

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: 31 Classics / Centre for Hellenic Studies
Title of case study: Expanding public understanding of Byzantium and its political and cultural legacy to Europe and the Near East.
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Public interest in Byzantium has traditionally been low, and Byzantium mostly viewed as a decadent non-western postscript to Greco-Roman civilisation. Throughout her decades of research Herrin has led the field in bringing a new perception of Byzantium into mainstream world history. From 2008, through the unforeseen immense popularity of her 2007 book and its many translated editions (3.2), she has awoken widespread public interest in and engagement with Byzantium. The principal benefit is cultural enrichment and increased knowledge of the international public interested in the history of Europe and the Near East; the book has also had impact in stimulating reflection on and discussion of current problems of nationalism and intolerance, especially in the regions from the Danube to the Tigris.</p>
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Since her appointment as Professor of Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at King's College London in 1995 (Senior Research Fellow from 2008), Judith Herrin has researched, published on and promoted the study of Byzantium, working with colleagues including Professor Charlotte Roueché (whole period), Dr Dionysios Stathakopoulos (appointed 2005) and Dr Tassos Papacostas (appointed 2001 in Digital Humanities, 2006 in CHS), and visiting research fellows (see REF5). Out of the many public events they have organised and outputs they have produced (see REF3a), two monographs of Herrin have had particular impact.</p> <p>Herrin's 2001 book <i>Women in Purple</i> (3.1) examined the role of the women of the imperial families of Byzantium, comparing and contrasting their position with that of the female members of nearby dynasties in the medieval west and the Islamic caliphate. While parallels can be found for women transmitting imperial status and instituting religious foundations as family memorials, only in Byzantium did two women, Irene and Theodora, rule as emperors (rather than as queens). This book introduced comparative research drawing on gender studies to Byzantine history, and first made the functioning of the Byzantine court accessible and attractive to the wide readership, public as well as academic, interested in political history and gender studies in other periods.</p> <p>Herrin's 2007 <i>Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire</i> (3.2) provides an introduction to Byzantine history which draws together and expands Herrin's career-long research and publications. It explores the whole civilisation, from the foundation of Constantinople in AD 330 to its fall to the Ottomans in 1453, through 24 chapters arranged in chronological order but in an unconventional format. Each chapter focuses on an event, person, social practice, city or building or specific topic crucial to the historical characterisation of Byzantium, for example the reign of Basil II the Bulgar-slayer, the siege of 1453, Saints Cyril and Methodios, Anna Komnene, veneration of icons, use of the fork, the Ravenna mosaics, Mount Athos, literacy, eunuchs, the economy. Cumulatively these build to impart a broader and deeper understanding of what Byzantium was, and what it means today. Herrin stresses the strength and vitality of Byzantine cultural self-identity created by combining ancient Greek education and Roman law and administrative practices with Christian beliefs and values, and also its generally unrecognised openness to new ideas (e.g. hospitals for lepers) and technology (e.g. Greek fire). She brings out the extensive influence Byzantium had on medieval and early modern Europe, especially the Balkans and Russia, where Byzantine missionary work converted huge populations to Christianity in its Greek Orthodox form, and invented the Cyrillic alphabet. She also highlights Byzantium's remarkable tolerance and accommodation of different ethnicities and religions (e.g. provision of a</p>

mosque and synagogues in Constantinople).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1: J.E. Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, and Princeton University Press 2001; pbk edns Penguin and Princeton 2002; translated edns in Spanish (2002), Greek (2003), Czech (2004) and Polish (2005).

3.2: J.E. Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, Allen Lane (London) / Princeton University Press 2007; pbk edns Phoenix (London) 2008, Princeton 2009; translated edns in Italian and Greek (2008), Spanish and Dutch (2009), Swedish, Turkish, Korean and Polish (2010), Japanese (2011), German (2013) and Portuguese (Brazil, contracted).

Quality of outputs: both peer-reviewed for publication

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Throughout her career at King's, in concert with her colleagues (see REF3a), Herrin has taken every opportunity to promote public interest in and understanding of the world of Byzantium and its legacy to the modern world, through reviews, broadcasts, and lectures, seminars and conferences open to the public. The aim of her research and its dissemination has always been to challenge the traditionally negative public image of Byzantium: impenetrable bureaucracy ('byzantine'), elaborate court and religious rituals, intellectual and social rigidity, obscure religious and political disputes, fiscal oppression, political and military incompetence. Two recurrent themes have been to challenge traditional views that the position of women in Byzantium was restricted, and that the emergence of Byzantium marked the division of the Mediterranean world into west and east. Public reaction to her 2001 *Women in Purple*, reflected in its sales and translation into Czech, Greek, Polish and Spanish, gave a foretaste of the extraordinary and ongoing reach of and response to her 2007 *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*.

The spark to writing *Byzantium* was an encounter in King's with two builders who, seeing her office nameplate, asked Herrin what 'Byzantine Studies' was. In response Herrin devised the novel format of her book which, while maintaining intellectual rigour and a chronological organisation, eschews the normal political and military narrative with interspersed cultural sections in favour of a series of chapters on significant events, places, people and topics, designed to make the essence of Byzantium attractively accessible to a general reader. On publication it soon became apparent that the book was reaching far beyond the normal academic and academic-related audience. Reviews reflecting - and in themselves increasing - its impact appeared in newspapers across the world, from the *Toronto Star* on 23 March 2008 ('an armchair delight'), through the *Christian Science Monitor* on 12 February 2008 ('the author embraces the reader in the love of her subject'), to the *Kolkata Telegraph* on 1 February 2008 ('Herrin sets out to rescue Byzantium from its negative stereotype . . . she succeeds brilliantly') (5.1). Herrin took up many media opportunities to discuss and promote the book, in themselves indications of media perception of a growing public interest. For example, she was interviewed by Alvaro Condamar on the Spanish website of Random House Mondadori on 28 October 2009 (Mondadori has 160,014 followers), and three times by national Greek newspapers: *To Vima* on 2 November 2008 and 30 May 2010 (2010 circulation 116,000) and *Ta Nea* on 17 December 2008 (5.2). Herrin was asked to write an article for the *Wall Street Journal* of 11 March 2011 on how and why popular interest in Byzantium is now growing. To coincide with the Byzantium exhibition at the Royal Academy, Herrin was invited to write a full 45-minute programme (recorded on location in Istanbul) for the flagship Sunday Feature documentary on BBC Radio 3 on 19 October 2009 (average audience 75,000), which she focussed on Byzantium's crucial role in the transition of Europe to modernity (5.2). Public reaction is indicated by the existence of at least four pirated downloads of this programme on the web.

The extraordinary reach of Herrin's *Byzantium* is attested by the sales figures (only the hardback was available before 2008) to July 2013 which are exceptional for a book on ancient history, and a

Impact case study (REF3b)

very pleasant surprise to the original publishers (5.3): Penguin 8,108 hbk and 52,866 pbk (plus 954 e-book sales); Princeton UP 9,112 hbk and 7,337 pbk. (Registered UK public lending figures to 2011/12 total 3,646 borrowings.) Total sales of translated editions at dates before and up to end July 2013 include: Greek over 7,325; Italian 3,968; Polish 7,991; Japanese 2,260; Korean 2,156; Spanish 4,500. The number of translated editions - ten to date (Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish) - show the perception by publishers of a worldwide demand for this insight into Byzantium, attested also in messages from them to Herrin (5.3). For comparison, best-selling anglophone books on ancient history such as Scullard's *From the Gracchi to Nero* (1959) and Finley's *The Ancient Economy* (1973) have only appeared in a few foreign editions in the usual languages of classical scholarship (Scullard: Italian 1983; Finley: French 1975, German 1986, and Italian 2008).

The book has excited many individual responses by readers expressing their pleasure and surprise at discovering the 'secret' history of Byzantium, and how the book has made them want to know more and to visit the surviving monuments. One of the more than 50 reader responses on Amazon UK and US alone encapsulates the general tenor: 'Judith Herrin is apparently in love with Byzantium and she made me share her enthusiasm. A wonderful book about an unknown and underestimated part of our past and culture' (5.4). Herrin herself has received many letters and e-mails, which reveal the varied backgrounds and interests of her readership, ranging from a mining engineer in the sweltering Australian outback spending his breaks with a colleague 'talking about Byzantium and how much they enjoyed your book', to a PhD student in Inorganic Chemistry at Zurich, who wrote: 'I have never been particularly interested in history, but your book really woke up my curiosity and encouraged me to learn more about the Byzantine Empire. Besides it motivated me to visit two beautiful cities - Istanbul and Ravenna', and an American, who wrote: 'I have long had a large "blank spot" in my understanding of Western Civilization and History . . . I could never accept the contradictory description of Byzantium as a thoroughly corrupt, morally bereft, and decayed civilization that, nevertheless, lasted for more than 1,100 years! . . . the "blank spot" is now gone!' (5.5). Online discussion is exemplified by presentation of the book on the campaigning digital commons website Open Democracy as providing ideas for a possible post-national world where communities cope peacefully with ethnic, religious and cultural differences, what the writer bills as 'the strong contemporary resonance of Herrin's argument' (5.6).

In Greece Herrin was an invited speaker, because of her book, at the Forum Makedonias, Thessalonike, 19-20 November 2010, in a theatre packed with local entrepreneurs and media. This event was organised by the Tourist Office of Northern Greece, with support from the Ministry of Culture, to increase tourism to Thessalonike and the surrounding area. Herrin spoke about the medieval monuments and their importance. As reported in the local press, she explained, drawing on her book, how they could help tourism by exploiting growing popular positive appreciation of the particularly rich local Byzantine legacy (5.7).

The potential of Herrin's book to contribute to cultural rapprochement between Greece and Turkey is illustrated by its translation into Turkish with three print-runs and 1,488 sales (5.3), and reviews in three national newspapers (*Cumhuriyet*, *Gezgin*, *Zaman*), with comments such as (*Zaman*): 'Herrin . . . gives her readers a different perspective for looking at and understanding Istanbul with her book' (5.1). As an invited keynote lecturer at the World History Association at Sehir University, Istanbul, in November 2010, Herrin was invited to meet the Foreign Minister of Turkey, to whom she later gave copies of her book, and they discussed, and he supported, holding the next International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Istanbul. To capitalise on and carry forward this cultural dialogue, Papacostas and Rapti, colleagues of Herrin in the Centre for Hellenic Studies, have organised for autumn 2013 at King's, with the support of the British Institute at Ankara and the Turkish Embassy in London, a special series of five public lectures by Turkish researchers on the theme 'Bizans - new perspectives from Turkey in Byzantine studies' (5.8).

The principal impact of Herrin's *Byzantium* book of 2007 has been its creation of a greater worldwide knowledge and critical interest in the history and culture of Byzantium - with some impact on tourism - accompanied by a growing realisation at individual and community level that it offers a model of ethnic, cultural and religious accommodation bridging Europe and the Near East

which helps us think through current problems. The impact is sustainable for the foreseeable decade - the book is being reprinted, new translations are in the pipeline, online debates about the book's contents are continuing, and the lecture series of autumn 2013 is designed to stimulate further contacts and public events in Turkey as well as in the UK. Surprised at the unforeseen public response, Herrin now plans to trace more systematically the impact of her book on general perceptions of Byzantium and the reflections on the modern world which it is stimulating.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1: Copies of newspaper reviews and articles.*

5.2: Records of media interviews.*

BBC Radio 3 programme: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00f0yk0

5.3: Commented sales figures from publishers.*

5.4: Online responses by individual readers:

<http://www.amazon.com/Byzantium-Surprising-Life-Medieval-Empire/dp/0691143692>

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Byzantium-Surprising-Life-Medieval-Empire/dp/0691143692>

5.5: Letters and e-mails to Herrin from individual members of the public (PDFs of the three cited have been uploaded).*

5.6: Open Democracy discussion:

http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/byzantium_always_an_empire_never_a_nation

5.7: Report in local paper *Makedonia* on 23 November 2010.*

5.8: 'Bizans' lectures:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/chs/events/byzsem1314.aspx>

(*Copies of all sources are on file at King's and are available on request).