellis 2019; Page 2008; Rapp 2008, pp. 27–147; Smythe 1996, pp. 26–36). It is common knowledge that the official appellation of the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire was Romans even after the fall of Constantinople. However, it is not without importance that from the 12th century onwards the name Hellene (Ἑλλην) became progressively more popular. A number of influential intellectuals and political actors preferred the term Hellene to identify themselves, instead of the formal Roman (Ρωμαῖος) and the common Greek (Γραικός) (Livianos 2008, p. 240; Vryonis 1991, pp. 5–14). According to the prevalent view of modern scholarship, the shift should not be interpreted only as a statement of proto-nationalism but also as the outcome of growing archaism (Hobsbawm 2012, pp. 46, 59, 71–77). As Vryonis pointed out, the historian Critobulus (ca. 1410–ca. 1470) used to call the Balkan nations with their archaic names: Byzantines became “Hellenes”, Albanians became “Illyrians”, etc. (Vryonis 1991, p. 7). Laonikus Chalkokondyles (ca. 1430–ca. 1465), the prominent Late Byzantine historian, had the same approach (Akışık-Karakullukçu 2013, pp. 101–2). The same tendency was observed in Western Balkans and Central Europe. Bibliography on Byzantine Hellenization is extensive (Beaton 2007, pp. 76–95; Kaldellis 2017, pp. 173–210; Akışık-Karakullukçu 2019, pp. 1–30; Magdalino 1991; Page 2008; Papadopoulou 2015; Rapp 2008, pp. 127–47; Smarnakis 2015, pp. 211–34; Stouraitis 2017, pp. 70–94; Stouraitis 2018, pp. 123–39; Vryonis 1999, pp. 19–36). Furthermore, in lamenting the decline of their Empire, Byzantines tended to compare their sad present to the glory of ancient Greece (Ševčenko 1961, p. 173). In this context, it is noteworthy that Byzantine scholars, who fled to Italy, deliberately chose to describe themselves as Greeks (Greci/Γραικοί) or Hellenes (Ἕλληνες) and not as Romans (Ρωμαῖοί/Ρωμαῖοι), according to the Byzantine official terminology. While I do not intend to challenge the prevalence of the Romanitas during the long Byzantine era (Kaldellis 2007, p. 349; Kaldellis 2019, pp. 3–80), I suggest that we should reevaluate the emerging importance of Hellenization in the shaping of collective and individual identities after the 12th century. Collective identity is the awareness from which individuals in a social group derive values and worth (Abrams and Hogg 1990, p. 2).

Lamers—while acknowledging the shift towards “Greekness”—held that it started and flourished in Italy, among the Byzantine scholars who fled there in the 15th century (Lamers 2015, p. 1). Lamers makes a distinction between Greekness—the ethnocultural identification with the ancient Greeks—and Hellenism, the study and imitation of ancient Greek culture (Lamers 2015, pp. 2–3). While Lamers’s viewpoint is interesting, I contend that the shift towards the Hellenitas started in the Greek East, rather than being a product of the Greek community in Renaissance Italy. For example, Scholarius (ca. 1400–ca. 1472), an illustrious philosopher and Patriarch of Constantinople, and Pletho (ca. 1355–1454), the legendary Platonist of Mystra, should not be considered as members of the Greek intelligentsia in Renaissance Italy. Moreover, the discussion about Hellenitas, as an identity feature, had started long

before the 15th century. As a result, I hold that Lamers's argument is partial, overestimating the role of Greek scholars in Italy (Lamers 2015, pp. 270–72). Akışık-Karakullukçu—referring to Pletho—admitted that in the 15th century there was “an ongoing conversation on identity that was anchored in the politically fragmented world of the eastern Mediterranean” (Akışık-Karakullukçu 2019, p. 15). This conversation, in which Pletho participated, was introduced even before the 15th century, due to the obvious decline of the Eastern Roman Empire. Furthermore, Lamers's and Akışık-Karakullukçu's insistence to separate the community of the Greek scholars in Italy, which, according to them, was oriented towards Hellenitas, from the community of Greek scholars in the Ottoman regions, which was attached to Romanitas, is not based on stable ground, since we know that, in the 15th and 16th century, scholars traveled extensively and did not cut their ties with mainland Greece and the Minor Asia. In addition, they exchanged views and texts with their fellows, no matter where they stayed. In the following pages, we will have the opportunity to realize that, despite of their whereabouts, Late Byzantine scholars shared a genuine interest on Hellenitas. For example, Theodorus Gaza (ca.1398–ca. 1475), a seminal Aristotelian of the 15th century in Italy, was closer to Scholarius's views and did not share Cardinal Bessarion's (1408–1472) philosophical viewpoint.

### 3. Mid-Byzantine Views on Identity and Consciousness

After the 6th century AD, the Christianized Greek populations around the Mediterranean avoided to identify themselves as Hellenes (Ἕλληνες) since the term denoted the pagans. The formal Roman (Ρωμαῖος) and the common Greek (Γραικός) became the standard appellations. The first was common among the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire, while the latter served to separate the Greeks from people without Greek origin, without any identification with the ancient Hellenes (Svoronos 2004, pp. 54–62; Stouraitis 2018, p. 29). The historian Priscus (5th century) referred to someone who identified himself as Greek: “he said that he was Greek” (ἔλεγε Γραικός μὲν εἶναι τὸ γένος) (Priscus 1979, Fr. 8, l. 476). However, in the 15th century, Theophanes, bishop of Medea (1467–1474) and skilled rhetorician, was annoyed by the fact that Pope Eugenius IV called the Orthodox delegates in the Council of Ferrara of Florence (1438–1439) Greeks (Γραικοί): “He insults us; he calls us Greeks and that is an insult” (Ἵβρίζει ἡμᾶς· καλεῖ γάρ ἡμᾶς Γραικούς καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν ὕβρις) (Laurent 1971, p. 124). Furthermore, the historian Ducas (ca. 1400–ca. 1462) characterized the supporters of the Union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches as priests of the Graeci (Γραικοί) (Smarnakis 2015, p. 222). Cassius Dio (ca. 155–ca. 235), a statesman and historian of Greek and Roman origin, and the historian Procopius (ca. 490–ca. 565) also mention that the Romans used the term *Graecus* to degrade the Hellenes (Papadopoulou 2007, p. 219). Despite Theophanes's furor, the Latin-speaking elites of the West, from the 9th century onwards, called the Byzantines Greeks and not Romans, predominantly for political reasons. Namely, they attempted to dispute the Byzantine Emperors' claims to the Roman legacy. After the 12th century, *Graecus* refers predominantly to someone of the Orthodox faith.

During the reign of the Comneni (1081–1204), the term Hellene regained progressively its prominence (Kaldellis 2007, pp. 283–300). It signified people of Greek origin, who also shared a common Hellenic education, meaning classical education. John Tzetzes (ca. 1110–ca. 1180), a Byzantine poet and grammarian, declared proudly that he was a pure Hellene (ἐκ δέ γε πατρός καθαρῶς τυγχάνοντα Ἕλληνα) (Tzetzes 1972, Ep. 6, 10.5). In an anonymous text of the same century, the author described the common people as native Hellenes (αὐτόχθων ὄχλος καὶ ἰθαγενής... Ἑλλήνων τῶν ἀπανταχοῦ) (Romano 1974, l.117–118). Another passage of seminal importance is found in a letter written by John III Ducas Vatatzes (ca. 1193–1254), Emperor of Nicaea, and addressed to the Pope. The Emperor supported that “among our Hellenic *genos* wisdom prevails” (ἐν τῷ γένει τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἡμῶν ἡ σοφία βασιλεύει) (Krikones 1988, l.178–186). His son and Emperor Theodorus II Ducas Lascaris (1222–1258) also felt a cultural and genealogical connection with the Hellenes. He proudly stated that philosophy belongs to Hellenes. Furthermore, in the first person plural, he claimed that the



Hellenes were the fathers of all sciences. The ancient Hellenes and the Hellenes of Theodorus's era breathed the same air and shared the same language and blood: (Festa 1898, CIX, l. 48–49).

In addition, when he referred to the army, he chose to speak of Hellenic troops (οἱ ἄκαμπεῖς τοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς στρατεύμασιν) (Festa 1898, CCIV, l. 56–59).

It is obvious that Vatatzes's shift towards Hellenitas was pushed onto by the Latins (Kaldellis 2007, p. 371). Theodorus Metochites (1270–1332), a Byzantine statesman and philosopher, in a sermon at court, asked the Emperor Andronicus III Palaeologus (1259–1332) to save the Hellenes (Metochites 1996, p. 38–40; Metochites 2007, pp. 128–420). Later, in the *Chronicon Morae* (14th century) we read that the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire, the so-called Romans, tenaciously preserved for centuries the name Hellenes, because they were arrogant (Διαβόντα γὰρ χρόνοι πολλοὶ ἀυτεῖνοι οἱ Ρωμαῖοι, Ἑλληνας εἶχαν τὸ ὄνομα, οὕτως τοὺς ὠνομάζαν, —πολλὰ ἤσαν ἀλαζονικοί, ἀκομῆ τὸ κρατοῦσιν,— ἀπὸ τῆν Ρώμη ἀπήρασιν τὸ ὄνομα τῶν Ρωμαίων) (Schmitt 1904, l. 794–797).

The same time the term Greek (*Γραικός*) and its derivatives were used within the context of the conflicts between members of the Orthodox and the Catholic faith (Papadopoulou 2014, pp. 172–73). After 1204, Byzantine Romanitas received a serious blow. As a result, the emphasis on Hellenic ethnocultural identity was an interesting alternative for the ruling elites (Stouraitis 2017, pp. 85–86). Kaldellis remarked that Hellenitas, after 1204, “no longer revolves around high culture but has moved down the social scale. Linguistically, “Hellenes” are now no longer those who have mastered Attic rhetoric but those whose language is Greek” (Kaldellis 2007, p. 368).

#### 4. Hellenitas in 15th Century Byzantium: from Chrysoloras to Pletho

##### 4.1. The Conciliatory Stance

At the turn of the 15th century, Manuel Chrysoloras (ca. 1350–1415), a seminal Byzantine scholar who contributed to the spread of Greek literature in Renaissance Italy, referred to the twofold identity of the Byzantines, highlighting the Hellenic and the Roman elements. The Byzantines would equally trace their heritage to the ancient Greeks and the Romans. Chrysoloras admitted that the Byzantines forgot their original name and adopted the ethnic name Romans. Despite his efforts in favor of shared identity, his conciliatory stance was not popular. Hellenization gradually gained ground among the Byzantine elites. Namely, Chrysoloras, in an epistle (1414) to the Emperor Manuel Palaeologus (Patrinelis and Sofianos 2001, p. 117, II. 4–13), stated:

Let us remember from what men we are descended. If someone would like, he could say that we descended from the first and age-old, I mean from the most venerable and ancient Hellenes (no one has remained ignorant of their power and wisdom). If you please, you could also say that we descended from those who came after them, the ancient Romans, after whom we are named and who we are now named and who we, I suppose, claim to be, so that we even almost erased our ancient name. Rather both of these races came together in our times, I think, and whether someone calls us Hellenes or Romans, that is what we are, and we safeguard the succession of Alexander and that of those after him (Lamers 2015, p. 32).

Chrysoloras entitled this part of his text *Exhortation on behalf of the genos*. Chrysoloras suggested that the Emperor revive the study of ancient literature, both pagan and Christian. He added that the Byzantines should not neglect their cultural inheritance, all the while the Italians were meticulously studying Greek texts (Patrinelis 1972, p. 501).

A few years later, namely in 1429, Isidore (1385–1463)—bishop of Kiev, humanist and theologian who promoted the Union of Orthodox and Catholic Christendom—entertained similar views. The Eastern Empire had two constitutive elements: the Hellenic and the Roman. He praised the Emperor Constantine the Great for mingling and uniting the best of the Romans with the best of the Hellenes, creating the Romellenes (Ρωμέλληνες), the best and most distinguished people (Lampros 1926, pp. 151.29–152.17). Not long after, Makarius Melissinus (d. 1585), bishop of Monemvasia, referring to the speech of Constantine XI Palaeologus (1405–1435) just before the fall of Constantinople, attested that the Emperor

addressed the people as descendants of the Romans and the Hellenes (Grecu 1966, pp. 414.21–420.33). However, Chrysoloras's and Isidore's syncretism was not popular in the next centuries and the shift towards Hellenitas was further reinforced.

#### 4.2. Pletho's Radical Hellenitas

It is well documented that in the 15th century several intellectuals and political figures among the Greek-speaking communities of Eastern and Western Europe chose intentionally the term Hellene (Ἕλληνη) to identify themselves, instead of the formal Roman (Ρωμαῖος) and the common Greek (Γραικός) (Livanios 2008, p. 240; Vryonis 1991, pp. 5–14). Pletho's famous quote set the framework for those who investigate the shift towards Hellenitas in late Byzantium: "we, over whom you rule and hold sway, are Hellenes by *genos*, as is witnessed by our language and ancestral education" (Pletho 1926a, pp. 247.I.14–248.I.3). Pletho also stressed the continuity of the Hellenes by saying that they have always inhabited mainland Greece and no other people before them had inhabited the same area. It is obvious that matters of historical and geographical continuity are core identity issues (Pletho 1926a, 248.II.2–10). Pletho's insistence in autochthonism could also be interpreted as a byproduct of his classicism, since the ancient Athenians were also proud of their autochthony. Woodhouse's view (Woodhouse 1986) that Pletho was the last of the Hellenes is disputed and most modern scholars prefer to denounce him as the last of the Byzantines and the first and foremost Modern Greek (Linardos 2010; Geanakoplos 1984, p. 436; Hladky 2014, pp. 269–86; Nikolaou 1974, pp. 98–102; Peritore 1977, pp. 173–77; Svoronos 2004, p. 78; Bargeliotes 2009, pp. 44–61; Harris 2000, pp. 25–44). Pletho thought of the Hellenes as a *genos* with common culture, heritage and ancestral territory. Pletho's views on identity have been analyzed thoroughly in the last two centuries, namely his thoughts on *genos*, *ethnos* and *homophylon* (Garnsey 2009, pp. 327–40; Siniosoglou 2011, pp. 327–84; Siniosoglou 2014, pp. 415–31; Woodhouse 1986, pp. 79–118). Admittedly, it is difficult to understand the essence of these key concepts and it is rather challenging to shape a coherent understanding of his national consciousness and identity (Zakythinis 1932, pp. 365–76; Webb 1989, pp. 219–49). The terms are vaguely used and the texts do not allow us to provide definitions. Furthermore, Pletho was not always consistent. For instance, in *Monodia in Helenam Palaeologinam*, a public official speech, Pletho declared that the Byzantine Emperor reigned over the Romans (Pletho 1926b, p. 271).

In order to understand Pletho's contradictory views, I propose a different approach. Since identity is largely based on the internalization of otherness, we would better comprehend his Hellenism by analyzing his position concerning others, namely the Muslims and the Latins.

In his philosophical treatises, Pletho scorned the Arabic philosophers, particularly Averroes and Avicenna, on several occasions (Lagarde 1973, pp. 321.3–8, 322.36–38; Steiris 2017, pp. 309–34). It is obvious that he deliberately adopted an anti-Averroist approach, which was common, as many other, to 15th century European humanists. Whilst his criticism is not philosophically accurate, it served his broader anti-Muslim and anti-Latin agenda. He contended that medieval philosophers outside of the Greek-speaking world overrated the significance of the Arabic philosophical texts. Pletho held that the Arabic and Scholastic scholars did not properly understand ancient Greek philosophy and distorted it (Mavroudi 2013, pp. 198–99). Pletho urged his fellow Byzantine scholars to rely on the Greek philosophical tradition—especially Platonic and Neoplatonic—and condemn the Scholastic's Aristotle. It is well known that in 14th century Byzantium, a circle of scholars around the Cydones brothers—Prochorus and Demetrius—translated and commented on Aquinas's and other Scholastics' texts in order to promote a different philosophical approach among the Orthodox. In the 15th century, Georgius Scholarius, Pletho's principal opponent, continued on the same path and further promoted Thomism. Pletho felt contempt for Aristotelian philosophy, which he considered inherently problematic, and he was annoyed by the prevalence of Aristotelianism among the Muslims and the Latins. Pletho did not aim at a detailed study of Arabic philosophy and its Jewish and Latin interpretations. He agreed with the view that ancient Greek philosophy was preserved only in Byzantium (Karamanolis 2002,

pp. 260–63). Hence, Pletho’s Hellenitas was a key element in his effort to safeguard the Hellenes from the expansion of Latin culture in the Greek speaking East.

### 5. The Next Generation: In the Footsteps of the Giants

Laonikus Chalkokondyles followed Pletho’s example by considering Hellenism a cultural and political identity (Vacalopoulos 1970), although he did not hesitate to apply the name Hellene to Orthodox Christians (Akışık-Karakullukçu 2013). He studied with Pletho in Mystra and he became one of the most important historians of the 15th century. He thought of the Byzantines as Hellenes and rejected any kind of Romanitas:

[They] guarded their (Hellenic) language and customs until the very end because they (Hellenes) were much more numerous than the Romans. However, they (Hellenes) no longer called themselves according to their (Hellenic) hereditary tradition and the name was changed. And, thus, the Emperors of Byzantion were proud to call themselves Emperors and Autocrats of Romans and never found it appropriate to be called Emperors of Hellenes” (Kaldellis 2014a, vol. 1, pp. 6–7).

The Greek-speaking inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire were Hellenes, not Romans, despite the fact that the Emperor was officially called “Emperor of the Romans”. Chalkokondyles consistently referred to the Byzantines as Hellenes. According to him, Romans are the followers of the Pope (Akışık-Karakullukçu 2013, pp. 238–300). To the contrary, he considered equally Hellenes the inhabitants of Peloponnese, Constantinople, and Trebizond (Ἑλληνάς τε ὄντας τό γένος) (Chalkokondyles 1922–1928, p. 219, II. 4–5, 248, II. 17–23), and aspired to a union of the Hellenes under a new Hellene king, who would govern them according to the Hellenic mores:

And the present fame of the Hellenic language will be greater in the future, when an Emperor will rule over a sizeable Hellene Empire and he will have imperial descendants. The children of the Hellenes will be attached to these emperors according to their own customs and will be ruled in a manner pleasing to them. And they will rule over others forcefully (Kaldellis 2014a, vol. 1, pp. 4–5).

It is also noteworthy that Chalkokondyles narrates the Greek history in a way that stresses the continuity of the Greeks. He saw the Byzantine period as another period of the long Greek history, which had nothing to do with the Romans (Chalkokondyles 1922–1928, p. 4, II.3–16). According to him, the Byzantines were Hellenes and preserved their culture during the centuries (Chalkokondyles 1922–1928, p. 4, II. 3–16). Moreover, he de-Romanized the Byzantines with the argument that besides officially calling themselves Romans, their language and religion differed (Kaldellis 2014b, pp. 171–96). Whilst Chalkokondyles’s Hellenitas claims are bold, I would not agree with Akışık-Karakullukçu’s argument, that “Laonikos is unique in the long and illustrious Byzantine historiographical tradition for having abandoned the traditional Roman identity and to have consistently referred to the protagonists of his narrative as Hellenes and to have located the Romans in the West since the time of Charlemagne, referring to the Papacy, the Carolingians, the Holy Roman Emperors, their political culture, and customs as Roman institutions” (Akışık-Karakullukçu 2019, p. 3). In fact Chalkokondyles was one among many others, who in the Late Byzantine centuries focused on Hellenitas. He was neither an exception nor an innovator, and his work presented a concrete narrative to support the claims about the continuity of the Hellenic *genos*.

Michael Apostolis (ca. 1422–ca. 1478), a faithful adherent of Pletho’s philosophy and ardent copyist in Italy and Greece, supported similar views on the threat of cultural—hence, national—alienation. Apostolis held that Greek philosophy and Greek cultural tradition in general were in danger of alienation. According to Apostolis, Theodorus Gaza and some other members of Bessarion’s circle did not respect the interpretative patterns of ancient Greek philosophy. Instead, they read it through the lens of the Scholastics, who misinterpreted and transformed the original thought of not only Plato and

the Platonists but also that of Aristotle and his commentators. Apostolis shared Pletho's contempt for Latin philosophy (Apostolis 1967, pp. 159–69). Particularly, Pletho accused Scholarius that he followed the Averroistic Aristotelianism and neglected the Platonic philosophy, which represented the best aspect of Greek thought. Apostolis also disapproved of Scholarius's admiration for Aquinas (Scholarius 1936, p. 5.22–26; Scholarius, 1935, p. 153.23–24). It is noteworthy that, while Apostolis openly rejected Aristotelianism, he avoided relying on the Byzantine literature concerning the preponderance of Platonic or Aristotelian philosophy. Instead, he resorted to Pletho, Plato and several ancient commentators. Apostolis, as Pletho before him, preferred the ancient Greek texts and did not rely on Christian philosophy and his contemporaries. Pletho and Apostolis attempted to draw a line between Greek philosophy—which is purely Platonic—and Scholastic philosophy, which is attached to Aristotle and the Arabs. He was annoyed by the fact that the Latins thought of themselves as more important in comparison not only to the ancient Greek philosophers, namely Socrates, Pythagoras and Plato, but also to the Hellenes of the 15th century (οἱ τῶν νῦν ὄντων Ἑλλήνων οὐ μόνον οἴονται σοφότεροι γεγονέναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ Σωκράτους αὐτοῦ καὶ Πυθαγόρου καὶ Πλάτωνος) (Apostolis 1967, p. 168). Moreover, he did not hesitate to call himself and his contemporaries “sons of the Hellenes”, without questioning the compatibility of Hellenism with Christian religion (Apostolis 1967, pp. 168–69). According to Apostolis, there was no dividing line between ancient and modern Greeks (Apostolis 1967, p. 168). Apostolis proudly declared that he is an offspring of the Hellenes and he followed in their path (Apostolis 1967, p. 169).

It is noteworthy that even Theodorus Gaza, Apostolis's main opponent, blamed his ancestors, the ancient Greeks, for being reluctant to accept the Roman calendar. Moreover, he accused them that they preferred to call themselves Romans, instead of Hellenes, a disastrous choice that was still in use in Gaza's times (Lamers 2015, p. 60). Gaza, as Pletho and Apostolis, considered the cultural alienation caused by Latin influences in both antiquity and Late Middle Ages as a major threat for Hellenism. Furthermore, Gaza's associate Nikolaos Sekoundinos (1402–1464) emphatically stressed that the Byzantines were sons of the Hellenes and imitated their ancestors (Boissonade 1833, v.5, p. 386).

Although Apostolis thought of himself as heir of the ancient Greek philosophers and his mother tongue gave him the opportunity to study the original Greek texts, it may be rather simplistic to interpret Pletho's and Apostolis' anti-Aristotelianism as a reaction of “Hellenism” against “Christianity” (Livanos 2008, p. 267). It is well known that Pletho was an anti-unionist and did not hesitate to support the Orthodox position in the council of Ferrara—Florence against the Latins (Kyros 1947, v.1, pp. 103–7; Laurent 1971, pp. 366.29–368.7). Pletho and Apostolis did not aim to confront Christian religion. They aimed at the refusal of the imperialism of Latin culture, which threatened to alienate the Greeks. Cultural opposition to the Latins and the Turks was the only way to safeguard the Hellenic *genos* from extinction (Siniosoglou 2014, p. 418). It is noteworthy that Apostolis complained to Bessarion that his compatriots in Crete did not send their children to his school because they were afraid of turning them to Romellenes (Stefec 2010, pp. 129–48). It is obvious that cultural alienation was somehow connected to religious and ethnic identity in 15th century Crete.

On the other hand, whilst modern research thought of Georgius Scholarius as a proponent of Orthodoxy, he did not unconditionally disapprove of Hellenism (Livanos 2004, pp. 23–40). It is well known that in a dialogue with a follower of the Jewish faith, Scholarius replied to the hypothetical question “Who am I?” by stating that he considered himself to be a Christian. Whilst he spoke the Greek language, he claimed that he did not think like the Hellenes (Scholarius 1930, p. 253). Scholarius's response obscure his views on identity and consciousness. Namely, he frequently considered himself and his fellow Byzantines as “Hellenes” and their motherland as “Hellas” (Angelou 1996, pp. 1–19). Moreover, he admitted that he and his compatriots were offspring of the Hellenes (“Ἑλλήνων γὰρ ἐσμέν παῖδες”) (Scholarius 1930, p. 13) and Constantinople was the motherland of the Hellenic *genos* at his time (πατρίδος τῆς νῦν ἑλληνικῆς γένει) (Scholarius 1935, p. 211). He also felt frustrated about the possible extinction of the Hellenic *genos* because the Hellenes were the best among the human



race (Scholarius 1928, p. 285). Moreover, the Hellenic *genos* prevailed in wisdom and lawfulness. The Hellenes were the best among the rest of the human races (Scholarius 1928, p. 285).

Scholarius, contrary to Pletho and his followers, did not share his skepticism towards Latin philosophy (Livanos 2006, pp. 74–86). He did not refrain from comparing Scholastic philosophy to ancient Greek, since he appreciated the progress made in Western Europe after the end of antiquity (Scholarius 1928, p. 386; Scholarius 1935, p. 406). Scholarius dedicated a large part of his career studying and commenting on works of major Scholastics, because he appreciated the originality of Latin thinkers. He was persuaded that the diffusion of Latin philosophy would benefit the Greeks, because the Latins further developed ancient Greek philosophy (Scholarius 1928, p. 386; Scholarius 1935, p. 406). Therefore, Scholarius did not share Pletho's fear of cultural alienation of the *genos*; his fears concentrated rather on the physical extinction of the *genos* (Scholarius 1935, pp. 406–7). Scholarius supported that the Byzantines should not exclusively study the ancient Greeks. Instead, they ought to study and incorporate the enhanced version of Greek philosophy that the Latins would offer them. Scholarius did not reject Hellenitas on grounds that have nothing to do with Christian religion. It seems that he felt a connection with the Hellenes of classical antiquity and thought of himself as a Hellene, besides a Christian and a Roman. However, he did not perceive Hellenitas as an imitation of classical antiquity. Rather, he aimed at an upgraded Hellenism, enriched by the best aspects of the Latin culture. Scholarius's views prove that Lamers's argument—according to which “the Hellenic identifier was used especially by Byzantine Latinophrones, who often settled in the Latin West or in the Latin-ruled parts of the Greek-speaking world” (Lamers 2015, p. 31)—is not accurate. Scholarius was the leading figure of the anti-Unionist party and he served the Ottoman rulers after 1453.

Nonetheless, the discussion of Greek consciousness and identity in the 15th century should not be limited to Pletho's entourage and his rivals. There is a rather interesting confrontation between Georgius Trapezuntius (1395–1472), a renowned translator and Aristotelian of the 15th century who migrated to Italy, and Cardinal Bessarion, who studied in Mystra with Pletho and then became a Cardinal in the Papal Curia. Despite his first Platonic steps in philosophy (Hankins 1990, p. 180; Geanakoplos 1989, p. 55; Gilbert 1968, pp. 463–500; Monfasani 1976, pp. 18–19, 73, 102, 167–68; Monfasani 2002a, pp. 220–21; Syros 2010, pp. 473–77), Trapezuntius gradually became the strongest critic of Plato and a fervent defender of Aristotle (Monfasani 1976, p. 19). His most influential book was *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis* (1458). In his work, Trapezuntius attempted to provide an explanation of how he came to disown Plato and become a supporter of Aristotle (Kristeller 1972, pp. 86–109; Monfasani 1976, p. 201; Monfasani 2002b, pp. 179–202). Trapezuntius occasionally refers to ancient Greece in ways that allow readings related to issues of consciousness and identity. Namely, he expressed his disapproval of Plato's attack to the four liberators of Greece, namely Miltiades, Themistocles, Pericles and Cimon (Trapezuntius 1523, O5r-P2r). In his dialogue *Gorgias* Plato sketches out a scornful Socrates against Themistocles, Cimon and Miltiades because they did not care to properly educate the Athenian people when they were in power. According to Socrates, these four politicians recklessly filled the city with projects without any concern for the citizens and their education (Plato, 503c–519e).

Trapezuntius discussed the same subject in a chapter entitled *On Plato's hatred and attack of Plato over of the four saviors of Greece* (Trapezuntius 1523, O5r-P2r). He felt discomfort for the scale of ingratitude and hatred of Plato against the saviors of Greece (Trapezuntius 1523, O5r). Trapezuntius was furious because Plato did not find any other reason to write about the liberators of Greece, except only to blame them. In order to defend Miltiades, Trapezuntius stated: “For those who saved our country and forefathers, saved us as well” (Trapezuntius 1523, O6v). It is evident that he felt a connection with the ancient Greeks and considered them as his ancestors. Moreover, he admitted that they saved the Greek *genos*, when he projected the consequences of the four liberators' actions up to his epoch. Trapezuntius was proud of his Greek roots and he treated the Persian wars proportionally to the Turkish threat (Trapezuntius 1523, O6v). It is indicative of the way Trapezuntius perceived the Greco-Persian wars that—in his exhortation (1452) to Pope Nicholas V (Monfasani 1984, p. 435)—he compared them

to the threat posed by the Turks to the Byzantine Empire and Christian Europe during his times. Trapezuntius considered the Platonic text to be dangerous because it was able to challenge the moral of the Greeks who, at the same time, were threatened by the Turks (Monfasani 1984, pp. 435–42). It is noteworthy that Trapezuntius conceptualized the combat between Turks and Christians through the lens of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, as Chalkokondyles did (Akışık-Karakullukçu 2013, pp. 189–94). Furthermore, when Trapezuntius referred to Greece, he chose the word *patria*. In my view, the word *patria* enhances the bonds of the Greeks of antiquity to the Greeks living during the end of the Byzantine Empire, because there is a sense that they shared something. Moreover, Trapezuntius's interpretation of ancient Greek history and his parallelisms with the dangers that the Greeks faced in the 15th century, proved his sense of connection to the Greek past.

In the exhortation to Pope Nicholas V, which he wrote in order to motivate the Latins to help repel the Turks, Trapezuntius identified himself as *Graecus* and *Christianus* (Monfasani 1984, p. 435). It is obvious that he does not perceive the two terms as identical. A *Graecus* is not necessarily Christian, according to him. Trapezuntius clearly states that he did not adhere to the doctrines of the Greek Orthodox Church when he wrote the letter: someone could be *Graecus* without being Orthodox. Trapezuntius's reference questions Angelou's argument that the word 'Hellene' in the 15th century means "Greek Orthodox" (Angelou 1996, pp. 1–19). Trapezuntius's reference is accompanied by the identification with Christianity and reflects his perspective. While elsewhere in this same letter, as well as in other Trapezuntius's texts (Monfasani 1984, pp. 529, 570), the term Greek (Γραικός/*Graecus*) seems to indicate the Orthodox, the above passage from the preface clearly distinguishes the national identification from the religious one. "Hellene" (Ἑλλην) is sometimes used to designate ethnic origin (Monfasani 1984, pp. 539, 550), but also as a synonym of pagan (Monfasani 1984, p. 550). However, Trapezuntius chose the words ἔθνῶν (Monfasani 1984, p. 572) and Ἑλλήνων (Monfasani 1984, p. 550) to refer to pagans (Monfasani 1984, p. 572). In addition, the term Ἀνατολικοί (Orientals) is used for religious purposes (Monfasani 1984, p. 531). Trapezuntius's plea to the Pope to guarantee the salvation of Europe against the Turks is particularly interesting (Monfasani 1984, p. 435–42). He attempted to separate the Greeks from their Eastern neighbors and connected them to the fate of the "Catholic Europe". According to him, Greece and the rest of Europe share a common future. If Greece fell, the rest of Europe would follow. We should bear in mind that Greek scholars show a preference to words that mean West (Ἑσπέρας, Ἑσπερίων) in describing Europe.

Trapezuntius read ancient Greek history—especially the Greco-Persian wars—under a new spectrum and enthusiastically associates himself with the Greek past. He felt a connection with the ancient Greeks, a *generis coniunctio* in his own words (Monfasani 1984, p. 435). He also proudly declared that he belonged to the Greek *genos* (Monfasani 1984, p. 351). Trapezuntius perceives himself as a Greek, as a person connected to the Greek land and the Greek past. In his argument against the Italian humanist Andrea Agaso, Trapezuntius asserted that his opponent could not praise the ancient Greeks and despise modern Greeks. Trapezuntius's claim presupposes that the ancient and modern Greeks belong to the same *genos* (Monfasani 1984, p. 383, 393). At the same time, he declares that he is also a Christian, believing that someone who is connected and inspired by the Greek past can be a Christian, without one identity negating the other. He is concerned about two positions that created a synthesis which, in the eyes of Pletho, seemed to be at least strange. As a result, Siniosoglou's claim that "Byzantine humanists were Hellenes, not because they revived the religion of the ancients, but because they deviated from Orthodoxy by experimenting in varying degrees with 'pagan' philosophy and especially Platonism" (Siniosoglou 2011, p. 26) is untenable in view of Trapezuntius's own writings. Trapezuntius was a proponent of Hellenitas, despite the fact that he used frequently the term *Graecus*. His predilection was the result of the fact that he wrote the vast majority of his works in Latin.

Cardinal Bessarion replied to Trapezuntius's *Comparatio* in his own *In Calumniatorem Platonis* (1469). Bessarion sought to defend Plato from Trapezuntius's attacks (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 546). According to Bessarion, Plato did not discuss the military successes of these men. He expressed a judgement on whether they rendered the citizens better or they learned to win over themselves first

and then their opponents. Bessarion's answer was that the four saviors were demagogues because they used the average, demagogic rhetoric with the intention to please rather than benefit the people (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, pp. 546–48). He supported that Greece was not saved in the naval battles of Salamis and Artemisium; rather, it was rescued in the infantry battles of Marathon and Plataea (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 548). While the four liberators of Greece contributed militarily, they did not benefit their city on any other level. (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, pp. 548–52).

In his magnum opus, the *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, Bessarion refers rarely to Greece and Hellenism. Bessarion intentionally keeps a distance from the topic under consideration. On the contrary, in a letter to the Emperor Constantine Palaeologus XI, Bessarion congratulates him personally and the Hellenes (ὁλως τοῖς Ἑλλησι) on the construction of the fortifying wall in Corinth (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 440). In the same letter, he refers to the Hellenes as our *genos* (ἡμέτερον γένος) (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 547) and he declares that he is Hellene by *genos* (Mioni 1973, pl. XX). According to Bessarion, the Hellenes are a praiseworthy *genos* (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 445). Palaeologus had the privilege to rule the offspring of the people who defeated the Persians at the battle of Plataea (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 443). Moreover, he calls Pletho “the glory of Hellas” (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 469). Addressing Theodorus Gaza, Bessarion expresses his fear for the fate of the Hellenes, since the decline of education would lead to the extinction of Greek language and *genos* (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 486). Furthermore, in his treatise “In illud evangelii: Sic eum volo manere, quid ad te?”, Bessarion names the Hellenes (Ἑλληνας)—the Orthodox—and the Latins as the two opposing sides on doctrinal issues (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, pp. 70–87). According to Bessarion, someone could be Hellene and Orthodox at the same time. This is a major departure from Pletho's interpretative scheme. Finally, he presented the history of Trebizond as a direct line from classical Athens to his times (Bessarion 1984, pp. 3–75). In his Encomium to Trebizond, he stressed the continuity of the Hellenes, both ethnically and culturally.

Bessarion, when addressing a Greek audience, preferred the ethnonyms Hellenes and *Graeci*, in opposition to the Latins and Romans of the Western Europe. *Graeci* was used mainly in religious contexts. Whilst Bessarion was not preoccupied against the Latins, he shared Pletho's fear about the future of the Hellenes, and the potential cultural alienation of his compatriots. As a reaction to this, he established his famous library, he collected manuscripts and hired scribes to safeguard the continuity of the language and values (Mohler 1923–1942, v. III, p. 479).

From his part, Andronicus Callistus (ca. 1400–1476), a professor of Greek language in several European cities and Bessarion's associate, also called the Byzantines Hellenes (Migne 1866a, p. 1020; Migne 1866b, p. 1131). Arsenius Apostolis (1465–1535), bishop of Monemvasia and son of Michael Apostolis, Marcus Musurus (1470–1517), a Cretan publisher and famous humanist in Venice, and Janus Lascaris (ca. 1445–1534), a noted Greek scholar in Renaissance Italy, followed the same path (Lamers 2015). Along the same lines, Christopher Kontoleon (first half of the 16th century), a scribe and scholar, argued that his compatriots would never improve as long as they prefer to use the ethnonym Romans instead of Hellenes (Lamers 2015, p. 58). We should admit that this is a rather quick escalation of Hellenitas. While all the aforementioned scholars discussed identity and consciousness predominantly on cultural and political grounds, Michael Tarchaniota Marullus (1453–1500)—a poet, soldier and humanist—put forth the concept of the bloodline. Namely, in one of his poems he wondered about the glory of the Pelasgian blood. He held that the survival of the Greek language was the only way to preserve the glory of the Pelasgian blood (Lamers 2015, p. 211). It is noteworthy that he chose to refer to Greeks with a rather obsolete term. Nevertheless, he felt that the connection with ancient Greeks is also biological and not only cultural. Therefore, Marullus considered the Byzantine Empire as an Hellenic empire. Hellenes possessed the *Imperium Romanum* for centuries (Lamers 2015, p. 221).

Finally, John Argyropoulos (ca. 1405–1487)—a leading Aristotelian of the 15th century in Italy (Steiris 2015)—was a fervent supporter of Hellenitas. His approach includes the continuity of Hellenism from antiquity to his epoch (Runciman 1985, p. 120). Namely, he stated to the Emperor Constantine Palaeologus XI that his kingship should be in advantage of the Hellenic *genos* and the common household of the Hellenes: (τοῦ δ' ἡμέτερου τουτουί γένους καί τῆς κοινῆς ταύτης τῶν Ἑλλήνων

ἔστιάς) (Lampros 1910, pp. 27–28, 66). Moreover, he implied that ancient and modern Greeks love to reflect on their passions; they are emotional (Lampros 1910, p. 10). Argyropoulos's views are better described in an oration addressed to the Emperor John VII Paleologus (1392–1448) (Lampros 1910, pp. 1–7). In this oration, he frequently refers to the inhabitants of the remaining Eastern Roman Empire as Hellenes (Lampros 1910, pp. 1–7) and calls John “the King of Hellas” (Ὁ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἡγε βασιλεὺς) (Lampros 1910, p. 7). After the Emperor's death, Argyropoulos praised the late Emperor for managing to save the lands, the cities and the language of the Hellenes (Lampros 1910, p. 6). According to Argyropoulos, Constantine XI Paleologus, the last Byzantine Emperor, was, like his predecessor, also king of the Hellenes (Lampros 1910, pp. 29, 37, 47). Argyropoulos did not hesitate to identify himself as a Hellene (Lampros 1910, pp. 30, 66). In addition, he repeatedly interpreted the historical events of his times in connection to the ancient Greek history. Argyropoulos's works are characterized by an intense patriotism, which is in fact a type of Hellenism different from that of Pletho. Although Argyropoulos shared with Pletho a strong archaism (Lampros 1910, pp. 7, 32, 36, 41, 44), he did not oppose *the genos* of the Hellenes to the Orthodox dogma and remained a Christian, even a Catholic (Lampros 1910, pp. 22, 35; Monfasani 1992, pp. 56–57).

## 6. Conclusions

In conclusion, Greek scholars in Late Byzantium and the Post-Byzantine era contributed to the quest of a Greek identity by synthesizing various elements in the formation of Hellenitas. Namely, Pletho and Apostolis aimed at the refusal of the imperialism of Latin culture in order to safeguard the *genos*. Scholarius felt a connection with the Hellenes of classical antiquity and thought of himself as a Hellene, not just a Christian and a Roman. However, he did not approve of the idea of Hellenism as an imitation of classical antiquity. Rather, he aimed at a renewed Hellenism, enriched by the best aspects of the Latin culture. Trapezuntius perceived himself as a Greek and as a Christian, believing that someone who is connected and inspired by the Greek past can also be a Christian. In addition, Bessarion held that someone could be Hellene and Orthodox at the same time. All the aforementioned scholars based their views of identity on cultural continuity and history. They felt the need to clarify the bonds that unite the Greeks, namely common history. It is obvious that the basis of the philosophical elites' Hellenitas after the 13th century was not only common language and literary tradition but also historical continuity and cultural otherness, in contrast to Mango's interpretative pattern (Harris 2000, p. 34.; Mango 1981, pp. 48–57). Therefore, commonly held views (Koubourlis 2005, p. 54; Pizani 2009, p. 14)—according to which Hellenism, as cultural and historical identity, and Christian religion were incompatible in the Post-Byzantine era—are not supported by the writings of the most prominent Greek scholars. Late Byzantine scholars lamented the decline of the former Eastern Roman Empire and sought pride in ancient Greece. Hellenitas was the core concept in their attempt to reshape their national identity. The Greek scholars in the last centuries of Byzantium and after the siege of Constantinople, no matter of their whereabouts, their personal career and their lords, agreed that the shift towards Hellenism would safeguard the existence of the *genos*. Romanitas and Graecitas remained influential and the debate was heated between proponents of different perspectives on identity. In contrast to commonly held views that the early modern Hellenic identity flourished only in the Latin West and was later introduced in mainland Greece, I suggest that gravitation towards Hellenic identity commenced from the work of Byzantine luminaries who, in some way or another, resided in or were related to the Greek East. Hellenitas is something that cannot be attributed solely, or even mainly, to Byzantine communities in Western Europe. The debate still lasts among Greek intellectuals and the questions posed in Late Byzantium are still open. Hellenitas, from the 15th century onwards, remains a constitutive element of Modern Greek identity. However, Hellenitas is not a process of mere imitation. It is rather a creative reconnection with ancient Greece, enriched by certain Byzantine elements, because its' roots are traced back in Late Byzantium.



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