

## ***Why is Medieval History Controversial in Greece? Revising the Paradigm of Teaching the Byzantine Period in the New Curriculum (2018-19)***

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**Abstract:** In which ways was Medieval and Byzantine History embedded in the Greek national narrative in the first life steps of the Greek state during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? In which ways has it been related to the emerging nationalism in the Balkans, and to relationships with the West and the countries of south-eastern Europe during the Balkan Wars, the First and Second World Wars, and especially the Cold War, until today? In which ways does Byzantium correlate with the notion of Greekness, and what place does it occupy in Neo-Hellenic identity and culture? Moreover, which role does it play in history teaching, and what kind of reactions does any endeavour of revision or reformation provoke? To answer the above questions I performed a comparative analysis on the following categories of sources: (a) Greek national and European historiography, (b) School history curricula and textbooks, (c) Public history sources, (d) The new History Curriculum for primary and secondary school classes, and (e) The principles and guidelines of international organizations such as the Council of Europe. In the first three sections of this paper, I provide an overview of the conformation and integration of the Byzantine period in Greek national historiography, in association with the dominant European philosophical and historical perspectives during the era of modernity, as well as the evolving national politics, foreign affairs, prevailing ideological schemas and the role of history teaching in shaping the common identity of the Neo-Hellenic society throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The fourth section briefly deals with the current situation in history teaching in Greek schools, while the fifth section critically presents the innovative elements and features of the new History Curriculum, which, to some degree, aspires to be considered a paradigm shift in the teaching of Medieval History in school education. Finally, I summarize and draw several conclusions.

**Keywords:** Byzantine history; curriculum; Greek national historiography; Medieval history; Public history dispute.

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## 1. Medieval history and Modern Greek identity

Modern Greek identity was shaped in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century upon magnetic fields that had emerged between two strong poles: on the one side was the Neohellenic Enlightenment, influenced by the European Enlightenment, and which adopted liberal ideas, immortalized classical antiquity and saw the modern Greeks as descending directly from the ancient Greeks (Karamanolakis, 2006, pp. 47-78). It is not by chance that the symbol of this ideology, stamped on the first coin issued by the Greek state, was the Phoenix, the mythical bird that is reborn from its ashes (Liakos, 1994, pp. 175-7). The other strong pole was Christian tradition, as it had been shaped in the Byzantine period and evolved in the Ottoman. This concept – anti-liberal and anti-Enlightenment – defended Christianity against nationalism and Greekness; it placed the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople at its head, identified Greek antiquity with paganism, and was initially opposed to the War of Independence (Dimaras, 1985, pp. 374-376; Skopetea, 1988, pp. 119-134). Within this invisible tug-of-war, an important role in the shaping of modern Greek identity was for many decades played by Philhellenism. The Philhellenes, the majority of whom were classicists and romantics at the same time, were the mirror through which the modern Greeks saw themselves, their place in the world and in history, understood the present, and envisioned the future – in other words, constructed their historical culture (Politis, 1993, pp. 74-89; Karakatsouli, 2016, pp. 277-298; Jollivete, 2016).

Greek historiography and history education in the first decades of the life of the Kingdom of Greece remained faithful to the ideas of the Enlightenment and established patterns in the philosophy of history, according to which the medieval period was a dark age of ignorance, religious bigotry, and moral and spiritual decline. It was perceived as a period between the two greatest epochs that the human spirit had created: classical civilization and the Renaissance. The Greek enlighteners, influenced by the theory of the British historian Edward Gibbon (Theodore, 2016, pp. 90-103) and in complete agreement with his European counterparts, had a distaste for the medieval period and drew their political and cultural models exclusively from the ancient world. Passionate advocates of democratic ideals, they did not distinguish between the Sultan and the contemporary tyrants of Europe. In other words, Greek Enlightenment intellectuals were to adopt the historical pattern that was commonplace in the Romantic European poetry of their day: the glorious ancient past; the recent past of slavery; and the struggle for liberation in the present (Karamanolakis, 2006, pp. 123-134). For them, Ancient Greece was the imaginary paradise of history, an Arcadia that had not been completely and definitively lost, since the descendants of all those who had created it continued to breath within its ruins, even waging a revolution in its name. The aim of these scholars was to return the ancient muses from exile to their homeland. It is not by chance that for many years the curriculum of the University of Athens, the first and, for almost a century, the only higher institution in the Greek state, was dominated by classes in ancient history, while the first chair of medieval history was only created in 1924, 87 years after its foundation (Kioussopoulou, 1993).

As might be expected, in the narrative of early Greek historiography, the Hellenic nation after classical antiquity is presented as having been successively enslaved by

the Macedonians, the Romans, the Byzantines and the Ottomans, to be reborn 2100 years later with the War of Independence in 1821 (Karamanolakis & Stathis, 2005, pp. 228-9). Of the «conquerors» of Greece, the first to be 'naturalized' as Greeks were the Macedonians and Alexander, especially in response to the impact caused by the publication and, in particular, three-volume reprint of Droysen's study entitled *Geschichte des Hellenismus* (1877-1878).

The abandonment of the unadulterated worship of antiquity is linked to the development of a new ideological schema, eloquently expressed by the term «Helleno-Christian» civilization (Karamanolakis and Stathis, 2005, p. 239). The idea of the cultural linking of the ancient Greek with the Christian-Byzantine was proposed in 1852 by the intellectual Spyridon Zambelios and the historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, who is also considered the father of Greek national history with his work *The History of the Hellenic Nation* (1853-1875). In this study, the romantic Greek historian, inspired by the European models of the division of historical time, introduced a new historical canon, which by the end of the 19th century was to be established in Greek schools and would continue unchanged until today: the tripartite schema of Greek history. According to this view, the Greek nation has continuously inhabited the same space from Mycenaean times until today (ethnic continuity), while each period (ancient, medieval and modern) not only preserved the Greek legacy, but it also offered something new to Greek civilization, thus contributing to the cohesion and integrity of national identity (Dimaras, 1985, pp. 325-404).

## **2. The Greekness of Byzantium: explanatory schemas and ideological parameters**

Hence, Byzantium is «Hellenized» and occupies a distinguished place in the new historical narrative. The Roman features of the state are downgraded or eliminated, as is the multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of its society. Gradually, the term «Roman», with which the state and its subjects defined themselves throughout its entire historical existence, as well as the term «medieval», were replaced with the terms «Byzantine» or «Greek medieval». From now on, it is the «Byzantine» or «Greek Medieval Empire» (Koulouri, 1988, pp. 34-45). Furthermore, symbolically, the place of the mythical phoenix is gradually taken by the double-headed eagle, the emblem of the Byzantine emperors and later of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the one head of which looks to the East and the other to the West.

Why does this happen? Firstly, to defend the Greekness of Byzantium was to defend the Greekness of the subjects of the contemporary Kingdom of Greece against the theory of the Austrian historian Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer, whose studies had attributed Slav and Albanian ethnic origins to the modern Greeks (Veloudis, 1982). From this perspective, Byzantium became the most critical link for the ethnic continuity (Liakos, 2001).

Secondly, Byzantium offers a historical legitimization to the territorial claims made in the Balkans and Asia Minor. Since Byzantium was Greek and its inhabitants had always been Greek, modern Greece had every right to claim the incorporation of its historical territories and populations. This was the *Megali Idea* («Great Idea»)

and this irredentism of Hellenism would reach its climax in the decade of wars from 1912-1922. It would also clash with the corresponding nationalist ideologies of the other Balkan peoples (Skopetea, 1988, pp. 273-286, 325-336).

Thirdly, the Greek Orthodox Church as the guardian of the medieval Christian tradition and guarantor of the values of Byzantium claims a share of state power and maintains the privileges that it had had under the Ottomans. National historiography reserves a leading position for the Church in Greek history, presenting it as the «ark» of Hellenism: it is the Church that kept the Greek-Christian identity alive during the bleak centuries of the Turkish occupation. From that time on, school historiography has reproduced historical myths that place the Church at the heart of national identity (Stamatopoulos, 2014).

Fourthly, Byzantium, as a Christian empire with a monarchical political system, was closer to the political models of the 19th-century European states than the democracies of antiquity were (Karamanolakis, 2006, p. 101). In fact, Greek national historiography projected Constantine Palaeologus, the last emperor of Byzantium who fell fighting heroically against the Ottomans, as the model leader (Karamanolakis and Stathis, 2005, pp. 250-251). Indeed, as Hobsbawm might say, it invented a tradition for the Greek monarchy, an institution that was foreign to the ideas of the Greek Enlightenment and the revolutionary liberal movements. It promoted the crown as a unifying factor in Hellenism and the king as a historical leader for Greek territorial claims. It is of course not by chance that when the heir was born on 21 July 1868, King George named him Constantine and announced that he would be christened Orthodox, while in the press he was called the «Messiah of the Hellenic nation» (*Aion*, 22.7.1868). Nor is it by chance that during the wars a large section of the press called him Constantine XII; which means, they presented him as the successor of the last Constantine of Byzantium.

And, fifthly, Byzantine history reveals and indicates the contemporary enemies of the Greeks: Islam and the Arabs; the Bulgarians; the Slavs; and, of course, the Turks (Skopetea, 1988, pp. 325-336; Giannouloupoulos, 1999, pp. 59-68).

Hence, next to Athens, the undisputed metropolis of Greek antiquity and classical civilization stands Constantinople, the ideal capital of the modern Greeks, the Jerusalem of the *Megali Idea*. Hagia Sophia, the monumental symbol of the Greek Orthodox world, is placed next to the Parthenon in the national imaginary. The idea of the rebirth of the Byzantine Empire and, alongside this, the establishment of a strong Christian state in the south-eastern corner of Europe was fundamental to Greece's military involvement in the Macedonian Struggle (1904-1908), the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the First World War (1914-1918) and the war in Asia Minor (1919-1922).

### 3. Byzantium in public history and in the school curriculum

In addition to the school classroom, where from 1882 Byzantine history occupied a position equal to that of antiquity and the modern era (Koulouri, 1988, pp. 39-40), Byzantium was also exceptionally popular in public history. Not only newspapers and magazines, but also popular publications, poems, songs, engravings, plays and novels were inspired by the Byzantine era. Even the lectures given by professors

at the university of Athens were packed with ordinary people who had come to hear moving narratives of the Fall of Constantinople, an emblematic event that had already become embedded in the historical culture of the common people in the years before the War of Independence (Karamanolakis-Stathis, 2005, pp. 251-255).

Even after the end of the Greek irredentism, Byzantine history was used as a tool of anti-Slav nationalism and, at least during the Cold War, of anti-Communism. Communism, in its endemic Balkan version, was considered yet another side of Slav expansionism and indeed the most threatening as it had a domestic ally, the Greek Communists (Koussouris, 2017, pp. 321-324). The Greek Civil War (1946-1949), the defeat of the Communist forces, the fleeing of many of the guerrilla fighters to the people's republics of Eastern Europe and the establishment within Greece of a hard-line anti-Communist regime gave a new ideological hue to the Byzantine history.

In the post-war textbooks, Hellenism in general and Byzantium in particular was promoted as the guardian of European civilization against Asian barbarity. According to this view, the ancient Greeks protected Europe from the Persian invasion, while the medieval Greeks protected Europe from the Slavs, Arabs and Turks. Moreover for a millennium medieval Hellenism preserved and developed the arts and letters, at a time when the rest of Europe was being overrun by barbarian tribes. Even in 1453 when Constantinople fell, Byzantium spread enlightenment to Europe with its decline: the Byzantine scholars migrated to Italy and transmitted the spark for the Renaissance (Palikidis, 2018).

Yet things were not so simple. Byzantine history was used as a tool in order to establish another strand of modern Greek identity: the anti-Western sentiment. This historical theory sees Greek national identity as having been born in 1204, with the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders, and being manifested as a resistance movement to the western European conquerors (Karamanolakis-Stathis, 2005, p. 256). In the 1960s and especially after the fall of the Greek dictatorship in 1974, it dominates in the historical narrative of the socialist political forces and of the Left, constituting a historically broadened Greek version of what Hobsbawm called «antifascist nationalism» (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 145). This trend is completely distinct from pro-Western anti-Balkan nationalism, and sees the Great Powers of western imperialism as the eternal enemy of Hellenism and as responsible for the great tragedies of its history. In this narrative, the barbarity of the Crusaders, their violent behaviour, and the looting of artworks were emphasized. The textbooks' illustration is full of photographs of the bronze horses that had been stolen from the Byzantine hippodrome and taken to Venice, where they adorn the façade of St Mark's basilica (Palikidis, 2009, pp. 260-261, 465-474).

Despite these ideological distinctions, since the late 19th century until today Byzantine history has only once been the subject of a public dispute. In 1964 the first non-conservative, centre-left post-war government was formed and an attempt made to introduce widescale reforms to the school system, including the production of new school textbooks. One of these, the textbook written by Kostas Kalokairinos for the second grade of middle school, entitled *Roman and Medieval History (146 BC-AD 1453)*, elicited harsh reactions from conservative circles (parties, newspapers, the Church, the School of Philosophy at the University of Athens), and eventually the book was withdrawn. Among the reasons for this were: (a) the term «Byzantine»

was not in the title; (b) the book was considered to have Marxist undertones as it referred to economic and social conflicts within the Byzantine Empire; (c) it was positively predisposed to the enemies of Hellenism, the Slavs in particular; and (d) it undermined the idea of undisrupted national continuity because, on the one hand, it presented the Byzantine Empire as the continuation of the Roman and, on the other, it adopted the heretical notion that the history of modern Hellenism began in 1204 (Athanassiadis, 2015, pp. 244-284).

#### 4. The situation today

The history teaching in Greece has been seen as a sensitive issue for at least a century. Especially in recent years, after the public conflict in 2006-2007 over the textbook for the sixth grade of primary school written by a team of experts headed by Maria Repoussi, the intervention of many institutions and centres of power, such as the political parties, the Church, the Academy of Athens, teachers' associations and the press and television (Athanassiadis, 2015, pp. 45-99) has created a hostile landscape and discouraged governments from making even the mildest of changes. So far, a powerful didactic tradition has crystallized in the teaching of history at school, with the following features:

- Just one sole textbook for each class, produced by the state.
- The content of the textbook is comprised of a normative, self-contained and entrenched body of information, which forms the «official» historical knowledge.
- A teacher-centric model of «rote learning – exams» prevails, based on the encyclopaedia-style historical information provided by the textbook. Pupils are obliged to learn the information by heart.
- The creation of a narrative mainly based on political and military events.
- The historical sources that frame the narrative confirm its truth.
- Ethnocentrism with three standard characteristics: (a) the diachronic subject of the narrative is the Greek nation; (b) the distant past is also nationalized (e.g. the Mycenaeans and Byzantines are considered Greeks); (c) even European and global history are interpreted through a national perspective.
- Controversial and disputed subjects are not touched upon and, if they are, they are not approached in a multi-perspective manner.
- The periods of history are divided in the curriculum on the basis of the tripartite schema that was developed by Greek historiography in the late 19th century: in each class pupils are taught successively ancient, Byzantine and modern history, for a total of three times during their schooling. The main goal is the historical continuity of the Greek nation from antiquity until today to be consolidated.
- As a result, a sterile discourse about the past prevails: the historical past is not connected to the present and future of our societies and, when it is, it is called upon to prove the purity and the sanctity of nation. It functions, in other words, as a means of xenophobia and nationalist propaganda.

- Greek history teachers are in the majority untrained. Many of them are not historians, or even philologists, and they do not have even an elementary expertise in teaching methods. The concepts of historical literacy, historical thinking and consciousness are unknown or unclear to them, given that they were not taught them even as undergraduates or during their initial or in-service training.

All the above have resulted in the growth of a diverse front against any attempt at reforming history teaching, which runs through the whole political spectrum, social institutions and, unfortunately, teachers' associations.

## **5. The new history curriculum for the Primary and Secondary Education at the centre of the public dispute**

In January 2017 the Institute of Educational Policy formed a committee of experts comprised of six university professors, specialists in the teaching of history, with the purpose of creating a new curriculum for the eight grades of compulsory education in which history is taught (from the third grade of primary school to the first grade of high school). The committee also included 15 educators from Primary and Secondary Education, specialists in history and history teaching. In April 2017 the committee issued an analytical outline for a public consultation and held two meetings with representatives of university History and Pedagogy departments, as well as with school counsellors. The reactions of a large section of the opposition press and teachers associations were outraged. «They are erasing Hellenism from history», «They are changing history too», «Pupils without a national consciousness, a nation without an identity», «storm of reactions for the forgery of history [by Gavroglou (i.e. the Minister of Education)]», and «the Turks are having a party with Gavroglou's history» were just some of the front-page headlines in the conservative newspapers, while the members of the committee were described as «counterfeiters of history», «illiterate», «lustful for the Turks» and «ideologically subservient» (Proto Thema 21.5.2017; Eleftheros Typos 13.3.2017; Estia 13.3.2017; Dimocratia 13.3.2017 & 18.4.2017).

Despite this, the committee continued and completed its work in February 2018. It submitted eight curricula to the Institute of Educational Policy, one for each school grade, and eight corresponding thematic dossiers. The Institute approved the material and passed it onto the Ministry of Education, which subsequently authorized them in October 2018. Later, the curriculum for the primary and secondary school classes has been published in the gazette (History Curriculum, 2018, 2019).

Before analyzing the particular characteristics of medieval and Byzantine history, it is necessary to note the fundamental features of the new curriculum:

- For the first time in history teaching in the Greek schools, modern epistemological, historiographical and pedagogical approaches are being introduced, which relate to the concepts of historical thinking and consciousness. A balance is also sought between content and procedural knowledge. More specifically, the theories of Peter Seixas (2017) and

Jörn Rüsen (2004) are deployed, as is the thinking that runs through the international literature on multi-perspectivity and historical consciousness, first and second order historical concepts, understanding of historical time and space, enquiry strategies, analysis of historical sources, etc. In terms of historiography and enquiry methodology, subjects covering the history of labour and technology, material and immaterial culture, gender, childhood, ideology, as well as local and family history, microhistory, and oral history are being introduced. Similarly, the holistic nature of historical knowledge is being promoted and the contribution of related fields, such as archaeology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, geography, medicine, and even meteorology is highlighted.

- Ethnocentrism is minimized in two ways: firstly, more historical topics from Europe and the world are introduced while, secondly, national history is set within the context of the large-scale regional, European, and global history. In this way, the study and interpretation of historical phenomena that up until now had been considered as either exclusively national or international is broadened.
- The textbook is given less of a central role and a significant portion of class time is dedicated to developing interactive projects or teaching scenarios in the form of thematic dossiers. For the first time in the Greek school system, educators are free to choose which historical topics they will focus on and are given the ability to develop creative teaching and learning environments and to apply student-centred methods in the school programme, and not at its margins was the case thus far.
- National consciousness and identity, without being displaced as an objective of the curriculum, given that they are in any case foundational principles of the education system according to the state's Constitution, are given a new basis. First, they are contextualized: in other words, interpreted in historical terms. Second, the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the societies of the past is pinpointed and difference is made natural so that it is not seen as an agent to social destabilization or as a threat against nation. And, third, the cultivation of a pluralistic and tolerant national identity is aspired to, within the context of a society imbued with humanistic values. A crucial goal here is the analysis of the attitudes and behaviours of people of other eras and the ethical codes that dictated them.
- For the first time in the Greek school system, history classes are linked to the cultivation of a democratic citizenship and the strengthening of a democratic culture. The authors of the curriculum, making use of both the international literature and the recent guidelines and findings of the Council of Europe (2018), have proposed a functional combination of content and teaching practices, which will help children systematically to develop values, attitudes and skills with which they can become true democratic citizens. By shedding light, and not creating darkness as happened up till now, on the heterogeneity of past societies, studying not only conflicts but also influences and the complexity of identities, pupils are able to understand contemporary social reality and become receptive to diversity and open to



new challenges. In contemporary European societies, which can easily fall prey to xenophobia and racism and which are at risk of being seduced by populism and fascist rhetoric, the subject of history cannot remain on the margins.

In the Greek case, the new history curriculum is anticipated to be a paradigmatic shift and not simply an update of the old curriculum.

More specifically, as regards the teaching of Byzantine and Medieval History in the two compulsory classes of fifth grade primary and second grade middle school, the curriculum still follows a chronological outline but is structured according to a different logic. The innovative element here is that the conventional method of teaching is disrupted by the thematic dossiers, which aim at deepening knowledge, invite the pupils to produce their own historical aspects through examining sources, and encourage multi-perspectivity and empathy. By way of illustration, I note the names of some of the thematic dossiers. For fifth grade primary school: (1) «Invitation to a Byzantine meal»; (2) «The earth is round: discovering the world»; (3) «Getting to know another world: China». For second grade middle school: (1) «Wealth and poverty in Byzantine society»; (2) «War in the name of God. Fighting nonbelievers and heretics»; and (3) «What do we owe to Arab civilization? Science and the arts in the Arab world».

In the fifth grade of primary school the teaching units are developed on the logic of the «worlds» that were shaped from late antiquity until the 18th century: *Roman world; Byzantine world; Arab-Islamic world; Medieval world of Western Europe; New Worlds; Ottoman world*. On the other hand, the structure in the second grade of middle school is more conventional and follows the established periodization of Medieval History. In each case, however, the perspectives, the historical enquiry, the language and meanings, the fields of study and reflection, the approach to the historical sources – especially the religious ones– and the modern conception of the material and immaterial heritage of the medieval period are radically different from the established forms. The main focus was the historicization of those aspects that until now had been considered the greatest «disadvantage» of Medieval History in the Greek school: the mostly theological reading of many historical events, such as Iconoclasm, and the «sanctification» of its sources (religious icons, architecture, symbols of power, poetry).

The crucial question that runs through all the modules of the two classes and which invites the pupils to make their own discoveries is: what does the medieval period have to say to the modern world? First of all, it is the era in which the monotheistic religions evolved, religious institutions were interplayed with political institutions; religion became a tool of propaganda and ideological manipulation, while there were religious wars and civil wars over religious issues. Bearing in mind today's rising fundamentalism and religious bigotry, the irrational violence, and the hate and fear that lead to the suppression of human rights and democratic freedoms, the medieval period is more topical than ever before. Medieval History shows us where religious fanaticism led in the past and also offers a historical basis for dialogue, reflection and the critical examination of religious stereotypes that are being revived and rekindled today in response to Islamic – and not only – terrorism. At the same

time, however, the positive aspects are not obscured or downplayed: the fruitful contacts and influences between, for example, the Arab and the European world, or between Jewish, Christian and Islamic culture, between East and West. Finally, an attempt is made to reveal the historical roots of prejudice, such as anti-Semitism, which led to the incomprehensible mass crimes of our times. Thus, topics such as the persecution of the Jews in Palestine in AD 70, England in 1290, France in 1306 and Spain in 1492 and the subsequent diaspora to the Balkans are being included for the first time in the Greek curriculum.

The second question concerns migration. Until recently at least, the history taught in schools in all European countries attributed the end of the ancient world to «invasions of barbarian tribes» from the North and the East. According to this view, these attacks led to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire; glorious civilizations were destroyed and West and Central Europe fell for centuries into darkness (Boletsi, 2017, pp. 117-120). In Greek school history, the Byzantine Empire is presented as the Eastern breakwater of Greek and European culture against Asian barbarism. In the new curriculum, the terms «invasion», «raids» and «barbarian tribes» are absent and mention is instead made of the «mass migrations of peoples». The aim is to make clear that migration is an inherent feature of human history and many of today's European peoples were themselves migrants. In other words, Europe is a continent of immigrants. There is no need to explain the value that such a perspective has for migration today and how important the cracks it can create in the historical foundations of contemporary xenophobia and racism are.

Furthermore, concepts from the medieval period which today dominate public discourse, populist rhetoric and religious propaganda are analyzed and historicized. These include concepts such as «holy war», «jihad», «Crusade», «martyrs», «unbelievers», «barbarians», «empire», etc. In this way, pupils can understand that the language of history is present everywhere and shapes, whether consciously or unconsciously, positively or negatively, our attitudes towards and ideas of the present and the future.

An attempt is even being made to introduce meta-historical perspectives, as epistemological and historiographical issues are raised: for example, why until recently were the medieval period and Byzantium considered a period of decline and darkness? When and why were they called this, how were their chronological boundaries determined and which periodization was suggested for them in the past or is still being suggested today?

Beyond this, the topics are enriched with a series of issues that are directly or indirectly connected with the past, such as: (a) the impact of climate change on demographics and the economy (Medieval Warm Period, 750-1250 and the Little Ice Age in the late 13th century); (b) religious education, the first universities, the spread of knowledge, Latin as a common language and the development of national languages; (c) the Christian festival calendar and dietary customs (e.g., fasting); (d) the effect of epidemics such as the Black Death in the mid-14th century on demographics, culture, and beliefs and a comparison with methods of prevention in modern medicine, etc.; and (e) the traces left by cultures on the places where pupils live or are descended from, if they are the children of refugees or migrants (for example, Roman aqueducts and baths, Christian churches, Islamic mosques,

Venetian castles). This is also attempted by harnessing the modern world's fascination with the medieval period through its varied presence in film, literature, music, architecture, painting, miniatures and glasswork, fiction, fashion and cooking.

The two curricula are concluded with projects that expand space and time of study and encourage intercultural communication and historical reflection in terms of the present and future of the modern world. The proposed final project of primary school is indicative: «The Mediterranean of Civilizations: a historical overview from the Roman period to modern times with a focus on our shared sea». Among others, pupils are asked to organize an event that is open to the local community on the topic of «The Mediterranean, a crossroads of peoples and cultures». The use of ICT for synchronous communication with pupils from schools in other Mediterranean countries is recommended to explore influences and trace differences and similarities in various fields of cultural expression. Alternatively, pupils can hold a photography exhibition on the topic of «The Mediterranean, the sea that divides us, the sea that unites us», in which the many different aspects of the common history of the Mediterranean peoples and their culture are highlighted, along with the role of the Mediterranean in contemporary migration. Similarly, in the second grade of middle school, a series of activities entitled «Byzantium after Byzantium» is held, with the central goal of studying the perception of Byzantium after its fall, as well as the legacy it left in the Balkans, Russia, Italy and the Ottoman Empire. As part of this, a project is proposed on the topic of «How Byzantine history was taught in schools in the past?» Students' groups are asked to search for 19th- and 20th-century school textbooks of Byzantine history in the digital archive in order to identify the similarities or differences with their own textbook and discuss the issues that arise from this comparison.

## **6. Conclusions**

Medieval History has been integrated with remarkable delay in the narrative of the Greek national historiography after the establishment of the Greek state in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the counteractions of many Greek scholars-advocates of Enlightenment ideas, who considered the Byzantine History as an era of decline and preferred the modern Greece to be reborn from the ashes of ancient Greece, eventually the principle of continuity of Hellenism prevailed. Byzantine period has been initially employed to bridge a gap of more than 1500 years in the timeline of Greek history and prove the uninterrupted continuity of the Greek nation from the Trojan War until today. Moreover, the incorporation of Byzantine period in the master narrative served some equally important objectives: (a) Being a Christian monarchy, it was much closer to the political patterns of current leadership, (b) being a widespread empire, was much more compatible with the current national vision of pursuing an extended state, which should include the «lost» territories after the fall of Constantinople as well as the enslaved Greek Orthodox populations of Ottoman Empire. Although the above can be easily explained in the historic context of the nationalistic and territorial rivalry of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Balkans, many of these ideas not only survived so far in the Greek school history, but also any attempt to change the narrative or even to enrich the perspective encountered

serious reactions in the public sphere. The new history curriculum published in 2018-19, may be considered, in some degree, a change of paradigm in teaching medieval era in Greek school classes.

Embracing the modern theories on development of historical thinking and consciousness, the new History Curriculum asks questions and introduces topics that connect the modern with the medieval through a fruitful and cohesive inquiry of the east and western civilizations over the span of time and the traces which the cultural traditions and the material and immaterial heritage of humanity left behind. Multiperspectivity and historization of the religious and cultural prejudices and stereotypes that revive in our days and inflame religious bigotry and rivalry with the face of anti-Christianity, anti-Islamism, and anti-Semitism, become valuable tools. Furthermore, the history of massive movements of peoples during the Medieval times in the new curriculum is essential for a deep historical understanding of the present time; migration as an everlasting historical phenomenon is naturalized, given that Europe is historically documented as the continent of migrants –unlike the national and racial myths currently displayed by racist and nationalistic groups and political parties. The conjunction in teaching programme of linear historical narration with thematic approaches foster on the one hand the acquisition of an overall image of the historical evolution, as well as of the parallel and intersected routes of the diverse medieval worlds, and on the other hand the penetration in key-topics focusing mainly in cultural and social issues; besides, the thematic inquiry constructs an educational environment that encourages discovery learning, engagement with multimodal primary sources, as well as the use of tools and methods of the historians. Under this perspective, Byzantine History is no more dealt with terms of ethnocentricity, namely as an in-between space of time that bridges the ancient Greek world with the modern Greeks and manifests the ideal of the unchanged and unmixed Greek nation. Finally, meta-historic concepts are introduced, whereas students are invited to reflect on and explain why medieval era was considered a time of cultural decline and spiritual obscurantism.

## 7. References

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## **9. Newspapers**

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