A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF CURATORIAL PRACTICES

Byzantine exhibitionary complexes in three European national museums

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Charts

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Abstract

This thesis presents three main arguments. First, that curating in national museums is a process of meaning making and that the exhibitionary meaning is situated in and mediated by culture, thus, the products of curatorial work, i.e. the ‘exhibitionary complexes’ are complex political and cultural constructions. Second, that the exhibitionary complexes’ final visual outcome, i.e. the exhibitionary complexes’ images and texts result in the presentation of ‘mythological’ constructs of Byzantium as the only ‘truth’ to their audiences. Third, that what is finally communicated through the presentation of ‘mythological’ constructs of Byzantium is ‘national’ identity and dominant cultural values. The latter is effected through the representation of the Byzantine Empire as part of the identity of the dominant cultural group of the country to which each national museum belongs.

‘National’ identity is communicated through the exhibitionary complexes, either by suggesting historical continuity of the contemporary ‘national’ identity of a country’s dominant cultural group through Byzantium, as in the case of the Greek national museums, or by undermining the very idea that Byzantine history, European history and British history are so very different, as in the case of the British Museum. Both interpretations are culturally constructed ‘realities’.

The above approaches are explained through the investigation of exhibitionary meaning around Byzantium, by identifying and analysing the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions that are involved in each museum’s curatorial practices. These presuppositions are the cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the
involved dominant cultural groups on Byzantium and on their own identity. My identification and analysis of these presuppositions includes research on the historical, political and cultural context of each museum, the ‘culturally accepted’ history and art history literature of each country on Byzantium, as well as research on museum archives.

By explaining and using the curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’, adopted and adapted to the practices of the museums under study, and by analysing the British and Greek interpretations of Byzantium, which make themselves apparent in the images and texts of the British and Greek ‘exhibitionary complexes’, I provide a cultural account of the making of exhibitionary meaning, explaining contemporary perceptions of Byzantium, its use in identity making and its relation to national politics.

By doing this, I also explain the implications of those presuppositions to the making of exhibitionary meaning, and I provide an explanation of how and why the power system of the exhibitionary complex is still in play although we are shifting into the era of the ‘Democratic’ museum (Fleming, 2008). The concluding remarks of the thesis include suggestions for the further development of the curatorial practices of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’.
My desire to understand and explain how Byzantine culture is interpreted today by different European national museums grew from my work experience in the cultural heritage sector in Greece. I became increasingly interested in the constructive role of cultural knowledge on issues relating to Byzantine culture and its links to Modern Greek culture and identity, as I realised that cultural knowledge was present in each attempt of cultural heritage professionals to reconstruct the past.

This is how I came up with this: My generation and previous generations were taught Byzantine history in our primary and secondary school curriculum as part of Greek history, with the aim of explaining to ‘us’ the evolution and final formation of ‘our’ ‘national identity’ through Byzantium. The historically disguised political constructs of ‘Hellenic Christianism’, the Byzantine ‘Omoaimon’ (Common blood), ‘omoglosson’ (common language), ‘omothriskon’ (common religion) and ‘omotropon’ (common way of doing things e.g. common traditions) and the ‘Great Idea’, (which will be explained in detail later in the thesis, but which essentially refer to the idea of a Hellenic ‘people’ or ‘ethnos’), were gradually incorporated into Greek ‘national’ historical narratives and the Greek national curriculum after the establishment of the Modern Greek state in 1832. In the 1980s, history schoolbooks started to be revised following specific revisionist practices. As a result, until the mid 1990s these constructs were gradually removed, as at this period of time, the Greek state considered them as too nationalistic. However, the contemporary beliefs, ideas and
values of Modern Greeks concerning their cultural and ‘national’ identity have been shaped as a result of the above.

As a conservator of works of art and museologist/curator, I have worked for several years in the cultural heritage sector in Greece, specialising in the conservation and curation of Byzantine antiquities. In the course of my work as conservator, I kept noticing that cultural heritage professionals were making efforts to exclude political constructs of the past from narrative texts presented in history-relating exhibition spaces. I was also noticing that the presence of the constructs mentioned above, in Byzantine archaeological sites and museums was ongoing, either in the form of references in accompanying texts, or in the visual outcome of the exhibition constructs.

Reflecting on my observations, I understood two things: First, that I was able to identify the Greek national historical narratives within the texts and visual images only because of my background cultural knowledge and second, that there is a combination of cultural memory and political power at play, due to which these narratives are still present in the textual and visual outcomes of curatorial work in Greece.

Nowadays, the contemporary curatorial concepts of ‘demystification’ and ‘democratisation’ are widely accepted within curatorial discourse and incorporated into the interpretive strategies of the museums, which I will be studying. Briefly, ‘democratisation’ as used in this context, suggests making exhibitions which are inclusive of and welcoming to a wide audience, providing equal opportunities for all to access exhibitions; and ‘demystification’ here means constructing exhibitions free of ‘myths’ (Barthes, 1972) and of deliberate manipulation of ideology-specific
exhibitionary messages. Nevertheless, these concepts are difficult to detect and understand when they are embedded or embodied in actual exhibitions.

The museums under study are the British Museum, London, U.K, the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, Greece and the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki, Greece. Undoubtedly, the British Museum has a dominant academic and intellectual role in museum and curatorial studies. What makes the British Museum particularly important for the present study, apart from its dominant role in the museum world is that it dedicated a separate space of its permanent display to the Byzantine Empire only recently, in 2014. However, as shown in its archives, the main volume of the collection as we know it today was formulated mainly in the 1980s. Hence, curatorial practices around Byzantium in the British Museum were formulated in the 1980s, but have been revised only in 2014. This indicates a change in the current curatorial understanding of Byzantium and gives the present study the opportunity to analyse and explain the current curatorial ideas and beliefs on Byzantine history and art, as communicated through its exhibitionary complex.

As the dominant cultural group in Greece explicitly sees Greece as the modern heir of Byzantine culture, the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens and the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki have their own, distinct input into the representation of the past culture of Byzantium. It is worth mentioning that the museum in Athens re-exhibited its early Christian and Byzantine collections in 2004, and its post-Byzantine collections in 2010. Also, the museum in Thessaloniki has been awarded the Council of Europe's Museum Prize in 2005. The reasons why it was necessary for more than one Byzantine Museum to be established in Greece are purely ideological. As archival research revealed there was even competition between
the two big Greek cities (Athens, the capital and Thessaloniki, the co-capital) for the establishment of a Byzantine museum within the centre of each. This competition reveals the perceived necessity and importance that museums, which exhibit and explain the art and culture of Byzantium, have for Greece. Hence, Byzantine heritage for Greece is not just about conserving the past; it is also very much about the cultural identity of Greece in the present and the future.

These are the reasons that made me realise that the nature of curatorship is contingent, and not free from cultural and political presuppositions and that these presuppositions have immediate symbolic and practical implications in the museum exhibitions. Having the experience of that in a practical sense I decided to conduct the present study, in the prospect that its outcome will contribute to the understanding of the meaning making process in national museums, and will have practical implications for other museum curators and cultural heritage professionals in general.
**Introduction**

**What is this thesis about?**

This thesis is about the different representations of Byzantine culture and art as constructed within the different ‘exhibitionary complexes’ of three European national museums through the use and application of traditional and contemporary curatorial practices and concepts. The museums under study are the British Museum in London, U.K, the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, Greece and the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, Greece. This thesis will explain how these curatorial practices and concepts are adopted and adapted to the interpretive practices, curatorial strategies and policies of each museum. Specifically, it will investigate the contemporary curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’. As explained in the Preface, ‘democratisation’ suggests making exhibitions which are inclusive of and welcoming to a wide audience, providing equal opportunities for all to access exhibitions; and ‘demystification’ here means constructing exhibitions free of ‘myths’ (Barthes, 1972) and of deliberate manipulation of ideology-specific exhibitionary messages.

In the context of each museum’s different national, cultural and political framework this thesis will analyse and explain the constructed notion of Byzantine culture as a product of the interaction between cultural knowledge on Byzantium and national museum curatorial practices and discourse. Its special focus will be on issues of identity making and nation-building. More specifically, I will argue that curating is a process of meaning making by looking at exhibitionary meaning as necessarily
situated in and mediated by culture, in terms of constructing exhibitionary meaning with museum objects and texts.

My argument will contribute to the debate on national museums and the making of exhibitionary meaning in relation to the making of nation, identity, empire and religion, and consequently, to the understanding of the current politics of identity making in the different cultural contexts of the museums under study. Equally, it will contribute to the understanding of the uses of Byzantine history, culture and art in the construction of present-day European identity(ies). However, most importantly, what my thesis will add to curatorial scholarship is a cultural account of the making of exhibitionary meaning, which is missing from current curatorial and museum studies literature. I argue that the cultural account for the making of exhibitionary meaning is fundamental to an understanding of the reasons for the non-democratic, non-demystified representation of historical events and world cultures currently - although we are shifting into the era of the ‘Democratic’ museum (Fleming, 2008; Fleming and Chamberlain, 2011). Furthermore, my thesis will contribute to Byzantine Studies literature by identifying the current ideologies of Byzantine culture and art through the interpretation of museum institutions, which belong to different cultural and political settings.

The Byzantine Empire or Byzantium, the dominant Empire of the Eastern Mediterranean existed between 330 AD and 1453 AD. As it will be thoroughly explained in this thesis, Byzantine scholars and museums have explained Byzantium in many different ways through the centuries, and as a result, various interpretations exist concerning the origin and meaning of its culture, art and traditions. Much debate surrounds this question, as well as the question of the incorporation of
Byzantine history, culture and art into post-Byzantine European national-historical narratives and as an extension to this, their contemporary use in national policies. However, while there is little doubt that Byzantium made an immense contribution to Europe, there is much debate around what that contribution is and what it means.

The representation of past cultures in national museums is a complex subject, constantly changing, combining intellectual and curatorial fashions, cultural presuppositions, national and global politics, while making an effort to maintain a grasp on historical ‘truth’. The past culture of the Byzantine Empire, or Byzantium, is reconstructed and represented in the different ‘exhibitionary complexes’ of the national museums under study.

I borrow the term ‘exhibitionary complex’ from Tony Bennett (1995) in order to define the particular things I am interested in looking at in the museum exhibitions. Briefly, the ‘exhibitionary complex’ contains the objects on display and the exhibition narratives as they are constructed by the museum through texts, designs and photographs in the object labels and introductory panels of the exhibition. However, the term ‘exhibitionary complex’ apart from signifying the visual elements of the display, is also indicative of museum power relations and incorporates the notion of ‘exhibition as a practice’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet, 2006, p. 37); exhibition as a practice, with all its cultural and political extensions, power relations, as well as communication and interpreting agents, is exactly what concerns the present study: its focus is principally on the curatorial practice(s) of the national museums under study.
Curatorial practice and the making of exhibitionary meaning

This thesis will present curatorial practice as a process of meaning making, in which interaction between the cultural presuppositions of each ‘national’ culture and the museum exhibition development process plays a central role. Presuppositions are highly influential in the process of meaning making; they are the basis for interpreting and constructing meaning. In the present study, the term ‘presuppositions’ refers to the set of cultural ideas, beliefs and values concerning the interpretation of Byzantine culture and art that are fixed in the minds of the dominant cultural group, or better, the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991) of each country, and also concern the identity and nature of the ‘imagined community’ of each country to which the museums/museum curators belong.

Here I say ‘imagined community’ following Anderson’s (1991) concept of ‘nation’ as a group of people who perceive, and construct themselves as part of that group, which would form the ‘culture’ and the ‘nation’ in each country. In other words, given that each country contains many different cultures, including a ‘national’ culture, by the term ‘imagined community’ I refer to a socially constructed community, imagined or constructed by those people who claim to represent the ‘correct’ national culture in each country. More strongly, I refer to ‘an imagined political community –and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’ (Anderson, 1991, p. 6), which constructs its identity, its ‘national’ identity, based on ideas, values and beliefs of who they think they are (i.e. a unitary or dominant ‘self’ which in this case would mean the ‘same’) and consequently, of who they think they are not (thereby implicitly creating and excluding the different, which in this case would also mean the ‘other’).
Derrida’s (1992) concept of identity/difference enables an understanding of this contradiction: for Derrida (1992) no identity is closed and pure; it is always made possible by what it excludes and hence identity is in part constituted by what it opposes, the different, the ‘other’. The ‘other’ is contained within identity as the condition of its possibility. Briefly, this means that there are different elements combined within an identity, and that the ‘same’ is a combination of identity and difference characterised by a concurrent repeatability and differentiality. The imagined community in each country (re)constructs its identity, through the combination of the different elements combined within its identity, which they claim to consist of the ‘correct’ national identity in each country. The use of the prefix (re) as in (re)presentation (as well as (re)construction/(re)production, which will be used throughout the thesis) will function as a reference to the repeatability and differentiality of each imagined community’s ideas, values and beliefs concerning its own identity as well as that of Byzantium within the exhibitionary complexes’ images and texts.

I argue that the national museum exhibitionary complex could be seen as an illustration of Derrida’s (1992) account: the (re)construction of ‘national’ identity/Byzantium within the national museum institutional framework would be based on ideas of ‘own’ identity, i.e. the ‘same’ and ‘other’. Hence, in the framework of the national museum exhibitionary complex, the (re)construction of ‘national’ identity, would be based on the ideas, values and beliefs of the imagined community that each museum belongs to: on who each imagined community thinks it is and who it thinks it is not. For this reason, it is expected that the exhibitionary complexes
(re)construct and (re)produce cultural values, ideas and beliefs on national identity and Byzantium through their visual and verbal representations.

In my argument I understand that the imagined community’s identity/Byzantium is (re)constructed within, and communicated through the national museum exhibitionary complex. One might expect the claim to be that the group of curators/museum professionals are constructing the exhibitionary complex/meaning and that it is therefore the group of curators/museum professionals who (re)construct identity. However, I am saying that this meaning making is achieved through the exhibitionary complex in order to incorporate in the notion of curatorial work the ideas that (a) the individual curator/museum professional or the group of curators/museum professionals in each museum are a product or products of the culture/society that always pre-exists them and (b) curators and culture/society as mutually constitutive. Thus, I conceive of and explain the curators as part of the imagined community of each country and I conceive of their work as having the effects of (re)constructing identity/Byzantium, of (re)constructing meaning.

I find Giddens’ (1979) concept of structuration helpful here, as well as drawing on Wolff (1981) and Foucault (1990), all of which I will thoroughly explain below. Briefly, the culture/society (structure) is always constituted by individuals’ thinking, acting, and interacting in specific ways, and the individuals (agency) - in my example, the curators - are always already within a system of social relationships that produce them and define the opportunities they deal with. This means that the culture/society (structures) shape the making of exhibitionary meaning and that curators (human agents) are not making this (re)construction of identity within the exhibitionary complex in a completely unconstrained way. Human thought and practices are
therefore shaped by underlying powerful structures (culture/society) and the powerful structures, which always pre-exist individual agency (curators), form the environments and contexts in which curators have agency in the making of meaning. In my example, the making of meaning is curating, and therefore, the exhibitionary complex is the product of curatorial work. Hence, the exhibitionary complex is the product of the interaction between curating (curatorial thought-work, practices) and culture - what will be explained in Chapter One as the ‘curatorial’ (Lind, 2009); The exhibitionary complex is the end product and effect of the productive micro-powers and relations that make up the national museum institution and the positions of the curators within the national museum institution.

Consequently, the exhibitionary complex, the product of curatorial work is the curator’s reproduction of themselves, in interaction with others through culture/society, which always pre-exists them. Following Derrida’s (1992) account, the (re)construction of ‘national’ identity within the exhibitionary complex would be a product of difference (own identity, the same and other), as a structure of differences would always pre-exist the curators. This is also the reason why the exhibitionary complexes are actually expected to reflect the culturally accepted interpretations of the history, art and culture of the Byzantine Empire, and this is why the present study will examine the exhibitionary complexes’ structures instead of for example, of curators’ ‘intentions’: because it sees curators (human agents) and culture/society (structures) as inseparable and in constant and mutual interaction. For the very same reason, in the present thesis, I will refer to the (re)presentation of identity/Byzantium within the exhibitionary complexes’ images and texts, as a (re)construction/(re)production of cultural ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined
community on its ‘own’ identity/Byzantium. Giddens (1979), Foucault (1990) and Wolff (1981), all provide useful theoretical frameworks or ‘tools’ in this analysis.

Following Wolff’s (1981) account of the relation between human agents and social structure, for example, it could be said that curatorship as practical activity, or better as practice ‘is in mutual relation of interdependence with social structures’ (Wolff, 1979, p.9). This means that the practice of curators/museum professionals (curators/museum professionals are what Giddens (1979, p. 49) would call ‘human agents’ or ‘subjects’), is affected by and also depends on the social and cultural structures/institutions and vice versa: both agency and structure/institutions are considered from within a common formulation in the sense that ‘the notions of action and structure presuppose one another’ Giddens (1979, p. 53). Institutions are the most ‘deeply-layered practices constitutive of social systems’ (Giddens 1979, p. 65). Here, social systems are seen as a ‘structured totality’ in the sense that Giddens (1979, p. 64) explains them: ‘they are not structures in themselves’, but they ‘have structures or more accurately, they have structural properties’. The structural properties can be understood as ‘rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems’, which are essentially ‘providing the binding of time and space in social systems’ (Giddens, 1979, p. 64). However, the practices and rules/resources only exist in combination with one another as the social systems are ‘systems of interaction’ and ‘as such, they involve the situated activities of human subjects and exist syntagmatically in the flow of time’ (Giddens, 1979, p. 66). Giddens (1979) explains that systems exist syntagmatically, i.e. in actual patterned relations in time-space, but structures, exist paradigmatically ‘as an absent set of differences temporally “present”, only in their instantiation in the constituting moments of social
systems’ (Giddens, 1979, p. 64), i.e. in virtual relations that exist outside of time-space, but which become actual (the paradigmatic becomes syntagmatic) through a process that Giddens (1979) calls ‘structuration’. In this process both systems and structures necessitate each other and structures are recursively dependent upon the systems. It is in this sense that structure is in a process of generation, reproduction, and transformation.

In my argument I conceive of and explain the individual curator or the group of curators/museum professionals as part of the imagined community and their (meaning-making) work as the (re)production/(re)construction of the imagined community, and hence, I also understand and explain the exhibitionary complex as having the effects of constructing identity. The (re)construction of the imagined community’s identity is made in relation to what Derrida (1992) would call the different, the ‘other’: the curators (re)produce the imagined community’s identity in the interaction with others through each imagined community’s sociocultural structures/institutions, which always pre-exist them. Hence, the sociocultural institutions define curatorial meaning making process and practices. In the national museum institution, the making of exhibitionary meaning, would interact with sociocultural institutions including the national museum’s specific institutional conditions, e.g. curatorial agenda/institutional meaning making practices/policies), i.e. the museum’s micro-power(s), what Foucault (1990) calls ‘power from below’ (Foucault, 1990, p. 94). This means that the curators would not intentionally choose the specific exhibitionary meaning and this is why earlier I referred to the exhibitionary complex, and not the curators, seeing that the group of curators is
applying generative rules and resources, which are subject to the museum’s micro-
power(s), and which can result in ‘unintended’ outcomes.

However, the sociocultural structure ‘is not to be conceptualised as a barrier
to action, but as essentially involved in its production’ (Giddens, 1979, p. 70). In other
words, the sociocultural structure is the condition for, rather than a barrier to, agency
and action, i.e. understanding, interpretation and production. The curatorial action or
practice would be the process of the making of exhibitionary meaning, which results
in the (re)construction of the ‘national’ identity. (Here, by saying the ‘national’
identity, I suggest that national identity is a (re)construction of the imagined
community’s identity. It is the identity that the imagined community (re)produces as
the only true identity). The sociocultural structure would not be a limit to this action
because it engages with the existence of:

(a) knowledge, -as memory traces- of how things are to be done’ (said, written), on
the part of social actors; (b) social practices organised through the recursive
mobilisation of that knowledge; (c) capabilities that the production of these practices
presupposes (Giddens, 1979 p. 64).

Hence, knowledge provides the basis on which human agents both
understand and transform the rules around them through structures. In the example
of the exhibitionary complex, it could be said that knowledge provides the basis on
which curators understand and transform the set of cultural ideas, beliefs and values
of each imagined community as ‘resources’ concerning the interpretation of
Byzantine culture, i.e. the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices around the
making of exhibitionary meaning of Byzantium in the different cultural frameworks of
each museum under study. Curators draw upon the different cultural/social structures of each imagined community to perform social actions through embedded memory or what Giddens (1979) calls ‘memory traces’. Hence, memory traces are the apparatus through which social/ cultural actions are materialised and hence the vehicle through which curation (the making of exhibitionary meaning) is carried out. Structure is also, however, the result of these social practices. Hence, curators would be counted as reflexive knowledgeable actors. In this process the structures are not functioning as a limit upon the curators, but as enabling/facilitating curatorial work and agency. This is why in this thesis the study of the structure is considered central to the identification explanation of curatorial action, or else the making of exhibitionary meaning.

However, the curatorial work is also understood and explained in terms of power; of ‘power, as transformative capacity’, which ‘can be related to the interaction in a dual sense: as involved institutionally in process of interaction and as used to accomplish outcomes in strategic conduct’ (Giddens, 1979, p. 88). This means, that the identities and meanings that are constructed within the exhibitionary complex in interaction with the set of cultural ideas, beliefs and values of each imagined community on Byzantium and the museum specific policies are used politically.

In the framework of the national museum, I understand that the exhibitionary complexes are used to enhance national politics. The ‘transformative’, or ‘productive’ element that Giddens (1979) identifies will be explained through the Foucauldian concept of power/knowledge. As Foucault (1990) explains power is everywhere and comes from everywhere and as power is productive, the making of exhibitionary meaning would be the result of museum power relations (the Foucauldian concept of
power/knowledge will be introduced below and thoroughly explained in Chapter One). Power, which is not simply embedded in structures/structural relations, but rather constituted through curatorial practice, also pre-exists the curators/museum professionals and the curators/museum professionals do their work as a result of those structures/structural relations. In other words, their individual work or agency is made possible by the powerful structures and they transform the structures as they work in them. Hence, the (re) construction of identity within the exhibitionary complexes, which is the result of curatorial action or practice, interacts with the imagined community’s values, ideas and beliefs on its ‘own’ identity/Byzantium and the museum (micro-) power(s) relations. The Foucauldian account of productive (micro-) power(s) is the condition for the possibility of the appearance and experience of power as possessed and wielded by the curators. In the case of the national museums, the appearance and experience of the exerting of power by curators is a product of the micro-practices in the choices of exhibition material (museum objects/texts).

However, as Foucault (1990) explains, power operates always in relation to resistance: ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). The (re)production of the ideological constructions (the national identity/Byzantium) within the exhibitionary complex is a product of power as well as resistance. Resistance is engaging with agents (curators) who are both the vehicles of power, and its target. Power is originally a network of relations, not something that is simply possessed by an individual or a group of individuals. Hence, there is no identifiable individual who exercises power. As explained above, structures (culture, society) exert their power on groups and individuals (curators), and the groups and individuals
(curators), affirm their own identity as well as resistance to the effects of power. Resistance then, is understood as a condition and a result.

The exhibitionary complex, apart from being a product of culture (a cultural-ideological, or ‘mythical’ construct) is also a product of curatorial research and is also informed by the latest curatorial ‘currents’; what I understand and explain as borrowed curatorial concepts/practices, i.e. a curatorial (re)construction of concepts/practices or curatorial ‘bricolage’, into which the curatorial concepts/practices of democratisation and demystification fit into. The term curatorial ‘bricolage’ will be thoroughly explained in Chapter One, but, I briefly explain here, that it is the practice of the museums to borrow, (re)combine and assemble curatorial ideas to adapt them to their own practice(s) and finally, form a new curatorial idea, which results in a new practice. Resistance is present in specific forms of interaction between curators, i.e. their curatorial ideas-practices and culture (structures), and this (inter) action, is situated in a certain time (e.g. ‘the present’), space (British Museum; Byzantine and Christian Museum; Museum of Byzantine Culture) and set of relations (each museum’s micro-power relations or ‘power from below’): I see the practice of curatorial bricolage as an act of resistance towards the powerful structures. And I understand and explain that the outcome of the curatorial is never totally successful because ‘resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power’ (Foucault, 1990, p. 95) and because, as explained above, power is the condition for the reproduction of identity; it attaches the agency to its own identity. This is why I argue that in practice democratisation and demystification are incompatible or in conflict with certain policies or practices of the culture as exemplified in its museum/cultural
policy, and I will demonstrate this in my analysis of the museum exhibitionary complexes in Chapter Three.

The representation of European identity(ies) through Byzantium

By understanding the relation of cultural ideas, beliefs and values to the exhibitionary meaning making processes, and by analysing and explaining the meanings of Byzantium as presented within each exhibitionary complex under study, I will argue that in all three museums the exhibitionary complexes use Byzantium to communicate aspects of each imagined community’s identity. I will argue that Byzantine history, culture and art are used for the explanation of the identity of the ‘nation’ and the (dominant) ‘culture’ of the country to which each museum belongs (i.e. Britain, Greece), and for the promotion of the desired image of the corresponding ‘nation’ (i.e. British, Greek). This meaning is presented as ‘natural’ and hence as the only ‘truth’.

One might expect that European national museums would present a ‘unified’ narrative of European identity. I say one might expect, as with the 1992 Maastricht treaty, European social/political identity aimed to become unified. More particularly, here, I refer to the establishment of social/political unity: the 1992 Maastricht treaty did not only aim to increase the social dimension of the union. As Griveaoud (2011) explains, it also aimed at developing ‘a new political comprehensiveness because the EU was now acknowledging the fact that it was one entity, which was formed by and worked for the citizens, rather than a body composed of different states, driven by their national interests’ –their different, and in some cases conflicting national interests. Educational exchanges have been encouraged, aiming to overcome cultural differences through mutual respect for diversity for example. As will be shown in the
different exhibitionary complexes under study, the different European cultures are presenting their national identities within a notion of Europe, but also, they resist ‘unification’ (another illustration of such resistance in the present, could be the rise of populism/populist and nationalistic political ‘parties’ across the EU). The contemporary European identity is actually consisting of different European/national identities resisting ‘unification’. Post-Maastricht Europe, as Lützeler (1994, p.9) explains, is a highly contradictory (but dynamic) post-modern structure. Social and cultural change in the EU today might be (and in fact, is) accelerated, but identity has been disrupted by unemployment, violence, migration, nationalism (Lützeler, 1994) – in the present, even more severely than in the past. What has been intended as (the development of a) European identity in 1992, is today European identities, hence the use of ‘identity (ies)’ in the title of this section. This is the reason why, the interpretation of Byzantium/identity as effected in the exhibitionary complexes of European national museums is of special interest in the present. Although there are other significant Byzantine exhibitions internationally, there are other museums outside Europe, in Turkey (Istanbul Archaeological Museum) and America (Metropolitan Museum of Art), for example, that have presented or present Byzantium, I am using the European ones chosen here, because there is already cultural difference and political national interest on display, without going outside Europe. In addition, the chosen exhibitionary complexes, may be seen as illustrative of the current political and cultural transformations in Europe. The focus of the present study is on contemporaneous exhibitionary complexes of different, European national museums, that, as will be shown have the effect of (re)constructing a
narrative of national identity, a narrative of ‘same’ and ‘other’ through Byzantium, within a notion of Europe.

In the British Museum exhibitionary complex, Byzantium is presented as the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east and is placed within the narrative of British history and European history. However, the parallel narration of these histories serves the museum's interpretation of Modern British identity: primarily presented as Anglo-Saxon and hence, English, Anglican, as well as European. At the same time it reflects the British colonial and imperial ideology of the past: British history is presented as dominant, European history is presented as complementary to the British and Byzantine history is presented as subordinate, ‘different’, ‘other’ to European and to British identity.

In the Greek museums, Byzantium is presented as the continuation of Greek antiquity and it incorporates the ‘national’ historical narrative of the continuity of Greek national history from antiquity to the present time. This will be explained in Chapter Two, but I consider it important to introduce it here, as it essentially refers to the reflection of the Greek national(istic) ideology of the past, according to which the Modern Greek culture is placed in continuity with Byzantium, Byzantium is placed in continuity with Classical Greek antiquity, and this serves as a ‘proof’ of the Greek national unity. In other words, the ‘national’ historical narrative wants to represent Modern Greek identity as resulting from Byzantium and Classical Greek antiquity. Byzantium is also presented as having contributed to the Renaissance and this serves as ‘proof’ of both the continuity of Greek identity from ancient Greece to the present through Byzantium, and the European nature of the Modern Greek identity.
Byzantium here is presented as part of the Modern Greek identity, which is presented as ancient Greek, Byzantine, Orthodox as well as European.

Hence, in all the national museum exhibitionary complexes under study Byzantium is used in different constructions and (re)presents the imagined community of the country to which they belong. Using the Foucauldian theory of power and knowledge, I will explain how these (re)presentations function within the national museum framework having the effect of achieving a political agenda of cultural domination. And using the Barthesian theory of ‘myth’ (Barthes, 1972) I will explain the ideological nature of each imagined community’s underlying ‘myths’ of Byzantium, identity, nation, and religion. By doing this, I will contribute to a range of recent scholarly debates concerning:

a) the contribution of Byzantium to the construction of modern European identity(ies) (e.g. Herrin, 2007; Ahrweiler, 2012; Pyrovolaki, 2012; Cameron, 2014; Stathakopoulos, 2014),

b) the so-called ‘turn’ of museums from the 19th and 20th century model of ‘institutions of power’ to contemporary ‘democratic’ institutions (e.g. Cummings and Lewandowska, 2000; Szwaja and Ybarra Frausto, 2006; Kratz and Karp, 2006; Fleming, 2008; Hein, 2010; Barrett, 2011; Black, 2012; Smith, 2012; O’Neil, 2012; Hein, 2012).

The latter will be achieved by providing an explanation why, despite the efforts of national museums’ to democratise their offerings, curating still (re)constructs the ideology or ‘myth’ (Barthes, 1972) of the ‘national’, which in itself is inclusive of a dominant identity, i.e. the same and exclusive of the ‘other’ and hence, is incompatible with the rhetoric of the ‘democratic’. For this, I will investigate the curatorial concepts/practices of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’, which have
become incorporated into the curatorial practice(s) of contemporary national museums around the world and are used in the construction of their exhibitionary complexes. By using these concepts, I will explain that the exhibitionary complex, as well as being a product of culture/power (a cultural-ideological, or 'mythical' construct) is also a product of curatorial research and is informed by the latest curatorial 'currents'. What will be articulated here is the way in which the discourse/practices of democratisation and demystification are products of 'curatorial bricolage' i.e. a curatorial (re)construction of concepts and practices into which 'democratisation' and 'demystification' fit and which serve a specific function. The explanation the function of 'curatorial bricolage' within the exhibitionary meaning-making process will be done in Chapter One and will illuminate an understanding of the conditions that allow the (re)production/(re)construction of a specific, 'unitary' and therefore 'undemocratic' national identity within the final visual outcome (i.e. images and texts) of the national museum exhibitionary complex.

By asking: 'how do the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices construct the different representations of Byzantine culture in the European national museums under study and what are the cultural and political implications of those representations?' I will examine the choices of the museums in exhibitionary content and meaning and I will analyse curatorial issues in the construction of identity(ies). Particularly, I will investigate the use of Byzantine culture and art in relation to the construction of European identity(ies) within the different cultural contexts of the museums under study.

More strongly, in this thesis I will argue that in the national museum exhibitionary complexes under study the selection of a particular exhibition material
and meaning of Byzantium over another is made according to the values, ideas and beliefs of each imagined community on its own identity.

Drawing on Derrida’s (1990) account of identity/difference, it could be said that the question of who, or what represents ‘otherness’ or the rationale of the same is complicated, as each is necessarily tangled up with the other. But then, it could also be said that the question is not what we are, or what we were, but rather what we will become. This will be answered by analysing the museums’ interpretations, which use national historical narratives attempting to explain the identity of the imagined community of each country, based on who the imagined community were, and who they are, (by separating ‘themselves’ from the ‘others’) -thus, contributing to a future imagined community, through the (re)production/(re)construction of the ideology of a national identity. In other words, by analysing an imagined/constructed past and the (re)construction of an imagined/constructed present through the exhibitionary complexes, I will provide insights into the conditions of the possibility of an imagined/constructed future – to put it better of a (re)imagined/(re)constructed future. Having identified and explained what contributes to the (re)construction of the ideology or ‘myth’ (Barthes, 1972) of the ‘national’ will enable me to offer a suggestion on the ways that the practices of democratisation and demystification could be further developed, in order to reinforce the museums’ democratic ‘turn’ and form the basis of the making of the ‘Democratic’ museum.

Why Byzantium?

Byzantium is ‘an under-theorised field as well as an under-studied one’ (Cameron, 2014, p. 6). As a result, there are several interpretations around it, which
give rise to ambiguity. This ambiguity mainly derives from diverse and mutually exclusive explanations of (a) the origin(s) of Byzantine culture and art and (b) Byzantium’s contribution to the formation of Europe (including its contribution to the formation of modern European nations and boarders and also, its influences on the construction of modern European identity). Here, I consider it crucial to an understanding of Byzantium today to thoroughly explain how the understanding of Byzantium has changed throughout time, and why.

Recent interpretations of Byzantium’s origin(s) have resulted in new understandings of its contribution to the construction of European identity, which underpin its culture and history. Yet, today, it is thought that Byzantium:

[...] has played a significant role in shaping the post-Roman medieval world, serving as a crucial bulwark against the expansion of Islam into Europe, influencing forms of kingship and political ideology in the West and spreading Christianity and the Cyrillic alphabet to the Slavic speaking Eastern Europe (Aberystwyth University, 2016).

Briefly, in the spirit of the 19th century romantic nationalism, the origin of Byzantine culture was explained through the then newly formulated scholarship of Greek-Byzantine national history. As will be explained in Chapter Two, in the 19th century, Byzantium was commonly understood as the continuity of the ancient Greek past (in terms of language and cultural traditions): it was presented as a Greek Empire and was placed in the Greek history timeline. From the late 1950s to the late 1980s, when western historians re-discovered Byzantium, different interpretations of its origin(s) were given. A dominant interpretation at the time was that Byzantium is heir to Classical Greek and Roman cultures, Christian in religion but eastern in
outlook (e.g. Vasiliev, 1958; Norwich, 1989). This interpretation is indicative of the paradox or complexity of Byzantium: Christian morals combined with the pagan Classical Greek and Roman past. Due to this complexity, Byzantium had once again been marginalised, ignored and finally forgotten by western scholars, until recently.

Today, Byzantine scholars argue that Byzantium was crucial in the maintenance of the 19th century Classical ideal, which is so central to the creation of modern European identity (e.g. Cameron, 2014; Stathakopoulos, 2014; Ahrweiler, 2012; Pyrovolaki, 2012; Herrin, 2007); but equally, they argue that it was instrumental in the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, and subsequently, to the end of the ancient Greek religion, practices and art (e.g. Cameron, 2014; Stathakopoulos, 2014; Ahrweiler, 2012; Pyrovolaki, 2012; Herrin, 2007). Hence, it can be said that Byzantium is neither a continuation of the Classical Greek culture nor a continuation of the Roman culture, although it has inherited elements of both. It is broadly accepted that the Byzantine Empire had developed a distinctive society under its Emperors, Patriarchs, and all-pervasive bureaucracy that was Greek in language, Roman in legal system, and Christian in religion (Jeffreys, Haldon and Cormack, 2008; also, Ahrweiler, 2012; Pyrovolaki, 2012). However, as Cormack (2000) explains, some contemporary art historians still see Byzantine art either as ‘the continuation of Greco-Roman art’, or at the opposite standpoint, they put ‘the greatest emphasis on discontinuity with antiquity’ (Cormack, 2000, p. vi). The many different interpretations and explanations can all be supported by argument and evidence and I will explain these in Chapter Two.

Byzantium however, is now, more than ever, at the centre of scholars’ attention (e.g. Herrin, 2007; Cameron, 2014; Stathakopoulos; 2014; Kaldelis, 2015) and
museum’s attention e.g. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Glory of Byzantium, 1997; The Royal Academy of Arts, Byzantium 330-1453, 2008-9; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Byzantium: Faith and Power, 2004; and Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 2012; The J. Paul Getty Museum and National Gallery of Art, Washington, Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections, 2013; and 2014. There are four main reasons for this.

1. The first reason is that Byzantium has recently been thought of as the ancestor of Europe and acknowledged as ‘the missing link in the wider public’s understanding of the European cultural narrative, of the transition from the classical world to Renaissance and modernity’ (Manginis, 2009, p. 12). However, it is not the first time that this particular idea has been put forward. This idea had first come up when Byzantium started to be re-discovered in the late 1950s. The debate at the time was around the influence(s) of Byzantium on the Italian Renaissance. Following the then dominant beliefs on Byzantium’s origins, the influences of Byzantium were frequently reduced to influences of the Medieval Byzantine-Greek traditions. This is why Vasiliev (1958) in his response to the debate hastens to clarify, that:

In considering what influence was exerted on the Italian Renaissance by the Medieval Greek tradition in general and by the Byzantine Greeks in particular, it is important to remember that it was not interest in and acquaintance with classical antiquity that called forth the Renaissance in Italy. On the contrary, the conditions of Italian life, which evoked and developed the Renaissance, were the real cause of the rise of interest in antique culture (Vasiliev, 1958, p. 713).
Vasiliev (1958) opposes the dominant beliefs of ‘some historians’ of the mid 19th century (Vasiliev, 1958, p. 173), which were also commonly shared beliefs among his contemporaries, and which wanted the Italian Renaissance ‘to have been called forth by the Greeks who fled from Byzantium to Italy before the fall of Constantinople in 1453’ (Vasiliev, 1958, p. 713). He supports, the notion that the Renaissance did not happen because of the cultural and artistic ideas that the Byzantine Greeks (or the Medieval Greeks) brought with them at the time. According to Vasiliev (1958) it wasn’t by them that the interest in antique culture had been triggered. Vasiliev (1958) explains that there were two problems in the understanding of the Byzantine influences. First, ‘the understanding of the influence of the Medieval Greek tradition upon the Renaissance’ and second ‘the influence of the Byzantine Greeks upon the Renaissance’ (Vasiliev, 1958, p. 173). This shows two things; first how unclear the ideas about the Greek or not-so Greek Byzantium were: Vasiliev (1958) refers to Byzantine influence by either calling it the ‘influence of the Medieval Greek traditions’ or the ‘influence of Byzantine Greeks’-, and second how well established among Byzantinists, was the idea that Byzantium had influenced the Renaissance. The object however, of Vasiliev’s (1958) argument, was not whether Byzantium had indeed influenced the Renaissance; this was taken for granted. His question was: ‘what sort of Greeks were those whose names are connected with the epoch of the earlier Renaissance, i.e. the fourteenth century and the very beginning of the fifteenth?’ (Vasiliev, 1958, pp. 713); this question refers to the Greek intellectuals who migrated to the west (mainly to Venice and Italy) in the period between 1204 (year of the fourth crusade) and 1453 (year of the fall of Byzantium). The idea however that Byzantium had influenced the Renaissance was soon overlooked. Consequently, to
most modern art historians Fra Angelico’s work is seen as influenced by Gothic traditions (e.g. Palladino, Schmidt and Kanter, 2005, p. 49) as well as Greek and Roman traditions (e.g. Fossi, 2001, 302), while Giotto’s subject matters are usually unilaterally examined for their attention to human detail (e.g. Cunningham, Reich and Fincher-Rathus, 2015, p. 327).

Today, Omissi (2016) re-examines Byzantium’s contribution to the transition from the classical world to the Renaissance. He takes Vasari’s (1912) definition of the Renaissance only to explain that ‘Vasari’s very emphasis on the ways in which the artists of his own day had surpassed the Greek models indicates just how deep was Byzantine influence on Italy’s artistic culture’ (Omissi, 2016). According to Vasari (1912-14, cited in Omissi, 2016), the Renaissance developed out of the rejection of ‘that clumsy Greek style (quella greca goffa maniera)’ [by this Vasari means the Byzantine style], which resulted in ‘the creation of a new naturalism that captured the human form in ways not known before’ (Vasari 1912-14, cited in Omissi, 2016). In support of his argument, Omissi (2016) compares Giotto’s Pietà (Fig. 1 below) with the frescoes of the late Byzantine church of St Panteleimon in Gorno Nerezi, FYROM (Fig. 2 below) that were patronised by the imperial family and completed by artists from Constantinople in the twelfth century.
Omissi (2016) explains that:

‘Giotto himself surely never saw this image, the comparison with his own however is striking […] Giotto’s models, like those of St Panteleimon, were firmly Byzantine, and it was by working and experimenting with techniques from the Greek East that Giotto’s own remarkable paintings were produced’ (Omissi, 2016).

Although Omissi’s (2016) view reveals an understanding of Byzantium as ‘Greek’, since he refers to Byzantine artistic techniques as ‘techniques from the Greek East’ (Omissi, 2016), his point on Giotto’s experimentation with these techniques is indeed evident in the visual elements of the two works. What Omissi (2016) expresses here is a contemporary understanding of Byzantine influence to the Renaissance according to which, the Renaissance style has emerged as a reaction against the static Byzantine style.
2. The second reason is the contemporary understanding of Byzantium as an Empire of cultural and intellectual flowering. Today, it is believed that what is called the ‘dark middle ages’ in European history never happened for Byzantium; in Byzantium ‘Christianity merged with classical tradition and the product of this union was an immense body of philosophy, literature and art that is varied, fascinating and still known only to few (Manginis, 2009, p. 12). It is worth saying that at the present, those who study the medieval world are called medievalists, unless they happen to study Byzantium, in which case they are called Byzantinists. For example two famous contemporary Byzantinists are Helene Ahrweiler and Judith Herrin.

3. The third reason is that Byzantium has started to be seen as a Rosetta stone for contemporary world affairs:

The Middle East, the division between the Islamic world and the West, the Balkans and Russia are up to the headlines. All these were once Byzantine imperial lands. A number of their boundaries, religious and national, were drawn by Byzantine hands. In many ways Byzantium has given us the geopolis for [the] map that we live with today (Hughes, 2014a).

Indeed, most of the European national boundaries were formulated in the Byzantine period and Byzantium’s ability to conquer, and ‘above all, to defend itself and its magnificent capital was to shield the northwestern world of the Mediterranean [...] Without Byzantium there would have been no Europe’ (Herrin, 2007, p. 251). Herrin (2007) explains how Byzantium’s resistance prevented Islamic colonisation and conversion of its populations. By preventing this ‘potential conquest’, Byzantium ‘made Europe possible allowing small units time to develop
their own strengths’ (Herrin, 2007, pp. 15-16). Nairn (2008) explains how the Byzantine Empire shielded everyone to the west and north:

Developing nation-states like France, Spain and England were given the chance to consolidate and arm, and a century later turned back the invaders, and confined them, on the northern shores of the Mediterranean, to one part of Iberia (Nairn, 2008).

4. The fourth reason is that it is thought that Byzantium may act as an example for Europe and offer solutions to current European matters, and more particularly to the ongoing European financial crisis (e.g. Frankopan, 2013) and its consequences (e.g. rise of nationalism). Byzantium experienced many crises throughout the centuries, but managed to overcome most of them and survive for more than a thousand years. All of the issues Europe experiences today also characterized the Ottoman conquest in 1453, which resulted in the fall of the Byzantine Empire. The experiences included financial crisis, migrations, creation of borders, rise of nationalism and a low birth rate. However, before all these things would happen, Byzantium was thought to be ‘paradise on earth’ (Hughes, 2014a), partly because the Byzantine Empire was a multinational Empire spanning different climates and diverse local economies. It also had a common currency and was the most powerful economy in the world, primarily based on trade and the fact that the Byzantines strictly controlled both the internal and the international trade, and retained the monopoly of issuing coinage (Laiou and Morrisson 2007). As the Historian Peter Frankopan (2013) explains:

Unlike the European Union, Byzantium was not riddled with inefficiency and disparity when it came to tax: profits could not be parked in a more attractive region, thereby
undermining the empire's structure. Government in Byzantium was lean, simple and efficient’ (Frankopan, 2013)

In the 1070s the first financial crisis in Byzantium burst after a long series of weak rulers; so bad did the situation become that by the beginning of the Komnenian period, ‘the doors of the treasury in Constantinople were flung open: there was no point locking them, wrote one contemporary, because there was nothing there to steal’ (Frankopan, 2013). The first Crusade (1096-1099) was to follow, but the most severe times would be experienced after the 4th Crusade in 1204. Early in 1204, Venice acquired bases in Dalmatia (e.g. Cherso or Cres; Spalato or Split), and an empire in the Aegean (Fusaro, 2016, p. 3). In April 1204, the crusaders and Venetians sacked the city and set up a new Latin Empire. In 1261, the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos recaptured Constantinople and gave many exemptions of trade duties to the Venetians; also, trade preferences and a territorial base to Venice’s rival, Genoa (Nicol, 1993, p. 34). Venice retained its Greek colonies (previously gained), and Venetian shipping (re)entered the Black Sea where ‘trade was booming due to the Mongol reopening of the silk route through Central Asia’ (Maddison, 2001, p. 52). Thus, the arrangements with Venice played a major role from 1000 to 1500 AD in re-opening the Mediterranean economy to West European commerce and developing links with Northern Europe, and in opening up trade within Europe (Maddison, 2001, p. 19), in other words, it created an institutional basis for what today would be called commercial capitalism.

However, the final countdown for the Byzantine Empire had just begun. In the early Palaiologan period (1261-1300) demographic issues assumed greater
significance, along with what today would be called nationalism (Shevkunov, 2008). The first defined borders between ‘nations’ emerged. ‘Byzantine Greeks’ started clearly distinguishing ‘themselves’ from the ‘others’. Refugees (a result of Turko-Mongol invasions of the Armenian and wider territory) coming into the Greek territories of Byzantium were not welcomed (Shevkunov, 2008). They remained foreigners and this created even greater tensions. All the above, weakened the Empire and ultimately, led to its fall to the Ottomans in 1453.

The solution with which Byzantines responded to the 1070’s financial crisis was threefold. As Frankopan (2013) explains:

first, the currency was taken out of circulation and replaced by new denominations that were a fair reflection of real value; second, the tax system was overhauled, with a compilation of who owned what assets across the empire serving as a primer to raise revenue in the future; finally, commercial barriers were lowered to encourage those with outside capital to invest more cheaply and easily than in the past – not in asset acquisition, but specifically for trade. Such was the empire’s plight that these barriers were dropped to the point that outside investors could even undercut the locals, at least in the short term, in order to stimulate the economy (Frankopan, 2013).

Unfortunately, what the Russian Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov (2008) -the Superior of Moscow’s Sretensky Monastery- calls the Greek ‘superiority’, led to polarisation and self-resolution. Consequently, the Byzantine value of ‘multiplicity of ethnic identities’ was abandoned and refugees were no longer welcomed, as a consequence ‘the meaning of the Byzantines’ existence was lost’ (Shevkunov, 2008). Shevkunov (2008) sees this as the final blow that destroyed the Byzantine state.
I argue that the European Union may use the Byzantine past to understand the present; but also, ideally, it may learn from it too. As explained above, the Byzantines survived the financial crisis. Their model could be adjusted to current circumstances. However, they were destroyed because of the implications of nationalism and the imminent racism. This is what weakened them and opened the way to the fall of Byzantium (it actually made things much easier for the Ottoman conquest). One explanation might be that the Byzantine army was mercenary and hired foreign troops from many different non-Byzantine regions (Bartusis, 1992). In the Komnenian period, though, the army became professional and disciplinary and its power was based on foreign troops as well as on people who were nonprofessional soldiers and guards (Bartusis, 1992). Amongst them were people who later (in the Palaiologan period) would think of themselves as Greeks e.g. professional tzakones (guards) from the area of Demetrias: non-professional tzakones from Trabizond and non-professional soldiers, like Choiroboskos; and Syrbanos, who were paesants (Bartusis, 1992, p. 366). Bartusis (1992) explains that the non-professionals were ‘ill-equipped and ill-disciplined’ and concludes that ‘a significant portion of the defensive structure was not organised by the central government, but by private individuals’ (Bartusis, 1992, p. 366). In the Palaiologan period, with the rise of what today would be called Greek nationalism (Vasiliev, 1958, p. 582), internal polarisation was inevitable, and resulted in inner conflicts and an ineffective army. In a contemporary analogy, it could be said that the economic growth of each European country is based on the labour of whoever the nationals are but also, foreigners, and therefore, what the European Union could be taught by the Byzantine example is that it should fight the ever-increasing nationalism (Mali, 2016).
The above points show how, Byzantium has recently been re-invented and its cultural and political history has been re-theorised, offering new, hitherto ‘unknown’ perspectives. This has important implications for the work of museums: the curation of history exhibitions, also involves scholarly research, hence, museums in their recently constructed Byzantine exhibitionary complexes are expected to have followed the recent development of Byzantine scholarship. However, the way that this new information and theorising is combined and managed within each exhibitionary complex is different, and is a product of the presuppositions involved in the local interactions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning in each exhibitionary complex under study. This is what this thesis examines.

Research questions

The purpose of my research is therefore to explain the construction of meaning around Byzantium in relation to the cultural knowledge and national politics of national museums in different cultural contexts. It is also to understand the uses of Byzantium in current politics of identity making within the framework of the different cultural contexts of the national museum exhibitionary complexes under study.

Therefore, my main research question is:

· How do the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices explain the different representations of Byzantine culture in the European national museums under study and what are the cultural and political implications of those presuppositions?

My sub-questions are:
What are the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices around the representation of Byzantine culture in the European national museums under study?

What are the products of the interaction of cultural knowledge on Byzantium with curatorial practices and how do the presuppositions in the exhibitionary complexes under study ‘work’ to produce them?

How do the museums under study come to construct a narrative of ‘national’ identity within their Byzantine exhibitionary complexes?

How do the practices of democratisation and demystification of exhibitionary complexes function in relation to cultural knowledge and the process of the making of exhibitionary meaning on Byzantium?

The research questions driving this thesis are formulated in order to raise issues and concerns relevant to the different presuppositions involved in curatorial practices, how they inform the generation of the meaning of Byzantine culture and the political implications of the collecting and exhibiting of Byzantine collections in the European national museums under study, with a focus on issues of nation-building and identity-making.

By analysing the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices and explaining their role in constructing the different representations of Byzantine culture in the national museums under study, and by explaining the uses of Byzantium in the construction of an idea of national identity, I will further argue that in the national museums’ context, the process of making exhibitionary meaning, far from being ‘democratised’ and ‘demystified’ is inherently ideological or ‘mythical’, as each museum presents the cultural constructions of the
imagined community of each country as the work of nature, and not of culture, doing the opposite of what the contemporary curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ suggest. Instead of ‘democratising’ their Byzantine exhibitionary complexes, the national museums under study have functioned to ‘naturalise’ their imagined community, i.e. their ‘nation’ with Byzantine history, art and culture acting as the means through which this is achieved. Hence, instead of ‘demystifying’ their complexes, they perforce present a culturally constructed ‘myth’ of Byzantium within them. The presented ‘myth’ is entangled with the image of the imagined community that each country wants to promote. This will be understood and explained through the Barthesian sense of ‘myth’, the Foucauldian theory of power relations (power/knowledge and resistance) and the range of cultural, political and social factors surrounding each country and influencing the way that their national museum exhibitions interpret and use Byzantine history and art over time.

More particularly, I will argue that this is a dynamic, interactive process: curatorial practices in the exhibitionary complexes of different national museums shape the vision and interpretation of artifacts and creations, according to the different presuppositions of each imagined community; further the interaction between the characteristics and socio-cultural norms of the involved imagined community; curatorial practices; and national and global politics, has an effect on the construction or ‘accomplishment’ of exhibitionary meaning. For example, national museums are influenced both by the new global conditions of accumulation and the ideologies and prevailing policies of governmental authorities (e.g. Schubert’s (2009) discussion of government policies towards museums and its influence on curatorial practices). Hence, museum policies cannot be examined independently of the political
relations found in curatorial practices, or separately from the implications of colonialism of the past, or of imperialism and globalism of today - all which affect curatorial practices and ‘drive’ to the formulation of the contemporary exhibitionary complexes. Within this framework and the provision that: ‘the global-local nexus is associated with new relations between space and place’ (Robins, 1999, p. 27) and individual and collective identities (Mercer, 1999), national museums respond to the new global conditions of accumulation, which also have cultural and political implications. For example, Robins (1999), examines these implications by seeing museums as part of the contemporary cultural industry; He argues that an implication of the museum’s attempt to respond to these new conditions is the close and necessary relation between modernising ambitions of enterprise culture and the retrospective nostalgia of heritage culture. Hence, national museums and their policies cannot but be directly related to time and the political, cultural, social, technological, financial, environmental, educational and geographical developments of the countries to which they belong. The implications of the above to the collecting and exhibiting of Byzantine art and culture cannot be ignored in the framing of an examination of cultural presuppositions, the making of exhibitionary meaning, and consequently the making of identity and of nation consequent upon them.

**Methodological considerations and conceptual framework**

My research questions developed and evolved from a deeper understanding of how cultural presuppositions work in the process of making exhibitionary meaning. I followed an iterative process of formulating my research questions driven both by experience and the relevant literature, which then brought me back to refine my questions. This process of developing the research questions and subsequently
framing the investigative steps that followed, continued in relation to methodological
decisions. Methodological considerations were therefore consequent on the
formulation of my initial research questions and the theoretical and conceptual tools
needed to address them.

For the formulation of my research questions I began with the assumption
that the same historical phenomenon would be understood and explained differently
within exhibitionary complexes of different cultural backgrounds, depending on the
cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the imagined community of the country to which
each museum belongs, but also, being affected by governmental and national
politics. The explanation and analysis of the process of making meaning in the
exhibitionary complexes then, could not be seen apart from the function of the
cultural presuppositions of each national culture. Referring to the role of cultural
presuppositions in meaning making, Farini states: ‘On the one hand, cultural
presuppositions shape interactions; on the other hand, interaction may renew cultural
presuppositions precisely by re-interpreting them within the local context’ (Farini,
2011, p. 2178). Therefore, the process of making meaning is made possible by the
cultural presuppositions of each national culture and vice versa – the two are
mutually constitutive. According to Arnason: ‘the double-edged relationship to
culture [as a target and as a standard] in general is counter-balanced by a close
association of the critical perspective with specific cultural spheres’ (Arnason, 1989, p.
126). Here, Arnason (1989) refers to the relationship of cultural institutions with
critical theory through cultural critique and supports the notion that the problematic
of culture, i.e. the shift of power relations from political and economic issues to
cultural critique, interacts with and depends on the cultural presuppositions on which
the critique is based, and hence, presuppositions are key in explaining critical perspectives of the construction of meaning within the framework of a specific culture.

Culture may be understood as the prevailing norms, practices, beliefs, values (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 4) and behavior of a group of people, which is acquired and transmitted by symbols (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1955, cited in Adler, 1997, p. 18). It may be understood as having three main aspects - as a collection of objects/images, as a group of people and as the ideas, values and beliefs held by that group (Williams, 1981). Knowledge about these can be described as cultural knowledge and it could be said that common understanding rests on common cultural knowledge. According to Barthes (1977) and Williams (1981) culture is the indispensable means of understanding through which we negotiate the image and make sense of reality; culture can be seen as 'the signifying system through which a group understands, interprets and communicates its world and social order' (Williams, 1981, p. 13).

In my argument, the exhibitionary complex is a mix of all the above, i.e. it is a collection of objects/images, which are brought together to instantiate and communicate the ideas, beliefs and values of a cultural group; they are not simply communicating the ideas, beliefs and values that are already ‘there’: they function to establish these ideas, beliefs and values and thereby to ‘produce’ a national identity. They are making the ‘there’ in the ‘first place’ - they are not just reflecting ideas, values and beliefs which exist in a vacuum, in an innocent or ‘neutral’ way: they are making them in the sense of (re)producing/ (re)constructing them within a wider context – or, more appropriately, ‘complex’ – of ‘interactive’ components and processes.
Therefore, it is by linking meaning making with cultural understanding that a culturally specific way of interpreting a past culture within the national museum space, is effectively presumed. This culturally specific way of understanding that comes from the ‘foreknowledge’ that each culture possesses, or what Gadamer in ‘The Problem of Historical Consciousness’ (1979) calls ‘prejudice’. Gadamer (1979) refers to the understanding that comes from the common knowledge or group knowledge that is determined by a certain culture. This kind of common knowledge is an integration of the cultural experiences of a certain cultural group. Based on these values, this knowledge that is accepted unquestioningly within a particular culture (Arnason, 1989), and therefore the connotations/meanings that are constructed on the basis of these cultural norms, differs radically between each country; particularly, within the imagined community of each country, in relation to its own cultural and national identity. i.e. within the socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group that would form ‘the national’ group of the country. As Anderson (1991) puts it:

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 1991, p 6).

These people consider themselves to comprise ‘the national’ group of each country; they consider themselves to be the ‘nationals’. But their considerations are a result of these organisations of knowledge about common identity, which are intertwined with forms of power and domination. I argue that within the national museums’ ‘epistemic’ context i.e. within the national museums’ belief systems and
power relations underlying the production of ‘coherentist’ (Alcoff, 1993) accounts of cultural knowledge, those organisations/bodies of cultural knowledge become not only intelligible but authoritative. Simply, the ideas, beliefs and values of the imagined community, which govern ‘truth’ and ‘identity’ are brought together in the exhibitionary complexes’ structures and count as ‘serious’, and ‘legitimate’, just as the national museum is ‘authorised’ to speak ‘seriously’ and ‘legitimately’. Then, within the national museums’ different cultural contexts the forms of power and domination found in the common political discourse of each of the imagined communities are reproduced and disseminated in new forms of knowledge along with new objects with which to know, and new modalities of power, which are responsible for the museum discursive formations. This understanding of the social construction of what comes to count as legitimate knowledge has led the development of my methodology, which is explained below.

In the present thesis, I am interested in investigating the interaction of curatorial practices with cultural knowledge of Byzantium, national politics and the construction and promotion of national identity as well as the part Byzantium plays in the making of ‘national’ identity. Particularly, I seek to understand the meaning making processes that are taking place in the curating of Byzantium in the context of the different cultural settings of the national museums under study, I want to understand the processes and practices through which museums construct meaning and frame interpretations of Byzantium and for this, I need to investigate the ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined community on Byzantium, ‘national’ identity and the process of making exhibitionary meaning.
The investigation of the above involves the study of curatorial practices as a process of making exhibitionary meaning. My methodological consideration was based on the assumption that exhibitionary meaning is culturally constructed, i.e. informed by the kind of common knowledge that is an integration of the cultural experiences of a certain cultural group and also, influenced by historically changing, reflexive dispositions between the content of cultural knowledge (i.e. ideas, values and beliefs) on Byzantium and the power relations that operate within and through national museums.

This means that although museum exhibitionary complexes are products of curatorial research and design, in the national museum context they are also indicative of the perception and transmission of the ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined community on Byzantium, and (as an extension) on their ideas, values and beliefs on their own ‘national’ identity.

I suggest that this can be understood through the Foucauldian theory of power relations and the Barthesian ‘myth’ theory. Foucault’s theory of power relations offers an explanation of how these culturally-specific ideas, values and beliefs are reflected within national museum exhibitionary complexes: Foucault (1990) explains that ‘power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere [...] Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1990, p. 93). In that sense, culturally accepted historical narratives constructed by the imagined community, are transmitted and (re)produced by the museum. Foucault (1990) explains that messages and narratives are not wielded directly by an individual or
groups, by way of ‘episodic’ or ‘sovereign’ acts of domination or coercion. In the case of the national museums the individual would be a single curator and the groups would be the groups of curators and museum professionals working together to construct the exhibitionary complexes. Instead, Foucault (1990) explains, they are dispersed and pervasive, in that they are a kind of ‘regime of truth’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Hence, the set of ideas as well as the visual capacities a curator, or groups of curators and museum professionals use in order to construct an exhibition are the same that inform their own common cultural and visual experience, which are deeply shaped by culture and society (institutions/structures). An example here of the structures/institutions to which Foucault/I refer, are the ‘professional norms and values’ that inform curating as a practice and which accord it professional status and legitimacy – which will in turn be informed by/infused with the very culturally accepted interpretations of history and its importance to us now. As explained earlier the individual curator or the groups of professionals, would be a product or products of the culture/society (the structures) that always pre-exists them. Also, the curators (re)produce themselves (in the interaction with others) through structures/institutions, which always pre-exist them. For this reason, the exhibitionary complexes will actually reflect the culturally accepted/national interpretations of the history, art and culture of the Byzantine Empire as they are formed in each country, as well as the ‘national’ identity related matters.

Barthes’ theory of myth explains that these culturally-specific beliefs, ideas and values make themselves apparent in the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes: According to Barthes (1972), everything has connotational meaning, is
myth and the meanings and identities of Byzantine culture can be seen as the products of museum discourse drawing on these myths. Barthes thinks of a myth as ‘a chain of related concepts’ (Fiske, 1982, p. 93), a form of signification. Mythologies, according to Barthes (1972), present themselves as being ‘natural’ and therefore transparent and resistant to challenge, just like ideology does. For Barthes, ‘Myth is not defined by the object of its message but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘substantial’ ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this’ (Barthes, 1972, p. 107). By this, Barthes suggest that ‘myths’ can be understood as narratives about origins that set the conventions or standards of a culture’s understanding of the world around it. ‘Myth’ for Barthes is an ideological act. ‘Myths’ are networks of actions, assumptions and representations. ‘Myths’ are ‘the ‘naturalness’ with which for example, newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history’ (Barthes, 1973, p. 10). Hence, the visuals of the exhibitionary complexes reveal the ‘myths’ of Byzantium.

Barthes’ (1972) account of meaning is useful here because it explicitly ties the construction of meaning to the ideas, values and beliefs of cultural groups and it can explain the way that historical meanings get turned into, and thus experienced as, ‘natural’ facts. Simply, it enables the identification and explanation of the nature, construction and ideological power of what is actually or simply a conception, understanding or interpretation of Byzantium.

However, the study of the visuals (images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes) requires the study of both the content-structures and the context of the exhibitionary complexes or else, the study of ‘iconography’ and ‘iconology’ (Panofsky,
1982) of the exhibitionary complexes. According to Panofsky (1982, cited in Muller, 2011) iconological analysis aims at unraveling the ‘intrinsic meaning or content constituting the world of symbolical values’ (Panofsky, cited in Muller, p. 286), and is based on thorough research on visual and textual sources and their verbal consideration in the form of a contextualised interpretation.

**Research Methods and Methodology**

In order to answer my research questions, which are concerned with the representation of Byzantium and national identity, as well as the cultural function of the presuppositions involved in the construction of exhibitionary meaning I chose an iconographic–iconological approach, connecting it with Barthesian semiotics (1972) and focusing on the visual aspects of the exhibitionary complexes.

Iconography/iconology has ‘the holistic goal of achieving an encompassing interpretation of the meanings of the analysed visuals’ (Muller, 2011, p. 286). It is based on the critical analysis of visual and textual sources (Grittmann, 2007, cited in Muller, 2011, p. 285) and the underlying principles of their cultural contexts, which are reconstructed through ‘synthetic intuition’ (Panofsky, 1982) i.e. intuition acquired through familiarity ‘not only with the practical world of objects and events but also, with the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a civilization’ (Panofsky, 1982, p. 52).

In this sense, iconography/iconology (i.e. Panofsky’s (1982) concept of three levels of meaning) offered an analytical approach for the identification and explanation of: (1) the primary subject matter (factual and expressional) of the visuals of the exhibitionary complexes, i.e. the pure forms of the visuals and their mutual
relations as events, which carry the primary meanings of the visuals (2) the conventional subject matter of the visuals, i.e. iconography; the connection of their primary meanings with concepts and (3) the intrinsic meaning, or content of the visuals, i.e. iconology; ‘those underlying principles, which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion’ (Panofsky, 1982, p. 55). The factual and expressional meaning in iconology/iconography can be seen as two forms of denotation and the conventional subject matter and intrinsic meaning as two forms of connotation. Iconography/iconology and myth then could be said to complement each other, as they both share common theoretical concepts. Barthes account of connotation/myth includes all the things that Panofsky includes in the second and third levels of iconographic/iconological analysis mentioned above; myth includes the ideological function as well the context, background history and culture, ideas values and beliefs. Myth however, is distinctive in that it occurs when the first order of meaning (of the sign) meets the values and established discourses of the culture.

Denotation in the early work of Barthes (1967) is argued to be the literal meaning encoded to the signifier (the first-order, denotative, meaning). This is compatible with Panofsky’s first level of meaning; that of the primary subject matter described above. However, this would mean that the first-order meaning assumes that the literal relationship of a sign to its referent is objective and value-free. Barthes (1974) in his later work explained that:

denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems both to
establish and close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature' (Barthes 1974, p. 9)

For Barthes the separation of the signifier from the signified, the ideological from the 'literal' (Barthes 1977, 166) was finally not feasible. As explained above, denotation is another connotation; therefore there is not natural meaning, but only a process of naturalisation: myth.

The role of the iconographic-iconological approach to the analysis of the visuals functioned as complementary to the cultural semiotics of Barthes. Following the iconographic-iconological approach, the visual material of the exhibitionary complexes has been treated as source-on cultural knowledge on Byzantium; politics on the making of nation and identity; as well as power relations- bearing witness to visual forms of expression in the present, which illustrate both past and present communication processes. Emphasizing the analysis and explanation of the ideological function of the complex sign systems embodied and embedded into the visuals of each exhibitionary complex, the iconographical/iconological approach, together with the Barthesian myth theory, made possible the identification and understanding of the ideas, beliefs and values of each of the imagined communities on Byzantium and on national identity.

**Case studies**

Hence, in order to study how meanings are made and how Byzantine culture and ‘national’ identity are represented in each museum exhibitionary complex my method is qualitative and applied to the following sites as case studies:
- The permanent exhibitionary complex of Byzantine collections of the British Museum in London

- The permanent exhibitionary complex of Byzantine collections of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens

- The permanent exhibitionary complex of Byzantine collections of the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki

The benefit of the case study method according to Shaughnessy and Zechmeister (cited in Berg, 2004) lies in its ability to open the way for discoveries, as it involves gathering enough information about a particular social or cultural setting ‘to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates and functions’ (Berg, 2006, p. 283). It focuses on holistic description and explanation and ‘as a general statement, any phenomenon can be studied by case studies methods’ (Berg, 2006, p. 284). The case study is a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data gathering measures (Hamel, Dufour and Fortin, 1993; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 1994, cited in Berg, 2004, p. 251). In each case study, I used Barthes’ theory for visual and textual arguments and iconography, which uses arguments based on intertextual comparison and archival background research following Van Leeuwen’s (2001) method. Van Leeuwen (2001) connects Panofsky’s iconological approach with Barthes’ semiotics, and so, iconography for Van Leeuwen (2001) becomes ‘useful for investigating the representational and symbolic meanings of the people, places and things’ (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 117) and for that, it uses visual and textual analysis, as well as contextual analysis to support its interpretations. In other words, as explained above, iconology/iconography here functioned as a complementary theory to myth theory: Barthes’s myth theory enabled me to account for the connotation in a cultural
fashion and Panofsky’s iconological/iconographical theory (or method) enabled me to explain the cultural context.

In my case studies I made use of the following standard research tools that enabled understanding of the process of making exhibitionary meaning and interpretation of the exhibitionary complexes:

- archival primary research in the archives of each museum
- secondary research in relation to curatorial literature and historians’ perspectives on Byzantium as well as each museum’s formative history
- photographs and observation notes from each exhibitionary complex
- visual and textual analysis. Particularly, I used semiotic analysis

Museum archives, and background literature review enabled interpretation of underlying considerations in the exhibitionary meaning making process. Observation notes from the exhibitionary complexes and photographs depicting the final visual outcome of the exhibitionary complexes (exhibitionary images and texts) were used as the objects of and illustrations for visual and textual analysis.

The analysis of the above ‘data’ emerges through the semiotic theory of Barthes (1972; 1977) and the Fouauldian theory of power relations.

I used primary archival research in order to collect information from museum documents related to museum policies and practices, the understanding of Byzantium by each museum through time, as well as the inclusion/exclusion of Byzantine history and art in the narratives of museum constructs relevant to identity making and nation-building. Through the archival primary research, I have been able
to find examples with which to illustrate the historical material on the formation of Byzantine collections, their further acquisition policies, and the museology that underlines them in relation to the formation of the museums under study as institutions and how the exhibitions with Byzantine collections were conceived in each museum over the years. I found when the museums established their Byzantine collections, what kind of Byzantine objects they acquired and in what ways (e.g. by purchase, by donation, by inheritance). I investigated who were/are the people who decide to acquire and enrich the Byzantine collections and why and how their decisions affect the museum. Also, where possible, I investigated what objects from the Byzantine collections of each museum curators choose to exhibit; when museums’ first permanent collection with Byzantine objects opened to the public; how many permanent exhibitions with Byzantine objects followed from the first exhibition until today (re-openings). Where possible, I saw which objects were on display in each case. Also, I looked at photographs from past exhibitions and relevant publications from the press (press-cuttings) concerning each exhibition. More particularly, in those museums that allowed me full access to their archival material, I looked at original documents of acquisition and documentation reports, exhibition records, past catalogues, Trustees’ minutes, curatorial briefs, confidential reports and administrative letters. This has eventually resulted in insights into the meaning of the Byzantine collections to each museum, explaining what the museums possess, and how and why they purchased it, but also, this has revealed the museums’ subordination to hegemonic structures as well as resistance. Metaphorically, this became ‘a drawing together of the pieces of a puzzle to form a complete picture’ (Berg, 2004, p. 239) about the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in the making
of exhibitionary meaning around Byzantium. It is worth mentioning that in each museum, access to the archival material had different rules. The British Museum provided full access to its archives. In contrast, the Greek museums had many restrictions in accessing most of their archival material, mainly depending on the criteria and decisions of the museum director. This also helped the understanding of the function of the wider notion of curating and the adoption and adaption of the contemporary curatorial practices of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ within the different cultural context of each museum.

In order to be able to identify the origins of the meanings informing the different exhibitionary complexes, I conducted secondary research in relation to Byzantine Studies literature. First, I investigated the different interpretations of Byzantium in the wide history and art history literature, and then, the interpretations of Byzantium as formulated in the culturally accepted historical narratives in each country, by looking at culturally accepted publications, the national curriculum of each country and available history schoolbooks, with particular emphasis on the 1950s and 1960’s, when Byzantium was (re) invented, on the decade of 1980s, where historical revisionism practices were put into action and on the last decade, where Byzantium is being retheorised. Also, in the framework of the Greek museums, I conducted research on the first volumes of the history of the Greek nation produced after the establishment of the Modern Greek state in 1830 and literature about and around them.

The above helped both the understanding of the historical constructs of the imagined community of each country on Byzantium, and the semiotic analysis of museum texts and images, as it enabled me to uncover underlying ideas, values and
beliefs of significant identity-making encounters. Equally, several cultural and institutional ideological issues that contributed to the identification and explanation of the presuppositions involved in the construction of the different interpretations of Byzantium as presented within each of the exhibitionary complexes. Hence, this enabled the understanding of the interaction of curatorial practices with cultural knowledge on Byzantium, national politics and the construction and promotion of ‘national’ identity as well as the uses of Byzantium in the making of ‘national’ identity. Reviewing the historian's perspectives on Byzantium, as formulated in the culturally accepted history and art history literature of each country of interest i.e. the U.K. and Greece gave insight to the ‘myth’ of Byzantium, as seen and (re)presented within the different ideologies of each ‘national’ and cultural context. The history and art history literature proposed by the museums under study, through their own publications, or books on Byzantium sold in their shops and history schoolbooks, is also included in the culturally accepted history literature explored in this context.

Also, I conducted secondary research in relation to curatorial and museum studies literature, focusing on the changes of museum curatorship over the years. This has helped the identification and explanation of the various techniques museums use today in their exhibitionary meaning making practices. Furthermore, I conducted secondary research in relation to literature about and around the formative history of each museum, focusing on the political history of each country from the moment of each museum’s establishment until the present. This has resulted in insights into the kinds of relationships established between the political and cultural context and the exhibitionary complexes under study and enabled the identification of the origins of the meanings informing the exhibitionary complexes.
In order to identify and explain the different interpretations of Byzantium within each exhibitionary complex, I conducted visual and textual analysis that involves a critical engagement with the notion of visual culture. I used archival information and literature reviews as sources of contextual information and I used the photographs and observation notes as the objects of and illustrations for visual and textual analysis. Through visual and textual analysis I understood the ways in which cultural and social subjectivities are either pictured or made invisible, and how those processes are embedded in power relations. In order to interpret the visual images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes under study I use essentially semiotic methods. As Rose mentions: 'Semiology confronts the question of how images make meanings head on' (Rose, 2012, p. 105), but also, as Bingell suggests: 'since all forms of semiology are concerned with the making of meaning, semiology is an approach that can be applied to all kinds of visual material' (Bingell, cited in Rose, 2012, p. 107). Barthes' account of meaning explicitly refers to the role of culture in generating meaning and helps the study of the theory and practice of making meaning in the exhibitionary complexes case studies. This kind of semiological approach fulfills the criteria for a critical visual method and offers a range of tools for looking at images and texts, since texts here are complementary to the images and they have what Barthes calls both an 'anchoring' and a 'relay' function (Barthes, 1977, p. 38-41). This approach further helped me to understand how curatorial practice is constructed and how knowledge, power and truth interrelate in the particular museum exhibitionary complexes. Most importantly, it helped me to understand how the knowledge of the imagined community on its 'own' identity has been dominating national museums'
cultural discourse and the different understandings of Byzantium within the different cultural framework of each museum.

In order to conceptualise the making of exhibitionary meaning in my case studies, I selected the cultural-semiotic theory of Barthes. Particularly, using Barthes’ (1972) concept of myth, the past culture of Byzantium that exists through the various narrations of historian’s and art historian’s perspectives as well as museum exhibitionary complexes is explained as a mythical object, i.e. a ‘meaningful object’, where the meaning is ideological.

For Barthes, every cultural product had meaning, and this meaning is conditioned by ideology, i.e. myth, and therefore any cultural product can be the subject of mythological analysis and review. However, myth is a realm of signification, which is cultural connotation, to distinguish from denotation. In ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ (1977), Barthes elaborated on the difference between denotation of the sign and its connotation and its use in cultural analysis. Connotation according to Barthes (1977) is highly arbitrary, specific to one culture, though it frequently has an iconic dimension and because connotation also works on the subjective level, we are frequently not made consciously aware of it (Fiske, 1982). Myth for Barthes is a story by which a culture explains or understands some aspect of reality. A myth, as connotational meaning, is a culture’s way of thinking about something, a way of conceptualising or understanding it.

Through the selected theory I explained that although the meanings and identities of Byzantine culture are presented as ‘natural’ within the exhibitionary complexes, and therefore ‘unquestionable’, they are actually the culturally constructed products of museum practices and discourse.
Hence, my work is critical in the sense that it explains how the meanings are made possible (i.e. by the cultural context/presuppositions) and in that it explains this ideological/mythical process of meaning making, a process which presents the cultural constructions of the imagined community as the work of nature, and not of history or culture.

Within this framework, the present study provides new understandings, new interpretations and new critical perspectives on the contemporary scheme of curatorial/meaning making practices that determine and reinvent the exhibitionary complexes with Byzantine collections, and the constructive notion of the past culture of Byzantium as shaped through the curatorial practices of European national museums at the moment. Here, I use the term ‘scheme’ (Bartlett, 1932) in the sense of mental framework or concept that assist in organising and interpreting information.

**Criteria for the selection of the case studies**

In order to answer my questions, I am looking at: the British Museum in London; the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens; the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki.

Of course, there are other significant museum displays of Byzantine art and culture internationally. However, most of them have been established/funded either by institutions/organisations that belong to the Greek State or by the Greek State itself or, they have been organised in collaboration with the Greek State –in either case, they contain donated or loaned objects that belong to the collections of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, and mainly to those of the Byzantine and Christian
Museum in Athens. I see these exhibitions as having the same mission: to spread the Greek ideological constructions of Greek national identity, as (re) constructed and (re)produced by the Greek imagined community.

Perhaps, the most striking example, is in Venice, where *The Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Studies* ‘Greece’s only research centre outside Greece itself’ (The Hellenic Institute in Venice, 2017a), established the Museum of Icons in 1959. On the museum website, it is explained that:

The museum collection was formed through donations by members of the Brotherhood and other individuals of Orthodox faith; many icons were transported to Venice by refugees, while others were painted by Greek artists in the city itself’ (The Hellenic Institute in Venice, 2017b).

The collection contains objects donated by members of the Brotherhood, Greeks; the Greek Brotherhood in Venice was a philanthropic and religious society, founded in 1494. It was the first formal recognition by Venice, of the legal status of the Greek Colony. It had [and still has, through the Hellenic Institute, which is the modern continuation of the Brotherhood (Karkayannis, 2005)] its own officers and committee to represent the interests of the Greek community (Nicol, 1994, p. 140). In other words, the Brotherhood/Institute feeds back the ideas, values and beliefs of the Greek imagined community, more strongly, it is part of the Greek imagined community. The above statement is indicative of the reproduction of the dominant cultural values, ideas and beliefs of the Greek imagined community on its own identity. The imagined community’s discursive construction (of identity/difference, same/other) is found in the last sentence. This sentence reveals the ideology
embedded in the argument of the contribution of Byzantine art and culture to the Renaissance. Simply, it documents the spread of Greek-Byzantine ideas in the early Renaissance Venice, their contribution to the Renaissance and hence the continuity of Byzantium/Greek identity, as well as the contribution of Byzantium/Greek identity to the formation of Europe.

Similarly, the travelling exhibition *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections* (2013-2015), has been organized -and partly sponsored- by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Athens, with the collaboration of the Benaki Museum, Athens, and in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (*Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, 2013, National Gallery of Art; 2014, The J. Paul Getty Museum; 2015, Art Institute Chicago). The objects of this exhibition were loans of the collections of either the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, or of the Benaki Museum. Also, the 1997 Byzantine exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was made possible by sponsorships and donations of the Greek Ministry of Culture and prominent Greek institutions and organisations – Marinopoulos group, Halyvourgiki, Constantine Angelopoulos and Mrs. Yeli Papayannopoulou (Evans and Wixom, 1997), to name a few. Eli (2004) commented that the MET exhibition aimed to ‘reveal the variety of Byzantine art, the vast spread of Byzantine culture (into Egypt and Sicily, Spain and Bulgaria), the interaction of Orthodoxy and Islam, and the influence of Byzantium on the Latin West’. Although it is in his view that the aim of the exhibition was not achieved, it would be unfair to say that the ‘curatorial’ (Lind, 2009) of the exhibition i.e. the thinking behind the act of curating does not make use of the same cultural presuppositions with the above examples.
Contrarily, The British Museum holds its own Byzantine collection, it does not depend on donations/loans from Greek museum collections or Greek sponsorships (including the Greek State) and does not make use of the same cultural and political presuppositions with the above examples (inherent in Greek national politics and embedded in the interpretation of Greek national museum Byzantine collections).

It would be fair to think that there are other such examples of Byzantine exhibitions in European museums, or elsewhere. As explained above however, the present study focuses on contemporaneous examples of European museums, seeing them as both indicative and illustrative of the current cultural, political and social transformations in Europe. Hence, it sees other examples, outside of Europe as the object of another study.

In Europe, the Bode Museum in Berlin was the first to have acknowledged the significant position of Byzantium in the history timeline -as early as 1875 (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2017). Today, it contains two main collections under the Skulpturensammlung [Sculpture Collection] and the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst [Museum of Byzantine Art]. However, the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, exhibits Byzantine art along with Gothic art, and the Byzantine collection on display consists of few Byzantine items, most of them ivory pieces (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2017). Hence, its Byzantine collection is presented along with medieval material, and is not the most characteristic of Byzantine art. As will be explained in detail in Chapter Three, the British Museum collection consists of a rich variety of Byzantine artifacts, including the most characteristic kind of Byzantine art: icons.

The Louvre Museum in Paris, also holds a rich Byzantine collection, and could (and in fact should) be thought of as another museum that would contribute
significantly to the understanding of Byzantine Culture in the present (as well as curatorial practices), primarily, due to its universal character. However, although one would have expected Byzantium to have a separate space in the Louvre narrative of world history, surprisingly, the Louvre still classifies Byzantine art as ‘Decorative art’. Following the old Western European curatorial perception/interpretation of Byzantine art as medieval and decorative, the Louvre has its main Byzantine collection under the Department of Decorative Arts (The Louvre, 2017a). This shows that Byzantine art and artefacts in the Louvre are -still- perceived as decorative. This perception/interpretation will be explained in more detail in Chapter Two, as it was also the interpretation of the British Museum in the past. The Louvre itself, explains that due to the collection’s size, [Decorative Arts collection] ’the collection cannot be covered in its entirety by the Louvre’s experts’ (Louvre, 2017). The study of the selected case study sites aims to offer, among other things, insights into the most contemporary curatorial perceptions and interpretations of Byzantium by exploring how this historical concept has been and continues to be articulated in European national museums. As explained above, although there are other museums outside Europe, that have presented or present Byzantium, I am using the European ones chosen here as there is already enough cultural difference and consequent national identity politics in Europe. This is the context into which the selection of the following three case study sites was made possible. Below, I will explain in detail the specific criteria for the selection of each case study site.

The British Museum opened its Byzantine exhibitionary complex for the first time in March 2014. The Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens re-opened its Byzantine exhibitionary complex in 2004 and then again in 2010. The Museum of
Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki opened its Byzantine exhibitionary complex for the first time in 1994 and has been awarded the Council of Europe's Museum Prize for the year 2005. Therefore, these exhibitionary complexes are closely related and can be considered as contemporaneous for the purposes of this thesis.

In addition to this, the historical, political, social, cultural and national contexts of the museums in the U.K. and Greece present very important criteria for the selection of the particular museums. Here are the main reasons why each has been selected.

1. The British Museum

As noted in the preface, the reasons for my initial decision to include the British Museum in the present study are twofold. First, the British Museum has a dominant role in the academic and museum world. Second, it has dedicated a separate space to its permanent display of the Byzantine Empire only recently, in 2014. The latter indicates a change in the British Museum’s understanding of Byzantium and gives the present study the opportunity to analyse and explain the current ideas and beliefs of the British Museum on Byzantine history and art.

However, there are more reasons that make the British Museum valuable to the present study. The current debate on the repatriation of cultural artifacts, and more particularly, the debate concerning the return of the Parthenon Marbles or ‘Elgin Marbles’, has brought to light new ideas and questions around the notion of identity and belonging with respect to cultural heritage as well as encouraging the re-examination of the rhetoric of ‘national culture’, ‘heritage ownership’ and ‘cultural borders’, and raising questions around the interpretation of art, culture and heritage.
within the British Museum walls. The British Museum explains that heritage does not really have an owner. At the same time, its Trustees have constructed a defensive policy towards the Parthenon Marbles repatriation, arguing that the British Museum preserves and exhibits them in the attempt to explain ‘us’, ‘our’ history. However, even the name ‘Elgin Marbles’, a name given to the Parthenon Marbles after Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, is controversial since it is taking a contestable political position on origin and 'ownership'. The Earl of Elgin was responsible for the removal and transfer to England of about half of the surviving sculptures of the Parthenon, as well as sculptures from the Propylaea and Erechtheum. In 1801 the Earl of Elgin claimed to obtain a controversial permit from the central government of the Ottoman Empire, the so-called ‘Ottoman Porte’, which then ruled Greece. The British museum supports that ‘Against the background of this broad moral responsibility, the legal status of the Parthenon sculptures is clearly defined’ (The British Museum, 2015) and explains that it is better to house the sculptures in ‘an international context where cultures can be compared and contrasted across time and place’ (The British Museum, 2015; Parliament UK, 2016). The British Museum has been through many transformations over its 260 years. As the offspring of colonial ideology, it was already promoting the British Empire aspirations at the time of its establishment in 1753. However, the British museum has adapted itself to the cultural, political and social changes throughout the years, following the shift of the United Kingdom from the metropolis of the British Empire to its contemporary multicultural and secular context. These transformations, along with the evolution of archaeology, art history and curatorship have shaped the way that the British Museum has formulated its exhibition policies and interpretive strategies over the years. In addition to this, the
Universal character of the British Museum makes the institution’s interpretation of art, culture and heritage crucial to the understanding of the contemporary ‘curating of culture’ but also to the ‘culture of curating’, to borrow O’Neil’s (2012) words.

2. Greek museums: The Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens and the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki

I have chosen to include in my study the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens and the Museum of Byzantine culture in Thessaloniki because both museums were purposely established in order to narrate Byzantine history and culture. Also, it could be said that there is a competition between the two museums: The Athens Museum is very antagonistic towards its competitor; so much so that today it regards itself as a ‘Metropolitan’ museum, which suggests that it belongs to the mother city (i.e. the capital city) of Greece and the rest of the Byzantine Museums in Greece are subordinate (the term ‘Metropolitan’ comes from the Greek words Metir (mother) and polis (city) and carries connotations of a hierarchical structure encompassing a sense of subordination, such as the one between a colonial power and its colony). As such, it did not return the exhibits it held from Thessaloniki for approximately eighty years: until recent years, the museum of Athens and the 9th Ephorate of Byzantine antiquities in Thessaloniki were in conflict. The Ephorate in Thessaloniki claimed that the Athens museum had withheld Byzantine antiquities from Thessaloniki for eighty years and was refusing to return them. The Byzantine antiquities were clawed from several Byzantine monuments in Thessaloniki and taken to the museum in Athens under the guise of their conservation and preservation (e.g. Potamianou, 1993). These antiquities though, as the Ephorate of Thessaloniki claims were destined to be housed primarily in the Rotonda Museum in Thessaloniki and other museums in
Thessaloniki. The Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens was established in 1914, at the beginning of the so-called ‘July crisis’ following the end of the Balkan Wars, which led to World War I and at the beginning of the Greek Genocide in Asia Minor. The attempt to build a Byzantine Museum in Thessaloniki, (co-capital of Greece), has a long history, which will be thoroughly explained later in the thesis. The Museum of Byzantine Culture was finally established in 1994 in the city of Thessaloniki and the Byzantine antiquities were returned. It is worth mentioning that the conflict over the so-called ‘return’ of the Byzantine antiquities’ from Athens to Thessaloniki was embodied in the title given to the opening exhibition of the Museum in Thessaloniki in 1994: Byzantine treasures of Thessaloniki. The return journey. Thessaloniki, claims the title of the ‘most Byzantine city of Greece’ as it is ‘arguably the city that has the most intense Byzantine character and beauty, due to the numerous Byzantine monuments which are still living there’ (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2015). So, I have chosen the Thessaloniki Museum for this additional reason: that it claims to be in the most Byzantine city in the world and uses its exhibition to support its claim. As is shown through the archival research in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, in early 1990s the archaeologists/curators of the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens thought that the name given to the newly formulated Museum in Thessaloniki, The Museum of Byzantine Culture connotated that Thessaloniki had built a unique museum dedicated to the explanation of Byzantine culture, something which was seen automatically to have relegated the museum of Athens to a less important, regional museum. Specifically, the 1994 director of the Athens Museum supported that the title of the newly established museum in Thessaloniki is an ‘ambitious title’ that ‘makes us suspect that it aims to reduce the Athens Museum to
a local museum, although it is not [...] we were expecting that the title of the newly established museum in Thessaloniki would be Museum of Thessaloniki’s Byzantine Culture’ (Potamianou, 1994, p.2). What this competition between the two national Byzantine museums reveals is the importance for Greece to have a national Byzantine museum in each of its two big cities, and this makes both institutions' interpretation of Byzantium crucial to the understanding of contemporary Greek ideas, values and beliefs on Byzantine history, culture and art as well as on modern Greek identity.

These are, briefly, the contextual conditions, which give insights into the ways that this specific history of Byzantium is thought and seen by these contemporary national museum institutions at the moment. In getting insights into the perception and interpretation of Byzantium as effected through the exhibitionary complexes of these national museum institutions, it is equally important to explain how the cultural context works/interacts with the meaning-making process in each country (and consequently, in each museum) as this further explains the importance and significance of the chosen museums to the present study. For this, I consider important to bring the following examples in my discussion.

As a simple example of how the cultural context works, one might say that contemporary Greece sees Byzantine culture and art in terms of the continuity of the culture and art of Greek classic antiquity and supports this interpretation through its national historical narratives. It also does this through national museum publications. For example, Nikolaidou (1994) argues that ‘in the fields of education and art, Byzantine culture was the direct continuation of ancient Greek culture, an amalgam and digest of a wide variety of cultural elements’ (Nikolaidou, 1994, p.14). This claim is linked to the claim of the continuation of Modern Greek culture and identity.
through Byzantium (Ahrweiler, cited in Bakounakis, 2010). Since Byzantium is seen as the continuation of Greek antiquity, the above phrase suggests the continuity of Modern Greek culture and identity from the Greek antiquity through Byzantium. Also, contemporary Thessaloniki promulgates itself as ‘the most important centre, after Constantinople, in the European part of the Byzantine Empire’ (Nikolaidou, 1994, p.14) and ‘the most ‘Byzantine’ city of the Modern Greek state’ (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2015). This phrase suggests that modern Thessaloniki is the continuity of Byzantium in Europe and hence, the most Greek-Byzantine (as well as European) city of the Modern Greek state. This also suggests the superiority of Thessaloniki, co-capital of Greece over the rest of the Greek cities and more particularly, over Athens, which is the capital city of Greece. This ongoing contention of Thessaloniki for superiority has brought the two cities in conflict many times, something which is also revealed through the Athens museum archives, and more particularly, through reports about the objects on loan from the Thessaloniki museum that were mentioned above. It may be that the above can only be understood by people who share the same cultural knowledge of issues surrounding the history and culture of Byzantium as shaped within the Modern Greek culture.

As an alternative simple example of how the cultural context works, the British dominant cultural group sees Byzantine culture and art as the continuity of Roman antiquity and places it in the European Middle Ages, also called the ‘Dark Ages’, a term which means a period of intellectual darkness between extinguishing the ‘light of Rome’ after the end of Late Antiquity, and the Italian Renaissance in the 14th century (Mommsen, 1942, p.227). Furthermore, the contemporary British culture incorporates the term ‘Byzantine’ to describe bizarre and incomprehensible things, as
well as intrigues and conspiracies (Hughes, 2014a). Indicative of the particular perception is a recent British-Irish film ‘Byzantium’ (Byzantium, 2013). It is a horror fantasy thriller film around the life of two female vampires and has nothing to do with the actual history and culture of Byzantium. The title of the film connotes games of power, corruption, lies, intrigues, secrets and illegal relationships. These elements had indeed existed in Byzantine political history (e.g. Lecky 1989, cited in James, 2010, p.1). However, when Byzantium started to be explored by British scholars in early 20th century (Demus, 1970) these elements were fragmentarily sourced from and selected over others (for example, over Byzantine cultural history), and through them, and only through them, Byzantium started to become known in the U.K.. In the British cultural context, these negative qualities, attributed to Byzantium through these elements, are the ones to have survived over the years. As a result, in modern British culture the words ‘Byzantium’ or ‘Byzantine’ suggest these elements. However, in order to interpret what the word ‘Byzantium’ or ‘Byzantine’ suggests in the British cultural context (and what it omits), access to shared cultural knowledge on the contemporary meaning of the term ‘Byzantine’, as it has been constructed within modern British culture, is required.

In other words, the presuppositions for understanding the connotations of specific phrases about Byzantine culture in Greece, or the connotations of the term ‘Byzantine’ in the U.K. are deeply cultural. The same applies to the process of making exhibitionary meaning around Byzantine culture and art.

To sum up, in the context of the British dominant cultural group, the meaning of Byzantium is obscure and a comprehensive understanding of Byzantium is unavailable; in the British cultural context, it is simply understood as a past culture
full of undefined complexities. In the Greek cultural context, it is accounted for as part of Greece's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and also, as an identity that modern Greeks take pride in. Thus, the different cultural contexts of the museums in the U.K. and Greece offer the two ends of the spectrum of understanding Byzantium, and this is valuable to the present study. This will contribute to the wider understanding of Byzantium nowadays, but also, and perhaps, most importantly, by analysing the exhibitionary complexes it will be shown that although the understanding of Byzantium is so very different, Byzantium operates in both cases, (i.e. British and Greek) to explain the identity of the imagined community of each country to which each museum belongs.

**Disciplines**

My argument on the making of exhibitionary meaning as a cultural meaning making process has a number of distinct aims.

Firstly, I undertake a revision of each country's accepted cultural and historical sources of the reconstruction of Byzantium arguing that they make themselves apparent in the national museum exhibitionary complexes; also, arguing that the national museum exhibitionary complexes rather than being democratised, following the contemporary curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification, they are the result of the development of a certain cultural tradition.

Secondly, I investigate these complexes as composite ensembles, aiming to understand their function and intellectual context, with specific emphasis on what the relationship between the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices and the construction of the different representations of Byzantium 'show and tell' about the
museums under study and their institutional functions, as well as the constructive notion of Byzantium.

Lastly, I undertake a thorough analysis of the complexes, which incorporate the different presuppositions, the conventional and contemporary curatorial concepts and practices and the different interpretations of Byzantine history, culture and art to investigate the meanings of Byzantium.

In doing so I am locating my work within wider bodies of scholarship, which are interested in the relationship between curatorial practices in national museums and the making of meaning in the fields of Pragmatics, Curatorial Studies, Museum Studies and Institutional critique. These disciplines are used in the conceptual work of this thesis, along with the main discipline used for the analysis of making exhibitionary meaning, which is semiology. Apart from the above fields, the field that emerges strongly is Byzantine Studies with emphasis on the concerns of Byzantine art and culture with language, identity, cultural and political processes.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study of museums of different countries provides access on different cultural contexts, interpretive strategies, and museum curatorial/meaning making practices. The analysis of curatorial practices around Byzantine exhibitionary complexes in these different museum settings gives original insights into:

(a) how the cultural and political framework in these different settings affect the construction of exhibitionary meaning (This will be shown through the identification and explanation of the function of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices) and
(b) how Byzantium is currently thought, seen and deployed in museum identity-making and nation-building practices (This will be shown through the identification and explanation of the different interpretations of Byzantium within each of the exhibitionary complexes under study).

The arguments on: (1) curating as a process of meaning making by looking at exhibitionary meaning as necessarily situated in and mediated by culture, and (2) the explanation of the identities of each museums’ imagined community through the use of Byzantium are new.

Also, understandings of: (i) European identity(ies) in relation to Byzantium and (ii) the application of the contemporary concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ in the context of European national museums are new.

To sum up, curating has not been explained in terms of ‘myth’ making before and has not been tied to a cultural account for meaning, which this thesis will provide. Until now, the use(s) of Byzantium in European identity making politics have not been identified and explained. Also, there are few, if any, explanations of the actual function of the application of democratisation and demystification of the exhibition in the national museums context.

Chapter One will present the thesis arguments analytically, and will set out the conceptual work of the thesis. It will explain in detail the Barthesian sense of myth, with which the past culture of Byzantium that exists through the various narrations of museum exhibitionary complexes will be analysed as a mythical object. Also, it will explain in detail the Foucauldian theory of power relations, explicitly explaining how power relations function or intervene in the process of making
exhibitionary meaning and affect each museum’s curatorial discursive formations. Furthermore, it will explain: the term ‘presuppositions’; the term ‘curatorial’; the term curatorial ‘bricolage’; the curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’; the contemporary museums’ ‘democratic turn’; the relation of national museums with the making of identity; the relation of the curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ with the contemporary museums’ ‘democratic turn’. All these will be explained in relation to the function of myth and power/knowledge in the framework of the exhibitionary complex. In other words, it will set out the theoretical framework around curatorial practices and their relationship with the making of exhibitionary meaning. This framework will be used in order to explain the concrete examples of the museums in Chapter Three.

Chapter Two concerns the theoretical perspectives of Byzantine culture and art and their perception within each of the involved cultures, including the historical reasons why each culture interprets Byzantine culture the way it interprets it, which fall into the category of cultural presuppositions. It will develop a survey around historian’s perspectives on Byzantium in order to facilitate understanding of museums’ choices within the exhibitionary complexes in Chapter Three. More particularly, it will set out the theoretical framework around the arguments concerning the origin of Byzantine culture and art as constructed in history and art history literature and will explicitly explain the reasons that allow the different interpretations of the origin of Byzantium. Also, it will explain the ‘national’, or at least the culturally accepted arguments around the national in the U.K. and Greece concerning the origin of Byzantine culture and art as constructed in ‘national’ history and art history literature of each country - mainly through history school-books and
national museums’ publications. This will help to get an insight into how cultural knowledge around Byzantine history and art has been constructed in each country and the way that the understanding of the imagined community of each country on Byzantium has been developed over the years. Through the exploration of the culturally accepted views of each country and the development of cultural knowledge, I will be able to explain the beliefs, ideas and values on Byzantium that museums demonstrate e.g. ideas about whether Byzantium was Roman or Greek and whether there was continuity or discontinuity, which I will show to be exemplified and put into practice in Chapter Three. Each sub-chapter will look thoroughly at the history and art history literature of each country, as well as at the formative history of Byzantine history in each country, and will identify and explain the different ‘myths’ of Byzantium as constructed within the history and art history literature of each country. It will close with the main points of the narration of Byzantine history from each country’s perspective.

In other words, Chapters One and Two set out the theoretical problems on curatorial practices and the different ideologies around Byzantium, as well as the ‘solutions’ to those problems which I will use to explain the concrete examples of the museums in Chapter Three. This will result in answering the first part of my main research question.

Chapter Three will use the outcome of Chapter Two and the methods described in Chapter One to analyse and explain the different representations of Byzantine culture and art in the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes under study. The concretisation or embodiment of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices and their functions will be shown in the particular exhibitionary complexes under
study through visual and textual analysis. The exploration of the cultural presuppositions made in the previous chapter will enable the visual and textual analysis of existing exhibitionary complexes, through which I will explain how meaning around the representation of Byzantine culture is constructed by explaining the different myths of Byzantine culture within each of the exhibitionary complexes. In order to proceed with this, I will also use information sourced from background research conducted on each museum’s curatorial strategies and policies, the historical, cultural and political context of each museum and museum archives. This will set the criteria for the identification and understanding of the political implications of the presuppositions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning to the collecting and exhibiting of Byzantine art and culture and will result in answering the second part of my main research question. In other words, this chapter will be looking at the actual museum contents and practices to show how the theories and underlying concepts work themselves through the physical arrangements of images, objects and texts. Eventually, this will result into new insights, understandings and explanations of each Byzantine exhibitionary complex.
Chapter One

National museums and ‘regimes of truth’

Introduction

In this thesis, I argue that in all three museums, the exhibitionary complexes communicate issues of each imagined community’s identity, through Byzantium. I argue that Byzantine history, culture and art provide an explanation of the identity of the ‘nation’ and the (dominant) culture of the country to which each museum belongs, and act to promote a desired image of the corresponding ‘nation’. In each case, this meaning is different but presented as ‘natural’ and hence as the only ‘truth’; the meanings are ideologically constructed products arising from the interaction between cultural knowledge and museum power relations. My arguments will be identified, explained and understood through the Barthesian concept of ‘myth’ (Barthes, 1972) and the Foucauldian theory of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1977; 1978; 1988).

Thesis main arguments

I consider it important to explain my arguments in detail, as they constitute the axis of the thesis and are therefore leading its conceptual work, which will be set out in the present chapter.
1. British Museum

I argue that Byzantine history, art and culture in the British Museum exhibitionary complex is (re)presented/(re)produced through the ideas, beliefs and values of the British imagined community which constitute its ‘own’ identity. Byzantium is placed within the narrative of European history and British history. However, Byzantium is presented as a continuation of the Roman Empire to the east, eastern, exotic, non-European, ‘different’, and thus, ‘other’. Europe is presented as emerging from the western kingdoms that are conceived as a continuation of the Roman Empire in the west (e.g. Ostrogoth, Frankish) and Britain is presented as emerging from these kingdoms (and hence as a continuity of the Roman Empire), but is predominantly presented as Anglo-Saxon, and hence English. I argue that by the use of these histories, what is actually presented within the exhibitionary complex is British identity as predominantly Anglo-Saxon and, and hence, English, as well as European.

The ideas, beliefs and values constituting a national identity that are (re)produced within the British Museum exhibitionary complex derive from historical narratives that appeared as early as the 1600s and were used in the late nineteenth century in support of the Roman-British identity of the British ‘nation’, and the Anglo-Saxon identity of the English nation. I consider it important to explain these historical narratives here as this will offer the context within which Byzantine culture and art are used in the exhibitionary complex to explain the identity of the nation and the culture of the country to which the museum belongs.

Sammes (1676) in *Britannia antiqua illustrata*, introduced the notion of a continuation of the Roman history in Britain, in terms of language, traditions and
religion. More particularly, he explained that in AD 79 the Roman Emperor Titus Vespasian privately encouraged the Britons ‘to live in ease and quiet, and in the [Roman] Institutes and Customes of a Civil life’ and in public, he ‘promoted the building of Houses, Temples, and places of general Resort’ (Sammes, 1976, p. 239). In addition to this, Sammes (1676) explained that Titus also inspired the Students of Gallia, who hated the Roman Language, to love the Latin Eloquence (Sammes, 1976, p. 239). Although Sammes’ (1676) main argument in *Britannia antiqua illustrata* is of the Phoenician derivation of the Welsh language, he also explained that after the end of the Roman period in Britain (which came with the Anglo-Saxon invasions in the 400s), Britain inherited and continued the Roman values, traditions and beliefs (Sammes, 1676, pp. 353-386).

Hingley (cited in Bell, 2007) explains that the ‘English [of the nineteenth century] often identified themselves with the classical Romans’. Faber (1969 cited in Bell, 2007) after noting that Smith (1776) extensively discusses the classical empires, maintained the view that ‘the late Victorian imperialists were heirs to this classical tradition’ and argued that ‘if the *Pax Britanica* was hailed in Latin, it was because the *Pax Romana* served as a model of comparison and inspiration’ (Faber, 1966 cited in Bell, 2007, p. 208). This idea about the origins of a Roman-British identity of the British nation had been dominant until the 1930s (Jones, 1996 p.1). For the next sixty years, this had changed and the so-called ‘Germanist theme’ (Jones, 1996 p.1) had become the dominant belief on the origin of the identity of the British nation. According to the ‘Germanist theme’, the Anglo-Saxons ‘destroyed or displaced the Romano-British civilization’ and created a ‘fresh beginning’ (Jones, 1996 p.1).
According to Jones (1996) it is on the assumption of this fresh beginning that English national consciousness and constitutional and social identity rest (Jones, 1996, p. 1).

Here, it is worth mentioning that the Romans gave the name ‘Britons’ to the Celtic people who lived in Great Britain from the Iron Age through the Roman periods (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989; Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). As Perkins (2000) explained, in the ‘popular imagination’ [which here translates as commonly shared knowledge or cultural knowledge] the separate identity of Anglo-Saxons and Britons […] is attributed to racial difference’ (Perkins, 2000, p. 514). Hence, the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons, i.e. Celts are thought of and seen as different; Perkins’s (2000) -nationalistic- approach, provides a popular, explanation of this difference. However, as he further explained, the term ‘British’ at the time he was writing suggested Englishness, which ‘suggests a predominantly Anglo-Saxon ancestry, with perhaps a romantic tinge, but only a tinge, of latter immigrant blood- Viking, Norman, Huguenot or whatever’ (Perkins, 2000, p. 514).

In the recent years, a ‘Romanist school’ (Jones, 1996 p.1) has stressed (again) ‘the significant continuity of Roman and Celtic British society into the Middle Ages’ (Jones, 1996 pp.1-2). This mainly serves as proof of (primarily) Roman but also, Celtic historical continuities that occur in the formation of the modern British culture (which is inclusive of Englishness, and which suggests that English identity is part of the British identity). According to this view, Roman values are seen as fundamental to the development of the modern British identity. Many Roman elements are thought to have continued within time, from the period marked as the end of what today is called ‘Roman Britain’ until the present day (e.g. Frere, 1969; Dark, 2000; Armitage, 2000). An example would be the Roman legacy of imperium to the three (medieval)
Kingdoms, i.e. the Scottish, the Welsh and the English which existed from the late medieval to the early modern period. These Kingdoms are thought to indicate the Roman roots of the British Imperial ideology (Armitage, 2000, pp. 29-30).

Another example of the suggestion of Roman continuities within modern British culture, would be the way that ‘BBC Bitesize’ (2015), an online source primarily aimed at children (which however, also provides learning resources for adults, parents and teachers) explains the elements that the modern British culture has inherited from the Romans. It includes a discussion about common linguistic roots; for example, it says that ‘a lot of British words come from Latin’ (BBC Bitesize, 2015), while it explains that Latin is the Roman language, and it also explains that:

The ways we measure distances – miles feet and inches - that’s all Roman. We’ve got Roman numerals, which you still see in a lot of places, like clocks. And coins too – the Romans made using coins to buy things popular throughout the whole of Roman Britain, rather than just swapping one thing for another – like a sheep for a sword for example. All in all we owe a lot to the Romans - but don’t tell them that - they’re smug enough as it is (BBC Bitesize, 2015).

By this, BBC Bitesize (2016) explains some of the Roman continuities that are ‘still’ obvious within the modern British culture. We find similar positions in the British national curriculum (Department for Education, 2013): it includes topics such as the ‘Romanisaton of Britain’ and the ‘legacy of Greek or Roman culture (art, architecture or literature) on later periods in British history, including the present day’ (History programmes of study: key stages 1 and 2, National curriculum in England, 2013, p. 3). Also, in BBC History, Ibeji (2011) explains that:
Rome’s most important legacy was not its roads, nor its agriculture, nor its cities, nor even its language, but the bald and simple fact that every generation of British inhabitant that followed them - be they Saxon, Norman, Renaissance English or Victorian - were striving to be Roman (Ibeji, 2011)

In other words, it says that Roman legacy is important (its roads, agriculture, cities and language), but the most important part of Roman legacy is its reputation, which made all British inhabitants want to be seen as a continuity of the Romans. Ibeji (2011) also links the roots of Christianity in Britain to Roman Catholicism by explaining that ‘In one respect, you could say that Britain was the birthplace of Roman Catholicism’ (Ibeji, 2011). It supports the idea that this was a result of: (a) Constantine’s great victory at the battle of Milvian Bridge in AD 312, which he fought in the name of the Christian God (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2016) and for which ‘he used the British army as the core of the force with which he finally conquered the empire’ (Ibeji, 2011) and (b) the subsequent Council of Nicaea, which ‘established the Nicene Creed of the Catholic Church’ (Ibeji, 2011). Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to profess Christianity (however, Orthodoxy, not Catholicism), and in AD 330, he became the founder of Constantinople; the founder of what today is called Byzantium.

I argue that although the British Museum exhibitionary complex reflects the above ‘Romanist school’ ideas, its interpretation is actually narrowed to the ideas of the ‘Germanist theme, i.e. the British identity is presented as a Roman continuity, but at the same time, the British identity is ‘reduced’ to English, by being primarily presented as Anglo-Saxon. Also, I argue that Byzantium is presented within the
narrative of British history (e.g. Celts, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons), starting the narration from the Roman Empire and beyond and is explained as the continuation of the Roman Empire. However, this narrative of British history is presented along with the narrative of European history. The mixed narration of these histories undermines the very idea that Byzantine history, European history and British history are very different; in this way, British identity is presented as English, and in relation to a notion of ‘empire’ by reflecting in a sense the colonial and imperial ideology of the past. British identity is finally presented as English; English identity is dominant: both Byzantine history and European history are presented as subordinate and complementary to the British and therefore to the English history.

In order to illustrate my arguments I will investigate rooms 41 and 40 that comprise the Byzantine exhibitionary complex in the British Museum. But also, I will look at the British imagined community’s understanding (or British cultural understanding) of Byzantium and of the notion of ‘empire’ and perceptions of colonialism/imperialism, the museum’s current position within the museum world, and the way that these interact with the curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’. This will add to the understanding of the use and explanation of Byzantine history in the British context. This will also allow the understanding of the recurring colonial and imperialist ideology of the past, which manifest themselves within the current exhibitionary complex.

Given that Byzantium had been ‘unknown’ to British history scholarship up until its ‘discovery’ by British scholars in the decades of 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Hussey, 1950; Jenkins, 1966) and then abandoned again only to be re-discovered in the late 2000s (e.g. Herrin, 2007; James, 2006), after a short revision period in the 1980s, it
seems odd for the British Museum to have included Byzantium in the narrative of British history. It had never been the case, but it seems to be the case now as it is shown in its exhibitionary complex. This is a complex issue that requires careful explanation.

As explained earlier, it is only very recently that Byzantium has been included in British scholars’ agendas as the western narrative of the formation of Europe (e.g. Herrin, 2007; Cameron, 2014). Accordingly, it is only very recently that the powerful appeal that Byzantium exerts on the wider public has been demonstrated, and I would add identified, after a series of important museum exhibitions (Cameron, 2014, p. 2), e.g. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997; 2004; 2012, The Royal Academy of Arts, 2008-9; The J. Paul Getty Museum and National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2013; and 2014. Also, many scholars have discussed the legacy of the British Empire on the collections and displays of the British Museum. For example, Barringer and Flynn (1998) in their discussion on the institutional framing of Chinese art in the British Museum argue that in the British Museum institutional environment, the collecting and exhibiting of Chinese objects is expressive of discourses of British national and imperial ideology. Equally, Adi (2012) is wondering whether ‘the sun has now set on Britain’s imperial ambitions, or are we witnessing a ‘new imperialism’ and new forms of colonial domination?’ (Adi, 2012). I argue that the above questions apply to all the exhibits in the British Museum, including the Byzantine ones, but I essentially see the argument on the recurring British imperialist/colonial ideology as a result of the unsuccessful attempt at demystification and democratisation of the exhibition- which, in turn, I see as the product of the ‘institutionalisation’ of the concepts of democratisation and demystification.
2. Byzantine and Christian Museum

Accordingly, I argue that Byzantine history, art and culture in the Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex is (re)presented/(re)constructed on the knowledge of the Greek imagined community (or Greek cultural knowledge) of its own identity. This knowledge is based on commonly shared nationalistic ideas of the past, concerning Greek ‘national unity’, as well as the historical continuity of Greek culture and nation through Byzantium; also, on the idea of Byzantium’s contribution to the Renaissance. More particularly, I argue that Byzantium in the Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex is presented as the continuation of Greek antiquity and that it incorporates the national historical narrative of the continuity of Greek national history from antiquity to the present day. This reflects the Greek nationalistic ideology, according to which Modern Greek culture is placed in continuity with Byzantium and Byzantium is placed in continuity with Greek antiquity - and this serves as a proof of Greek national unity; it affords a view of the Modern Greek identity as arising from Byzantium and Greek antiquity. Byzantium’s contribution to the Renaissance serves as a proof of the also European nature of Modern Greek identity. This in effect strengthens the idea of ‘national unity’ and continuity of the Greek nation from the ancient Greek culture through Byzantium. I argue that this is based on the nationalistic constructs of the ‘Great Idea’ and ‘Hellenic Christianism’ that appeared after the establishment of the Modern Greek state. These constructs act to strengthen the Greek national ideals and in effect to claim back the lost Greek territories, which were annexed to the Ottoman Empire as a result of the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottomans and their possession for
400 years since 1453. The set of ideas values and beliefs introduced above will be thoroughly explained in Chapter Two.

In support of my argument, I will look at the at the Greek imagined community’s understanding (or Greek cultural understanding) of Byzantium and Greek political history with a focus on ‘romantic’ nationalism, the museum's current position within the museum world, and the way that these interact with the curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’. This will help with an understanding of the use and explanation of Byzantine history in the Greek context, and will allow an understanding of the recurring nationalistic ideology of the past, which manifests itself within the current exhibitionary complex. I argue that this functions exactly as in the British Museum example, and is a result of the unsuccessful attempt at demystification and democratisation of the exhibition, which is the product of the ‘institutionalisation’ of the concepts of democratisation and demystification.

3. Museum of Byzantine Culture

Finally, I argue that Byzantium in the Museum of Byzantine Culture exhibitionary complex is (re)presented/(re)produced through the use of the same set of ideas values and beliefs, stemming from the common cultural knowledge of the Greek imagined community on Byzantium and has the same effect as the Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex. However, in addition to the use of the national(istic) views of historical continuity and national unity it also narrates Byzantine history through many elements of regionalism. Most of the exhibits are from Thessaloniki and actually, the exhibitionary complex narrates Byzantine history and culture by focusing on Thessaloniki. Hence, what it is actually presented is not
the history of Byzantine culture as a whole, as the museum’s title suggests, but the history of Thessaloniki in the Byzantine period, mixed with the wider narrative of Byzantium. Correspondence between the Athens Museum and the Ministry of Culture revealed that the latter has also been expressed by the Athens museum in the past. Besides, Thessaloniki sees itself as the most ‘Byzantine’ city of Greece, (and hence the most ‘Byzantine-Greek’ city of Greece). Still, Byzantium is presented as a ‘Greek Empire’, but with a view that the Byzantine centre of Thessaloniki has contributed highly to the preservation, continuation and spread of Byzantine-Greek culture. In support of my argument, I will examine the political history of Greece and the museum’s position within the museums’ world, in relation to its aspirations to be the only Museum, which actually explains Byzantine history and culture. I will also bring up in my discussion emerging issues of regionalism. Due to these issues, which emerge strongly, I will explain that this is a characteristic example of competition between two local/national institutions, which reveals the struggle for sovereignty, as a manifestation of power relations, between Byzantine museums in Greece - and finally, the importance Byzantium has for Greece.

The above will be identified, explained and understood through the Barthesian concept of ‘myth’ (Barthes, 1972) and the Foucauldian theory of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1977; 1988). They will be applied in the exhibitionary complexes of each country by looking at the following: the ‘national’-political ideologies and positions (i.e. the cultural and political context of each museum); the foundation history of each museum; and information about the museums’ Byzantine collections as well as Byzantine exhibitions, gathered from archives and history and art history literature on Byzantium. The contextual information will help the identification and explanation of
the underlying cultural ideas, values and beliefs on Byzantium illustrated by the images and texts of each exhibitionary complex. In other words, this will be examined through the identification and explanation of the presuppositions, which are involved in curatorial practices and are responsible for the construction of the different representations of Byzantine culture and art in the museum exhibitionary complexes under study.

**Conceptual map**

Here, I will explain the basic terms, concepts and theories explicitly discussed in this thesis. In particular, I will focus on the explanation of the term ‘presuppositions’, the concept of power/knowledge, the concept of ‘myth’, the term ‘curatorial’, curatorial ‘bricolage’, and the curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’.

The first purpose of the theoretical and conceptual discussion is to explain these basic terms and concepts so as to facilitate their use in the thesis. The second, and equally important purpose is to explore various ways of interpreting curation, the making of exhibitionary meaning within the context of national museums and the relations between them.

The understanding of the above will contribute to the analysis and explanation of the different representations of the past culture of Byzantium in the respective national museum exhibitionary complexes. Equally, it will contribute to the understanding of the interaction of cultural knowledge with the making of exhibitionary meaning and the functions of museum power relations. This will lead to:
(a) the identification and explanation of the making of ‘a’ national identity, encompassing notions of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ within the museum framework

(b) the understanding of the reasons of the museums’ unsuccessful attempts at ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’, which are seen as fundamental to contemporary ‘curatorial’ (Lind, 2009), and conditions for the ‘Democratic’ museum

The understanding of the above will also contribute to the interpretation and explanation of the contemporary museums’ ‘democratic turn’.

In order to make this analysis and explanation possible, I will use the Foucauldian conception of the relation between power and knowledge and the Barthesian concept of ‘myth’ and I will present the role of curatorial practices in the making of exhibitionary meaning and two interrelated theoretical and conceptual approaches:

1. the relation of national museums with the making of identity

2. the relation of the curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ with the contemporary museums’ ‘democratic turn’

The concept of power/knowledge will help with an understanding of how particular meanings of Byzantium become excluded and others included, in the respective national museum exhibitionary complexes. Along with the concept of ‘myth’, it will enable the understanding and explanation of the reasons behind the selection of a specific interpretation of Byzantium over another.
The theoretical and conceptual approaches along with the examination of the context of each museum, i.e. their formative history together with the wider cultural and political history of the country to which they belong, will also enable an analysis of how these different myths are constructed in practice. And this analysis will frame the next chapter (Chapter Two), which will account for the significance of Byzantium in the cultural and political histories of the two different countries, so as to explain where each national museum gets ideas in order to construct its own version of ‘myth’. Finally, in Chapter Three, by applying this analysis empirically I will be able to explain how each of the national museum institutions under study constructs the exhibitionary meaning around Byzantium the way it does, and this will frame the relationship of each national museums’ power-politics and knowledge-ethics to the cultural presuppositions involved in the construction of exhibitionary meaning.

1. Presuppositions

According to Levinson (1983, pp. 179-180) a presupposition is a background belief, relating to an utterance, that:

- must be mutually known or assumed by the speaker and addressee for the utterance to be considered appropriate in context
- generally, will remain a necessary assumption whether the utterance is placed in the form of an assertion, denial, or question, and
- can generally be associated with a specific lexical item or grammatical feature (presupposition trigger) in the utterance.
Hence, presuppositions in the context of the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes under study are implicit assumptions or ideas that inform the production of utterances about Byzantium. These utterances are products of the curatorial discursive formations of each museum and are found within the exhibitionary constructs. In the context of the exhibitionary complexes, the presupposition triggers which signal the existence of the presuppositions in these utterances are found within the constructed images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes. The identification of the 'presupposition triggers' within the utterances of the curatorial discursive formations of each museum is necessary for the visual and textual analysis of the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes, and this is undertaken in the Chapter Three. The presupposition triggers are constructions or items which would signal the existence of the different presuppositions within the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes, and this will help to further identify the different 'myths' of Byzantium as presented within each exhibitionary complex. In other words, the triggers are like signs. The triggers in the exhibitionary complex have either visual or/and textual form and are presented in the exhibitionary complex’s images and texts. In order to be able to identify and explain the presupposition triggers within the exhibitionary complex’s images and texts, it is necessary to know each imagined community’s background ideas and beliefs on Byzantium, so as to be able to relate them to utterances, whose truth is taken for granted.

Is it the case that curators have actively chosen the cultural message of their own imagined community on Byzantium and used them to reconstruct a new meaning of the past culture of Byzantium in the images and texts of their exhibitionary complexes? As explained in the Introduction, the individual curator or
the groups of museum professionals are a product or products of the culture/society (the structures) that pre-exists them. This is why we can see exhibitionary complexes as reflecting the culturally accepted interpretations of the history, art and culture of the Byzantine Empire – and this is explored more fully in Chapter Two.

2. Power/knowledge and ‘myth’ in the exhibitionary complex framework

2.1 The function of power/knowledge in the exhibitionary complex

Foucault sees power as productive; as productive of knowledge, truth or discourse, for example, that can take a long time to change, involving basic changes in perception or thinking. He sees power as embodied through socialised processes of discipline and control, reproduced through social and cultural norms, and internalised by both powerful and powerless people or groups of people. Foucault explains that power is everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault 1977). As Gaventa (2003) says, this:

- marks a radical departure from previous modes of conceiving power and cannot be easily integrated with previous ideas, as power is diffused rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them’ (Gaventa 2003, p.1).

For Foucault (1978) ‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ so in this sense power is neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault 1978, p. 93) – it is present in the process that Giddens (1979) calls ‘structuration’ (where both systems and structures necessitate each other and structures are recursively dependent upon the systems). I conceive of power as ‘transformative’, or ‘productive’, as being in
constant flux and negotiation, and constituted through curatorial practice. It is in this sense that Gidden's (1979) account of the structure -which is in a process of generation, reproduction, and transformation- fits with Foucault's account of power. Foucault uses the term 'power/knowledge' to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth'. Foucault (1976) argues that truth isn't outside power. On the contrary, truth 'is produced by virtue of multiple constraints. And it induces regulated effects of power' (Foucault, 1976, p. 13). Therefore, 'truth' is 'a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements' (Foucault, 1976, p.14), it is linked 'by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it' (Foucault, 1976, p.14; Rabinow, 1984, p. 74).

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned, the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth, the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Foucault, in Rabinow 1984, p. 73).

I argue that the national museum institutions are institutions of power in the sense that they (re) produce the imagined community's knowledge(s), regimes of truth and general politics. As Foucault explains, the ‘regimes of truth’ and ‘general politics’ are the result of scientific discourse and institutions, and are reinforced, but also, redefined constantly and can ‘in fact be integrated into any function (education,
medical treatment, production, punishment)’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 206). In this sense, I argue that the imagined community’s knowledge(s), regimes of truth and general politics can be integrated into museum curation. Foucault (cited in Rabinow, 1984) further explains that the way to define power relations is as ‘truth’, or better, the battle ‘for truth’, or at least ‘around truth’. Truth, not as ‘the ensemble of thruths, which are to be discovered and accepted’ but as ‘the ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true’ a battle about ‘the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays’ (Foucault, cited in Rabinow 1984, p. 74). This is a form of power, which:

applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 783).

In other words, this is a form of power which makes individuals into subjects; either subject to someone else by control and dependence, or tied to their own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). In this way, Foucault describes the notion of disciplinary power, which functions on the micro level of society as a productive process. This would further explain the powerful (re)production and circulation of the ideas, values and beliefs of the imagined community towards identity within its members; in our example, such members would be the museum curators. Power relations, as described by Foucault, are productive processes rather than repressive ones. Power produces objects, truths and political spaces by using techniques, knowledge and discourse (Masschelein, 2004).
The ‘spaces’ in question here are the national museums. Foucault (1979) further explains the productive nature of power and says, ‘In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth’ (Foucault, 1979, p 194). But also, Foucault (1977) explains that in order to be exercised, this power would be successfully exercised as long as it could itself remain invisible, ‘like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 214). However, this field of perception is formulated by the mechanisms that are monitoring the individual and consist of a permanent account of individuals’ behaviour, and hence the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth. This is a process of connecting identity and power, which also produces facts, subject domains, and rituals of truths (Simola et al., 1998). Museum institutions are not an exception. On the contrary, I argue that they are institutions of power in the sense of exercising power, by producing knowledge(s) and truths.

By looking at the exhibitionary complex as a cultural construction of ‘power’ and ‘truth’, Foucault’s approach will be used to explain the ways in which the products of curatorial discourses (i.e knowledge(s) and truths about Byzantium/identity) are imbued with power, and national museum institutions function as institutions of power and knowledge relations, i.e it will be used to explain that curatorial power is productive, in the sense that it produces meanings, knowledge(s) and truths, through the exhibitionary complexes. Hence, it will be helpful in explaining that curation is not the disinterested and innocent presentation of existing identities and truths but the products of power, politics and cultural ideas, values and beliefs. Accordingly, it will be useful to the ‘myth’ analysis that is central
to the present enquiry, as it will facilitate the identification of the presuppositions involved in the construction of exhibitionary meaning that are responsible for the different ‘myths’ of Byzantium which manifest themselves within the different exhibitionary complexes under study.

2.2. The function of ‘myth’ in the exhibitionary complex

Barthes (1972, p.128) explains that the very principle of ‘myth’ is to turn history into nature. By this, he draws on the concept of Marxist ideology aiming to reveal the ways in which the results of people's actions in history are turned into what appear to be the result of laws of nature. According to Marx and Engels (1970, p. 47) ideology works like a ‘camera obscura’, which inverts the image of social reality, presenting itself as objective and universal; also, it not only represents, but also is the interests of the ruling class (Marx and Engels, 1970, pp. 64-68). Ideology, ‘myth’ according to Barthes (1972), is a set of values, rules and agreements through which certain historical meanings, which operate in the interests of one particular dominant social or cultural group, are constructed and presented as natural and universal and given to an entire society. The ‘myth’ of Byzantine culture in the framework of the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes under study is perceived as a cultural reality concerning Byzantine culture among the layers of signification within the constructed images and texts of each Byzantine exhibitionary complex. The functions of ideological narratives concerning Byzantine culture manifest themselves in the sense of the Barthesian ‘myth’ within the constructed images and texts of the museums’ current Byzantine exhibitionary complexes.
‘Myth’ is a type of speech, a system of communication, according to Barthes (1972, p. 109) and hence, myth analysis enables the explanation of how communication takes place. The implications of cultural mythologies are particularly complex in the sophisticated contexts of museum exhibitionary complexes. However, museums construct the image-text relationships in the exhibitionary complex following both contemporary and conventional concepts/practices (for example the contemporary curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’). The identification of these concepts/practices within the constructed images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes under study will help the identification, understanding and explanation (i.e. my critical analysis) of the image-text relationships within the exhibitionary complexes. In its turn, the interpretation of the image-text relationships of each exhibitionary complex will help to analyse the layers of exhibitionary meaning. Specifically, the exhibitionary meaning will be explained by identifying the secondary, cultural meanings of signs within the exhibitionary complexes (signs that are used as signifiers for a secondary meaning). In other words, by identifying the cultural connotations i.e. by identifying and explaining the combination of paradigms and syntagms that make up a ‘truth’ with elaborate cultural presuppositions on Byzantium, which reinforce or are compatible with structures of power, and which create forms of ‘common sense’, of the taken-for-granted meanings of Byzantium. Exhibitionary complexes are therefore the products of power and perform ideological or mythological work (i.e. they promote a particular view of Byzantium and relate to ‘democratisation’).

Following the above, I argue that each Byzantine exhibitionary complex under study is the product of the power relations of each national culture, which
(re)produces/(re)constructs ‘cultural truths’ and hence, the project of myth analysis lies in articulating the relationship between all aspects of the sign system of each exhibitionary complex that constructs meaning around cultural assumptions embedded in each exhibitionary complex. The power relations produce the curatorial positions and the exhibitionary complexes, which ‘display’ the myths that are constitutive of identity and which also have a role in the attempt at the ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ of knowledge.

The process of mythological analysis necessarily begins with the critical insight that the exhibitionary complex sign system carries assumptions concerning Byzantine culture that appear natural but are actually historically constructed. Museums aim to communicate the ideas around the topics of their Byzantine exhibitionary complexes through their practices and as a result, museum objects and texts are organized into relationships that encode systems of signs to construct exhibitionary meaning. Therefore, central to interpretation of the ‘myth’ of Byzantine culture within each exhibitionary complex is the context of signification that is present in the relationships of the constructed images and texts of the exhibitionary complex.

In combination with the above, iconography/iconology of the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes will provide valuable information on the presuppositions involved in each museum’s curatorial practices. The functions of those presuppositions as well as their cultural and political implications will be identified and understood within the layers of exhibitionary meaning. This will result in the explanation of the ‘myths’ of Byzantine Culture in the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes under study and consequently, in an explanation of issues relating to the notions of identity, nation and religion, as interpreted by each museum.
3. Contemporary curating

3.1. Contemporary curating is meaning making

In this section I will explain that contemporary curating is meaning making and I will tie it to power/knowledge, ‘truth’ and ‘myth’. I will do this by bringing into my discussion current accounts of curating and its relation to the production of meaning, and I will show why these accounts are not sufficient: I will explain that what is missing from these accounts is a satisfactory account of meaning, that is, a cultural account of meaning.

Contemporary curating can be seen as a ‘distinct mode of discourse’ (O’Neil, 2012, p. 132) that ‘as a collection of utterances takes place in particular social contexts and is subject to the limitations of time and space’ (Habermas, 1990, cited in O’Neil, 2012, p. 3). For Foucault (1972) discourse is a way or ways of constituting knowledge and power relations, social practices and forms of subjectivity, which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. However, discourse is more than just ways of thinking and producing meaning. It constitutes ‘the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern’ (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). For O’Neil (2012) curation is: ‘the constructive and dynamic role of either spoken or written discourse [in] structuring areas of knowledge and the social and institutional practices’ (O’Neil, 2012, p. 132), which are associated with contemporary art and curating. Therefore, curation is a form of discourse where power and knowledge meet and I argue that I can use these
concepts to analye and explain how meaning is produced in exhibitionary complexes.

There have been several attempts made to define curation and its relation to the production of meaning however, none of them provides a satisfactory theoretical account of meaning. For example, for Nowotny (2013) and Smith (2012) curating is considered to be a spiritual act bonded with the capacity of creation. The 'spiritual act' and 'capacity of creation' seem to work beyond the constraints encountered by mere mortals, as Kant would put it. Wolff (1981) however, has provided a radically different explanation of creation; creation as cultural production. According to Wolff (1981) ‘all people and all acts are socially located’ and ‘even individuality is constructed in socialisation’ (Wolff, 1981, p. 19). The nature of ‘creativity’ then, cannot be free from cultural and social factors. Following Giddens’ account of the structure, it could be said that structure, determines the focus of the product of ‘creation’, which is no other than the product of culture. It is in that sense that Wolff (1981) sees that human act is determined: agency, creativity and structure, all work in mutual dependence and interaction. Following this, curating will be understood as cultural production, as reproducing the values, ideas and beliefs of cultural groups.

For Waterlow (cited in Smith 2012) curating is: ‘A medium bringing a passionate and informed understanding of works of art to an audience in ways that will stimulate, inspire, question’ (Waterlow, cited in Smith, 2012, p. 21). Although Waterlow (cited in Smith 2012) explains that curating is ‘making possible the altering of perception’ (Waterlow, cited in Smith, 2012, pp. 21-22), he does not provide a theoretical account that would explain how. Furthermore, Smith (2012) explains:
to exhibit, is to bring a selection of previous and other, imaginable art or newly created works of art into a shared space (which may be a room, a site, a publication, a web portal or an app) with the aim of demonstration, primarily through the experimental accumulation of visual connections, a particular constellation of meaning that cannot be made known by other means (Smith, 2012, p. 30).

Smith’s (2012) accounts fail to explain the production of meaning. By saying ‘constellation of meaning’ Smith (2012, p. 30) perhaps refers to the ‘syntagm’ of the works into a space, i.e. the syntagmatic relations of the works into a space, (which concern the positioning of the works; to put it better the ‘syntagm’ is the relationship where signs occur in sequence or parallel and work together for the construction of meaning). However, Smith (2012) does not use the word ‘syntagm’; he rather gives an abstract explanation and also, he does not provide an explanation as to where the meaning comes from. In a semiotic account meaning arises from the differences between signifiers, i.e. the differences between the forms that signs take (Chandler, 2014) and these differences here would be syntagmatic and paradigmatic.

However, Nowotny (2013) and Waterlow (cited in Smith 2012) as well as Smith (2012) refer to the ‘exhibitionary meaning’ which: ‘is established and experienced in the space of an exhibition, actual or virtual’ (Smith, 2012, p. 30) and is the result of the mediation of the curator in enabling viewers to experience an exhibition setting. O’Neil (2012) considers curating ‘as a distinct practice of mediation’ (O’Neil, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, curatorial mediation refers to meaning making, to interpretation and encompasses several practices such as selecting, organising, arranging, promoting, presenting or representing art in spaces of display and exhibition from ‘the staging of
an event to the creation of a sequence of sites or the orchestration of a discursive interaction, such as public dialogue' (Smith, 2012, p. 35). Through their practices, curators attempt to reconfigure our understanding of the multiple actors and agencies at work, within the field of cultural production and understanding. Therefore, curatorial practices attempt to form a potential meaning in a specific ‘exhibitionary complex’, in the sense that Smith (2012) uses Bennett’s term to refer to the contemporary assemblage of exhibition space, artifacts and curatorial mediations.

According to Storr (cited in Smith, 2012) ‘a good exhibition should be an intelligently conceived and scrupulously realised interpretation of the works selected’ (Storr, cited in Smith, 2012, p. 43). However, as Kreps (2003) states: ‘If we think of curating as social practice it follows that change is a constant’ (Kreps, 2003, p. 313). Therefore, exhibiting artistic meaning needs to be examined ‘in terms of identifying the kind of act or thought, the sort of affective insight, that contemporary life requires of curating’ (Smith, 2012, p. 31). In other words, exhibiting artistic meaning needs to be examined in the sense of the ‘curatorial’, which according to Lind is ‘a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas and so forth, a presence that strives to create fiction and push new ideas’ (Lind, cited in Vogel, 2013, p. 49). Although I agree with Lind’s approach on the ‘curatorial’ as signification processes, I take it a step forward and I argue that what it strives to create is ‘myth’, power, knowledge and ‘truth’ (following Foucault’s understanding of ‘truth’, the latter could also be taken as what Lind calls ‘fiction’) and that the understanding of the relationships between objects, people, places and ideas depend on cultural knowledge.
Curators encompass the use of visual signs in their practices so as to construct exhibition messages and allow audiences to explore the meanings of an exhibition. Storr (cited in Smith, 2012) argues that ‘Showing is telling. Space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased. Installation is presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation’ (Storr, cited in Smith, 2012, p. 48). The showing/telling analogy suggests that the process is innocent, however, I argue that it is not ‘innocent’: it does meaningful/ideological work. Installation, presentation, commentary and documentation do not ‘tell’ things ‘innocently’, they (re) produce a reality, a ‘truth’; they (re) produce a ‘myth’. As explained above, for Barthes, a ‘myth’ isn’t just a genre of stories: it is a particular way of saying something. According to Barthes, myth presents a set of ideas, values and beliefs as if it were a natural condition of the world, when in fact it is a constructed ‘reality’. A ‘myth’ is not the natural state of the world, but expresses the ideas, values and beliefs of its teller. Hence, the showing/telling analogy is a construction/communication of meanings/myths/ideologies; it is a ‘mythical’ construct.

Smith, following Storr’s position, argues that: ‘each particular exhibition would be an array of speech acts’, like the ‘utterances I mentioned above, and puts the exhibition in this analogy as a ‘conversational setting’ (Smith, 2012, p. 49). Using this metaphor of conversation, I understand that Smith calls up the semantics of the exhibition and seeks how it generates meaning by the relationships between its parts. These relations would be syntagmatic and paradigmatic on a Barthesian semiological account and the parts would be the exhibits and interpretational material.

Syntagmatic relations are possibilities of combination (Chandler, 2007). The sytagms here are the various ways in which the exhibition elements (i.e. objects,
texts) may be related to each other in sequence, e.g., this object -and- this text -and-
this object. In other words, they provide a structure or context within which signs
make sense, or else, the structural forms through which signs are organised into
codes or conventions for communication (Jakobson, 1971). However, as Saussure
(1983, cited in Chandler, 2014) explains, meaning arises from the differences between
signifiers; these differences are of two kinds: syntagmatic, which, as explained above
concern sequence, and paradigmatic, which concern substitution. Paradigmatic
relationships are the oppositions and contrasts between the signifiers that belong to
the same set from which those used in the text were drawn. They are functional
contrasts: they involve differentiation (Chandler, 2007). Such relations held ‘in
absentia’; in other words, they refer to what it is assumed that one takes for granted
as obvious. ‘Syntagmatic relations refer intratextually to other signifiers co-present
within the text, whilst paradigmatic relations refer intertextually to signifiers, which
are absent from the text’ (Saussure 1983; 1974, cited in Chandler 2014).

In terms of analysis these concepts would demonstrate that the images and
texts used in exhibitionary complexes are not innocent/accidental and that they
contribute directly to the meaning/connotation: the syntagmatic/paradigmatic
concepts can help the explanation of these choices and combinations, and that is the
point of using them. Syntagmatic relations involve studying the structure of a
syntagm and the relationships between its parts (Chandler 2014). The study of
syntagmatic relations here would reveal the conventions or ‘rules of combination’
underlying the production and interpretation of the exhibitionary complex, since the
use of one syntagmatic structure rather than another within the exhibitionary
complex influences meaning. Paradigmatic relations involve a consideration of the
positive or negative connotations of each signifier (revealed through the use of one
signifier rather than another), and the existence of 'underlying' thematic paradigms.
The use of one signifier rather than another from the same paradigm is based on
code (e.g. genre), convention, connotation, style. Paradigmatic analysis involves
comparing and contrasting each of the signifiers present in the exhibitionary complex
with absent signifiers, which might have been chosen, and considering the
significance of the choices made. For Barthes (1972) these choices depend on the set
of ideas, values and beliefs through which one particular dominant social or cultural
group, constructs a ‘reality’ and presents it as universal and given to an entire society.
Following the above I argue that the exhibitionary complex (re) produces a
‘mythologically’ constructed ‘reality’, and therefore, what is missing from current
curatorial accounts is a cultural account for exhibitionary meaning. Within the
following chapters this thesis will provide a cultural account of exhibitionary meaning.

3.2. The ‘curatorial’. A cultural account of meaning

Here, I will explain how the ‘curatorial’ in the sense that Lind (2009) explains it,
‘as a way of linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and
discourses in physical space’ (Lind, 2009) corresponds to the cultural account of
meaning. In order to achieve this, first I will explain the ‘curatorial’ and its relation to
the making of exhibitionary meaning and then I will position it within the national
museum context, where I will identify the challenges which occurred in this context,
and explore their implications for the curatorial. Second, I will provide and critique
some museum professionals’ incomplete accounts of the making of exhibitionary
meaning. And finally, I will argue that a cultural account of exhibitionary meaning
would be more accurate, sensitive and useful in explaining the curatorial/meaning making processes.

I understand the 'curatorial', as Mirzoeff (2011) explains 'visuality': in the sense of a production of a set of cultural processes and social organisations that form a given complex. The 'curatorial' in the exhibitionary complex is the model for perceiving and thinking. It incorporates the embodied dimension of the visual at an individual and collective level, together with the visual as cultural and political representation. Hence, the 'curatorial' refers to the elements at stake in the thinking behind the action of curating. Following the above, another term, which resembles the 'curatorial' and could be used to explain it is the 'scopic regime', in the sense that it appears in an essay by Martin Jay (1988) entitled ‘Scopic Regimes of Modernity’. This term is intended to encompass all the schemes, categories, perceptual and deductive habits which compose the ‘knowing style’ of an individual, and by the total number of codes, conventions, social habits and forms of representations which are common to a whole society. As Somaini (2006) explains:

The mental instruments through which an individual organizes his or her own visual experience vary from culture to culture and from time to time. They include the categories through which he or she classifies the various visual stimuli, the knowledge with which the results of immediate perception are integrated, the attitude towards images and various forms of representation (Somaini, 2006, p. 32).

Somaini (2006) refers to cultural knowledge, and its role to an individual’s way of granting meaning to the world around her/him, simply by using the 'tools' made available to her/him through his/her culture. Besides, as explained above, to Barthes
(1977) and Williams (1981) culture is the indispensable means of understanding through which we negotiate the image and make sense of reality, and to Wolff (1981) ‘creativity’, i.e. production is entangled with culture.

My thesis suggests that understanding is cultural knowledge. Since understanding rests on cultural values, the visual capacities curators use in order to construct an exhibition are those that inform their own visual experience, which is profoundly shaped by culture and society. However, in the national museum exhibitionary complexes analogy, the thinking behind the act of curating, the curatorial, is the product of both the curators’ own cultural knowledge and the kind of pressure curators are subject to within their national context by being charged with the construction of an exhibition of national significance.

This pressure comes from governmental policies (e.g. Schubert, 2009) and relates to the promotion of national ideas around identity. I understand this in relation to the Foucauldian concept of ‘governmentality’, according to which people are taught to govern themselves, shifting power from a central authority, like a state or institution, and dispersing it among a population (Foucault, 1977). This function of power follows Giddens (1979) understanding of the relation between human agents and social structure/institutions, explained earlier in the thesis. Governmental policies would be among those rules and resources that are responsible for the reconstruction of a national identity within the exhibitionary complex; in this sense, curatorial practice would be ‘in mutual relation of interdependence with social structures’ (Wolff, 1979, p.9), and hence the curatorial would be affected by, but also, depend on the social and cultural structures/institutions, rules and resources ‘recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems’ (Giddens, 1979, p. 64).
and vice versa, through the process that Giddens (1979) calls ‘structuration’. In this process both systems and structures necessitate each other and structures are recursively dependent upon the systems. In this sense structure/institutions are in a process of generation, reproduction, and transformation. This however, implies that the human agent doesn’t have total control over the process; the human agent does not have perfect agency. In effect, all these (individual, institutional, social and cultural) ‘actors’ are mutually constitutive. In the museum example, the human agent would be the curator and the process would be the exhibitionary meaning making process, which interactively ‘accomplish’ the construction/production of the exhibitionary complex.

In the past, the museum has been defined as an apparatus of the nation-state (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Bennett, 1995; Macdonald, 2003): It has been used ‘across history and across the world to create national narratives and identity (Teskey and Alkhamis, 2016, p.109) and it has been promoted as ‘the site for the consummation of a seamless and unproblematic national unity’ (Coombes, 2003, p.267). Part and parcel of this ideology has been ‘the constitution of a National Culture’ (Coombes, 2003, p. 267) and hence, the stories museums were telling and the identities they were portraying have been influenced by certain national political agendas.

National museum practices from the 2000s onwards have changed in response to new kinds of global pressure: they have become increasingly ‘open to and there is an increasing demand for, more public involvement in the creation of the presented national narratives and identities’ (Teskey and Alkhamis, 2016, p. 110). Apart from the pressure coming from governmental policies, the curatorial in the framework of the national museum exhibitionary complex, (which in our example
corresponds to the presuppositions of the representation/construction of a national identity), should also be examined by taking into account the contemporary countervailing forces of globalisation at work. Following concerns about the perceived consequent loss of local culture and values (Geraci, 2009, cited in Teskey and Alkhamis, 2016, p. 110), some contemporary museums increasingly ‘reflect a desire to protect and promote the heritage that is central to the conception of nationhood’ (Teskey and Alkhamis, 2016, p. 110). Here it appears that the national in a sense resists the global: national museums seem to resist the contemporary global standards for social and cultural inclusiveness. However, there is controversy here, as national museums are in a process of democratising their meaning making practices; democratising in the sense that Mulcahy (2006) explains (a) the ‘democratisation of culture’ i.e. ‘equal opportunity for all citizens to participate in publicly organised and financed cultural activities’ (Dueland, 2001, p. 41) e.g. low cost performances and exhibitions; promotion of equality of aesthetic opportunity via public art education and the promotion of certain forms of cultural programming that are deemed to be a public good (Mulcahy, 2006, p. 269) and (b) ‘cultural democracy’, i.e. respect and recognition for cultural diversity, as well as substituting a pluralistic for a monocultural concept (Mulcahy, 206, p.270).

This controversy however, witnesses a ‘cultural transformation’ in the museum. Robins (1999) discussed the first stages of this ‘cultural transformation’ in the museum, explaining that ‘in the new global arena, it is necessary, then, to minimize and maximize traditional cultural forms’ (Robins, 1999, p. 26). By this, Robins (1999) suggested that museums, in order to meet the new standards, those of inclusiveness,
should make the exhibitionary complexes (which are products of cultural understanding and interpretation) an open platform for communication.

As Karp (1991) has explained, exhibitionary complexes in national museums have the privilege of presenting images of ‘self and other’. I understand this in terms of Derrida's (1992) concept of identity-difference: identity is in part constituted by what it opposes and excludes. The ‘self’ here would be a version of a national identity and the ‘other’ would be the non-national, the different, which in European museums has often been seen as either ‘primitive’ or/and ‘exotic’ (Bennet, 2004). Up until the 1990s curatorial representations of national identity appear to have been privileged in relation to curatorial representations of the ‘other’.

Robins’s (1999) controversial approach, that of minimizing and maximizing traditional cultural forms, springs from the ‘needs of modernity’, in the sense that Gellner (1965; 1983, cited in Smith, 1999) explains it: the need for embracing other cultures with conviction. Nowadays, by democratising their meaning making practices, museums are making an effort to transform their relationship with the ‘other’ (the concept of democratisation will be explained in more detail in the section below; it is useful here as it is seen as an element of the contemporary curatorial).

However, I argue that representations of a national identity in national museums are still dominant although museums have perceived the need for embracing other cultures. I see this failure as a result of social/cultural forces outside curators’ control, which predetermine the curatorial and hence, curatorial action and curatorial production. By forces I understand the social/cultural structures and power relations that emanate from the very nature of society/culture itself and prevent
curators from making the exhibitionary complex ‘inclusive’. Baxandall (1972) explains that:

Some of the mental equipment a man orders his visual experience with is variable, and much of this variable equipment is culturally relative, in the sense of being determined by the society, which has influenced his experience. Among these variables are categories with which he classifies his visual stimuli, the knowledge he will use to supplement what his immediate vision gives him, and the attitude he will adopt to the kind of artificial object seen. The beholder [...] is likely to use those skills his society esteems highly (Baxandall, 1972, p. 40).

Baxandall (1972) refers to cultural knowledge by putting emphasis on the way that it shapes and influences the everyday experience(s) of an individual. I will use this example to explain that, although nowadays embracing other cultures is a commonly shared value in the contemporary museums world, what has always been intervening the curatorial and hence, the exhibitionary meaning making process and which nowadays fails to make the curatorial inclusive, is the specific cultural knowledge, which has always been influencing perception and interpretation. According to this knowledge the members of a cultural group make sense of the world around them, and more particularly, understand their identity in relation to ‘others’. I argue that this is an example of how power functions and which allows the following controversy to occur: although the aim of contemporary museums is to be democratic, and hence, inclusive, they end up being exclusive. In this sense, I see the discourse/practices of democratisation and demystification, which are products of curatorial ‘bricolage’, as acts of resistance towards the powerful structures (the term
curatorial ‘bricolage’ will be explained below). I understand and explain the outcome of the attempt at applying these practices as unsuccessful, because resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power, power is the condition for the reproduction of identity; it attaches the agency to its own identity and consequently, democratisation and demystification are incompatible or in conflict with certain policies or practices of the culture as exemplified in its museum/cultural policy. I will return to this later, in my account of the contemporary curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ and the construction of identity.

Another problem for a-cultural accounts of the curatorial is that the exhibitionary complex is believed to make meaning in the sense of determining a connotational meaning. For example, the museographer/curator of the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens explains:

    Using the presentation of the archaeological material as our main tool, we sought to evoke for visitors’ associations of ideas and emotions that will stir the memory, imagination and knowledge and will guide them to the concept of historical reality (which we would like to be constructed largely by visitors themselves) (Stefanou-Katsanika, 2008, p. 30).

According to Stefanou-Katsanika (2008) the museum offers a set of presuppositions or triggers, which lead visitors to make the necessary or suitable connotations that will guide them to the concept of ‘historical reality’, i.e. to something true, which exists in an objective material world, that of the museum’s exhibitionary complex. This can be explained as an attempt by museums to control connotation. However, this, apart from not being possible, as, each individual carries
her/his own intellectual and cultural presuppositions as explained above, shows that
the curatorial is prejudiced (in Gadamer’s sense of prejudice) regarding the complex’s
paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of the sign(s). What the museum actually
does is the construction and presentation of ‘myth(s)’. However, according to the
above contradictory statement, the museum wants the visitors to get the ‘historical
reality’ but also to construct it by or for themselves, whilst they are called to
consume the ‘myth’ not as statement of particular actors, but as outgrowths of
nature, as ‘truth’. The museum statements (images/texts) are seen as providing a
natural reason, a ‘truth’, rather than one explanation among other potential accounts
or a constructed statement. They are thought as ‘innocent’ speech, from which
ideology and signification are absent. As Stefanou-Katsanika further explains:

To attain these aims, we tried to find a museographical language capable of lending
significance and establishing communication—that is, a method of presentation that
would endow the ancient artifacts with their semiological substance and at the same
time bring out the potential for communication inherent in them. The exhibits are
presented within specific historical contexts—serving as points of reference and
creating multiple semiotic connotations—so as to bring out the meanings and values
they possessed during their life in the past and during their subsequent course from
archaeological discovery to their acquisition by the museum (Stefanou-Katsanika,

The very essence of the function of myth is to empty reality of the appearance
of history and of social construction. It could be said that the reference to the
museum objects as ‘ancient artifacts’ (Stefanou-Katsanika, 2008, p. 30) suggests
objectivity; it could be said that it brings forward the past view of ‘archaeological objectivity in interpretation’ (Ucko, 1994, p. x). Briefly, in the 1980s this term was created in order to challenge what was believed as objective in relation to the archaeological inquiry. The ‘archaeological objectivity in interpretation’ was the main topic of the papers and discussions in the World Archaeological Congress in 1986 in Southampton, England (Ucko, 1994, p. x). As Ucko (1994) explains:

the whole theme attempted a unique mix of critical assessment of the basis of archaeological methodology, with critical awareness of the social contexts of the use (and possible manipulation) of the evidence of the past (Ucko, 1994, p. x).

Simply, this was challenging archaeological interpretation, due to earlier efforts and attempts of archaeologists to establish archaeological interpretation as an ‘objective scientific discourse’ (Jones, 1997, p.51). In more recent years it is believed that objectivity in archaeological interpretation does not exist. ‘Truth and objectivity are not seen as abstract principles inherent in material remains of the past’ (Shanks and Hodder, 1995, p.18), but things that are constructed, as their interpretation may depend on present interests, since ‘the material presence of the past is an emotive field of cultural interest and political dispute’ (Shanks and Hodder, 1995, p.12). According to Katsanika- Stefanou (2008) the museum used the ancient artifacts as a medium that allows visitors to construct meaning, and the museum is seen as the facilitator of communication between artifacts and visitors, aiming at the revelation of historical reality, i.e. the artifacts’ truth towards history, which is guiding the visitors to perceive ‘historical reality’ through concepts ‘inherent in the artifacts’ (Stefanou-Katsanika, 2008, p. 30). However, as Paine (2013) explains under the term
‘museumification’, i.e. the entry of an object into the museum and its transformation to a museum object (Paine, 2013, p.2), ‘as soon as an object comes into a museum it becomes a ‘museum object’. It acquires a new meaning, a new value, a new personality, which more or less completely overlays its previous one’ (Paine, 2013, p.2). This new meaning, is not about ‘the meanings and values the objects possessed during their life in the past’, as Stefanou-Katsanika (2008) puts it. It is about the connotation of being an object in the museum in the first place, even before the modern visitors have interpreted it with their contemporary beliefs and values. Paine (2013) explains that with their ‘museumification’, the material objects, the ancient artifacts, are used both to symbolise the past and to stake out positions in discussions for example, about cultural representation and ownership of cultural property. An example would be the New Acropolis museum. According to the New Acropolis museum Director Prof. Pandermalis (2009) what used to be a verbal discussion concerning the demand for the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles up to the point of the New Acropolis museum establishment in 2008, is now presented within the museum display in a visual way (Pandermalis 2009, cited in Newsweek, 6 May 2009). The New Acropolis Museum exhibitionary complex has been constructed in a way to respond to the claims and demands for the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles. It makes a statement about the loss of the Parthenon marbles and especially, about the absence of one of the six Caryatids, by making her absence obvious within the exhibition structure. The absence of the Caryatids within the structure of the exhibitionary complex is a sign, which allows connotative meanings in relation to the repatriation of the Parthenon marbles. In other words, in the New Acropolis museum, as in every museum, things do not exist independently of the
sign systems which the museum uses in its exhibitionary complex and hence, 'reality is created by the media which seem simply to represent it' (Chandler, 2014). The new, constructed layers of meaning around the artifacts contain assumptions about reality (i.e. about the characteristics and context of what is being described). These assumptions are highlighted within the museum texts and the rest of the accompanying interpretive material that is part of the exhibitionary complex (e.g. designs, photographs, lighting, colours and so on) and between them relationships, their structure.

Stefanou-Katsanika (2008) supports the contention that the Byzantine and Christian museum aimed to communicate cultural ideas, beliefs and values through the presentation of signs and symbols constructed by the museum for the visitors’ consumption, using the museum’s archaeological material as a medium. However, as explained earlier, the understanding of these signs and symbols depends on the viewers’ cultural knowledge. Hence, the museums construct signs in order for visitors to be generally invited to add the objects on display to their associated texts, plugging the objects on display into culturally desirable paradigms so that in this way they will understand the final meaning or ‘myth’ that the exhibition aims to produce. The question arises however: whose culturally desirable paradigms are operating? The curators construct meaning based on their own group/cultural knowledge, i.e. ideas, values and beliefs, but individuals carry their own cultural set of ideas, values and beliefs. What happens then, when the conventionality of the sign(s) refers to ideas, beliefs and values specific to one culture (and not ones as widespread as the repatriation of Parthenon Marbles)?
What the museums believe they are doing doesn't work according to the way that signs work on the second order of signification as described at the heart of Barthes’s theory, which contains connotation, myth and symbol. In contrast to what is believed, the connotative meaning is produced in the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the feelings or emotions of the visitor and the values of her/his culture (Fiske 1982). Besides, as Pollock says: ‘cultural practices do a job which has major social significance in the articulation of meanings about the world, in the negotiation of social conflicts, in the production of social subjects’ (Pollock, cited in Rose, 2007, p. 12). Cultural practices like visual representations both depend on and produce social inclusions and exclusions, and ‘a critical account needs to address both those practices and their cultural meanings and effects’ (Rose 2007, p. 12). In other words, the meaning of the exhibition symbols depends on the viewers’ cultural knowledge. Hence, the chain or series of signs (a syntagm) that coexist in the exhibition is also a collection of related connotations because they are culturally or paradigmatically related and invoke in each other a paradigm as a set of items that could replace each other in a syntagm. Hence, as an object of study, curating is not only dependent on the quality of work contained in its practices, but also on the position museums hold in the context of culture as a whole.

The exhibitionary messages are not contained within the composition of the image(s) museums construct, but are produced from the moment that they become the centre of attention and discussion from the audience. According to Cash: ‘curatorial work is a social practice predicated on the principle of a fixed relation between material objects and the human environment’ (Cash, cited in Kreps, 2003, p. 312). Kreps suggests that: ‘this definition implies that individual societies have
patterned ways of seeing, valuing, ascribing meaning to and treating objects.' Also, she argues that: 'by looking at curating as a social construct, we begin to see how curating is situated in particular cultural contexts and is thus a cultural artifact in itself' (Kreps, 2003, p. 312). This statement articulates exactly this: that the 'curatorial' is culturally specific and that the making of exhibitionary meaning is necessarily tied to a cultural account of meaning. This being the case, it can also be examined as such, which is what I do through my fieldwork.

In conclusion, in this section I argued that curation is cultural and therefore involves cultural prejudices, ideas, beliefs and values. These inevitably find their way into the exhibitionary complexes, where they are (re)interpreted by visitors with their own prejudices and values. Exhibitionary complexes are constructed by syntagms/sequences of exhibits made from selections that are made from paradigmatic sets. Connotations can’t be controlled or simply communicated and there isn’t a historical reality 'out there'. More specifically, the 'curatorial' refers to the elements in operation in the thinking behind the action of curating. The curatorial in national museums presents two issues: the first is that it is affected both by curators' own cultural knowledge and the kind of pressure they are subject to from their national context and the second is that it is prejudiced (in the sense of Gadamer’s prejudice, as something that makes interpretation and meaning possible) through the complex's paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of the sign(s). The problem with some curators' accounts of meaning is that implicit in them is the idea that connotational meaning is ultimately controllable. Contrarily, I have argued that this is not possible and demonstrated this by explaining that the understanding of these signs and symbols depends on the viewers’ cultural knowledge. I have also explained
that these issues can be seen as an example of how power functions, citing the Barthesian cultural account of meaning as offering a more accurate, sensitive and useful account of meaning.

4. Contemporary curatorial concepts and practices in the national museum framework

4.1. ‘Curatorial bricolage’: The curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’

Nowadays, large museums of the world borrow the curatorial ideas of independent curators and artists as well as curatorial practices from each other (Smith, 2012; O’Neil, 2009; Heuman Gurian, 2006; Smithsonian Institution, 2002). This ‘borrowing’ would be better explained as (re) combining and assembling curatorial ideas to adapt them to their own practice(s) and thereby to form a new curatorial idea, resulting in turn in a new practice. This can be described as ‘bricolage’. Here, I use the term to explain the museums’ practice of recombining existing curatorial ideas in order to develop new curatorial ideas or new meaning(s) for existing curatorial ideas. Among such ‘recombined’ curatorial ideas are the concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ (Schubert, 2009, p. 67; ibid, p. 75), which will be explained in detail below. The practices of democratisation and demystification are products of curatorial bricolage. They are adopted and adapted to the curatorial of each museum and their application depends on each museum’s social/cultural context (structures). The identification and understanding of their use in each exhibitionary complex under study will enable an understanding of the way that each museum has incorporated them into their exhibitionary meaning making practices.
Levi-Strauss (1966) used the term ‘bricolage’ to describe the recombination of a number of elements, as a modality of human thought that he called ‘mythical thought’ -not to be confused with the Barthesian ‘myth’. Mythical thought is ‘a kind of intellectual ‘bric olage’ (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17). Levi-Strauss (1966) distinguishes ‘mythical thought’ from scientific thought in that:

The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and produced for the purpose of the project (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17-18).

The bricoleur uses a limited set of materials and tools, but the engineer creates the means to complete the project. The tools and materials that the bricoleur uses are at the same time abstract and concrete. Each element of the bricolage then, represents a set of actual and possible relations, which is contingent, or subject to change. The bricoleur is in control of deciding the roles played by the elements, by entering into a dialogue with the inventor. It is this dual nature of the bricolage, of being both a material and an intellectual process that finally creates new meaning. Levi-Strauss (1966) explains that mythical thought is culturally dependent: ‘the bricoleur works by means of signs’ and ‘signs allow, and even require the interposing and incorporation of a certain amount of human culture into reality’ (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 20). This is why mythical thought is explained as ‘a kind of intellectual bricolage’ (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p.21). In this sense, the museum practice of (re)combining and assembling curatorial ideas can be characterised as an intellectual bricolage. I will refer to this practice as ‘curatorial bricolage’: the museum/group of
museum curators, like the bricoleur collects and uses elements that ‘are “pre-constrained” like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre’ (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p.17). The curatorial bricolage like all forms of human thought and activity is based on underlying structures that are made up of interrelated elements. As discussed earlier in the thesis, the subject (re)produces itself in the interaction with others through structures/institutions, which always pre-exist that subject. This means that human action and thought is influenced and affected by the cultural society/culture and vice versa. As explained earlier, curatorial action is no different: it is based on underlying structures/institutions whilst the curators are ‘always already’ within a system of social/cultural and (in the museum’s framework) institutional relationships that seeks to define them and also, to define the opportunities they deal with.

The ‘curatorial bricolage’ (exactly, as the ‘curatorial’) is underpinned by the wider politics of globalisation. Globalisation is characterised by world-wide exchanges of images, information, knowledge(s), people and capital (Longhurst et al. 2013). Consequently, as Longhurst et al. (2013) have observed ‘communication is no longer confined to the boundaries of particular places, and practices became increasingly detached from their local settings’ (Longhurst et al. 2013, pp. 60-61). In the past, this development has been interpreted within the museum world as a ‘new’ problem (Young, 1999).

As explained earlier, contemporary museums consider it important to construct exhibitions, which would minimize difference(s). A good example of this
tendency would be the recently established *International Institute for the Inclusive Museum* and the *International Journal for the Inclusive Museum*. The commonly shared or recombined ideas are considered important in the construction of exhibitions whose aim is to be inclusive (e.g. Smithsonian Institution, 2002, pp. 12-27). Among such recombined curatorial ideas are the concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ (Schubert, 2009, p. 67; ibid, p. 75). The present study focuses on these ideas for two reasons. First, because the European national museum institutions under study have incorporated the above concepts into their practices and second, because the examination of the application of those concepts to the exhibitionary complexes under study provides an understanding of the interaction of cultural knowledge with the process of making exhibitionary meaning. This will enable me to explain (a) the recent discourses and positions on Byzantium, (b) issues of inclusion/exclusion in relation to the making of identity and (c) the (unsuccessful) attempt of national museums to shift from institutions of power to ‘democratic’ institutions.

According to Konstantios (2010), the former director of the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, and Stefanou-Katsanika (2008), the museographer/curator of the exhibitionary complexes of both Greek museums under study, the Greek museums have encompassed democratisation and demystification in their curatorial ideas and practice(s): one of their basic concerns when constructing the complexes was ‘to present the past in a ‘democratic’ manner, one free of nationalistic bias and charge and as objective as possible’ (Stefanou-Katsanika, 2008, p.29). By this, I understand that the museum professionals were seeking to construct ‘democratic’ exhibitionary complexes free of national (istic) ‘myths’; also, that they
used elements of the curatorial practices of ‘demystification’ and ‘democratisation’ to develop their own practice. Following the directions of new museology, they agreed that they would be working towards a museum that would ‘not simply be a place in which to keep the objects’ (Konstantios, 2010, p. 15); their interest would be focused ‘on the ‘public’, on people, and not only on the ‘specialist public’ who are able and competent to access the museum, not only the ‘privileged’ (Konstantios, 2010, p. 15).

The British Museum has also incorporated these practices into its agenda, following the same logic, which it expresses in several ways: it offers free entrance to all visitors and the visual images of its complexes are accompanied by simple texts, without special terminology.

The curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ share the common underlying aim of making all kinds of exhibitionary complexes inclusive (O’Neil, 2012; Smith, 2012; Schubert 2009). More particularly, the concept of ‘democratisation’ articulates the idea of employing several, diverse practices in the making of exhibitionary meaning that would allow the active participation of all audiences in all kinds of curatorial ensembles whether they are presented in a museum or a gallery or in an independent art space, or even a web-site (O’Neil, 2012; Smith, 2012). The range of these practices expands beyond just the simplification of the exhibitionary meaning and the accessibility of the exhibition space by all audiences. The concept of ‘democratisation’ also employs the idea of releasing the public view from the social cliché that wants museum and gallery exhibitions, as well as art displays of every kind to address only to those who possess appropriate levels of ‘cultural capital’ (e.g. Konstantios, 2010). Bourdieu (1986) explains ‘cultural capital’ as the knowledge and habits acquired by a dominant social
or cultural group and shared within the members of the group. (Here this group would be the imagined community of each country).

Accordingly, democratisation becomes the concept of ‘demystification’, which refers to the making of exhibitionary meaning and articulates the idea of constructing exhibition narratives free of ‘myths’ (O’Neil, 2012). ‘Myths’ in the sense that Barthes (1972) used the term to refer to connotational meaning, cultural values and beliefs expressed and claimed at an ideological level. As O’Neil (2012) explains, in the 1960s ‘demystification was predicated on the assumption that curators were perceived as powerful figures’ (O’Neil, 2012, p. 33). This resulted in the mythification of the curator in the 1980s, as demystification had ‘effectively been incorporated, reinterpreted and diluted as “visibility” for the curatorial position’ (O’Neil, 2012, pp. 33-34). Curators in the 1980s called for a ‘demystification’ of the exhibiting process and for greater transparency about the curatorial process. This finally evolved into the ‘supervisibility’ of the 1990s curatorial position and resulted today in a ‘new curatorial rhetoric, of flexibility, connectivity, transformability, intersubjectivity, contextuality and hybridity’ (O’Neil, 2009, p. 110). However, the new rhetoric demystifies those who are responsible for curatorial production and focuses on the production of new forms of curatorial subjectivity. Today, ‘demystification’ would mean that the exhibition content should be presented free of ‘myths’. The contemporary idea of the exhibition demystification would aim to allow visitors to look at the exhibitionary complex, i.e. museum objects, texts and so on without having an ideology imposed upon them. Accordingly, ‘democratisation’ would mean making all cultures and social classes welcome to the exhibition and giving them equal access; also, ‘democratisation’,
would refer to exhibitionary meaning making and participatory practices, e.g. construction of simple texts, without the use of special terminology.

In conclusion, the identification and explanation of the way that each museum has adopted and adapted these concepts into its practices will enable an understanding of the specific presuppositions that make democratisation and demystification incompatible with certain policies or practices of each imagined community, as exemplified in their museum meaning making practice. This will allow the identification of the presuppositions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning - which, in this study, I argue constitutes the making of national identity.

4.2. The making of national identity

I argue that the curators' (re)construction of national identity within the exhibitionary complexes is underpinned by oppositional politics stemming from the function of the museum (micro-) power relations, which finally result to the (re)production/(re)construction of the imagined community’s values, ideas and beliefs on its ‘unique’ identity. Within this framework, the curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification serve as an example of how cultural knowledge and power function in relation to the making of exhibitionary meaning. This example is indicative of the contribution of the values, ideas and beliefs, specific to one culture to the exhibitionary meaning making process.

According to Foucault (1978) power is always operating, and is only possible, in relation to resistance, and this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. As explained above, the exhibitionary complex, apart from being the product of culture (a cultural-ideological, or mythical (re)construction) is also a
product of curatorial research and is also informed by the latest curatorial 'currents'/ideas-practices (i.e. borrowed ideas-practices), and hence is also a product of curatorial bricolage. Resistance is present in specific forms of interaction between curatorial bricolage and culture (structures), and this (inter)action is situated in a certain time (now), space (different museums case studies) and sets of relations (museum micro-powers or ‘power from below’): the practice of curatorial bricolage is seen as an act of resistance towards the powerful structures, the outcome of which is unsuccessful because, as outlined earlier, resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power, rather power is the condition for the reproduction of identity; it attaches the agency to its own identity.

For this reason, I argue that, within the institutional framework of the national museums under study, both power and resistance appear and are operative in the concepts of democratisation and demystification, which are adopted and adapted into their curatorial practices. By this, I mean that each museum applies democratisation and demystification, but the application of these practices acts in effect as an act of resistance towards each museum’s own (micro-) power, which is in turn a product of the powerful institutions/structures and wider politics of the country to which they belong. As a result, the making of exhibitionary meaning is produced in accordance with the values ideas and beliefs of each imagined community and democratisation and demystification appear to be incompatible or in conflict with certain policies or practices of each imagined community, as exemplified in their museum meaning making practice. As will be shown in the exhibitionary complexes although, the incorporation of the concepts of democratisation and demystification to the institutional context of the national museums have been
articulated by the museums themselves, it has actually not been applied, or only partly applied. What we actually see within the exhibitionary complexes is the effort of holding the elements and characteristics that would compose the ‘unique identity’ of a group of people in tension with other.

In Chapter Three, it will be shown that the British museum constructs ‘identity’ within its exhibitionary complexes through the lens of colonialist/imperialist ideology and the Greek museums through the lens of Greek (not so) ‘romantic’ nationalism. In other words, the museums under study construct national identity ‘myths’ although, as explained above, museum professionals work on the basis of exclusion of (identity-specific) nationalistic bias and charge in the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes.

I argue that it is the institutionalisation of the concepts of democratisation and demystification, i.e. their incorporation into the museums’ institutional power relations (the institutional ‘machinery’) that has distorted their very foundations (of inclusiveness) and I see this as a function of the interaction of curatorial practice with (a) the policies of national museum institutions, and (b) the imagined community’s ideology reflected in the social/cultural structures/institutions. Both are operating as rules/resources and are responsible for the incompatibility of the practices of democratisation and demystification with the powerful museum institutions. This links to my earlier argument on the effect of cultural knowledge and power on the museums’ curatorial, as it functions in the same way: Cultural knowledge interacts with the curatorial and finally, comes to constitute exhibitionary meaning. Consequently, it links to my argument about the exhibitionary complexes/constructs themselves: What I argue about the constructs is that in all three sites, Byzantine
history, culture and art are used to make manifest the cultural and ‘national’ identity of their own ‘nation’.

The reasons why this is happening in Greece could be said to have a long history, which begins from the establishment of the Modern Greek nation back in the 19th century (this will be explained through literature and modern Greek cultural ideas in Chapter Two). But it could be said that it seems odd for the U.K. to use Byzantium for the same purpose. However, as Derrida (1992) explains, any culture is only what it is on the basis of its relation to what it is not, the different, the ‘other’. As explained in the Introduction, for Derrida (1992) identity is always affected by what it excludes, the ‘other’ - hence identity is in part constituted by what it opposes. Following this, it is actually not surprising that the UK does the same: museums in both countries are establishing their identities in relation to Byzantium, by claiming Byzantium as originally part of them. Therefore, they are establishing a relation to that which they are. Curators construct the museum’s identity, based on ideas, values and beliefs of the imagined community to which they see it as belonging and reconstruct those ideas, values and beliefs within the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes. This means that the curators are constructing/imagining the museum as part of a nation/imagined community and they are also constructing/imagining a Byzantine community. The curators however, are not intentionally making this (re) construction of identity within the exhibitionary complex. As Foucault (1990) explains, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere and as power is productive, this would be the result of the functioning of the museum’s power relations. This is why the exhibitionary complex is a
(re)construction and (re)production of the ideas, values and beliefs of a nation’s imagined identity.

5. National museums’ contemporary turn: ‘Institutions of power’ or ‘democratic’ institutions?

In explaining the term ‘exhibitionary complex’, Tony Bennett (1995) initiated the discussion around museums as institutional articulations of power and knowledge relations. Using the Foucauldian theory on the relationship between power and knowledge as a starting point he explained the ‘exhibitionary complex’, as an alternative mode of authoritative communication, which seeks to empower its visitors through education.

As explained in the Introduction, the exhibitionary complex is a way of thinking and an object, which contains the exhibited objects and accompanying texts curators create in order to make the narratives in each exhibition. At the very heart of the term ‘exhibitionary complex’ lies the Foucauldian theory of power relations. According to Bennett (1995) the ‘exhibitionary complex’ governs, through the production of categories of knowledge and assemblages of texts -showing what is possible to talk about and what is not. Hence, it (re) produces both power and knowledge simultaneously.

More specifically, Bennett (1995) sees the museum (from its opening up to the general public) as a powerful institution of knowledge creation, and he explains it as ‘a complex of disciplinary and power relations whose development might more fruitfully be juxtaposed to, rather than aligned with, the formation of Foucault’s ‘carceral archipelago’ (Bennett, 1999, p. 60). The ‘carceral archipelago’, which was
developed in response to the problem of order, refers to the practice of social
control and discipline over the population of modern societies in all areas of social
life with the use and application of disciplinary techniques (Foucault, 1977). Bennett
(1995) suggests that the exhibitionary complex works differently. The powerful
mechanisms deploying the exhibitionary complex are embodied in its architectural
forms, and function as meaning making agents, playing a determining role to the
construction of the exhibitionary meaning, which in national museums in particular is
primarily negotiating matters of identity. The difference then is that it works ‘in
seeking to transform that problem [of order] into one of culture’ ‘winning hearts and
minds as well as the disciplining and training of bodies’ (Bennett, 1995, p. 59). Hence,
rather than any disciplinary effects, the exhibitionary complex has ‘a rhetorical effect
through its representation of otherness’ (Bennett, 1995, p. 67). The exhibitionary
complex then, is not a display of power in which people are positioned ‘on the other
side of power as its potential recipients’ but rather placed on this side of power, as
‘both its subject and its beneficiary’ (Bennett, 1995, p. 67). I understand that as the
‘democratic’ version of the museum, as opposed to the ‘institution of power’; it is the
productive, ‘positive’ ‘enabling’ form of power, rather than the negative, no-saying
form that is simply received or suffered by powerless people. According to Bennett
(1995) this further explains how national museums contribute to the negotiation of
power within a society in order to maintain the hegemony (in a Gramscian sense) of
the ruling class. Bennett (1995), following Gramsci’s (1971) notion of ‘hegemony’, sees
these mechanisms as the rhetorical strategies of power that became the institutions
of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ and turned the national museum into an instrument of
the nation state. Simply, for Bennett (1995) the ‘exhibitionary complex’ provides a
context for the permanent display of power/knowledge within the society, highlighting the ideological economy of the organising principles of power/knowledge relations and transforming displays into ‘material signifiers of progress’; of progress ‘as a collective national achievement, with capital as the great co-ordinator’ (Bennett, 1995, p.67). By this, Bennett (1995) suggests that the ‘exhibitionary complex’ is marking the distinctions ‘between the subjects and the objects of power, not within the national body, but as organised by the many rhetorics of imperialism’ (Bennett, 1995, p. 67). I see these distinctions as between that body (the ‘national’, the ‘same’), and the ‘other’, and - to borrow Bhabha’s (1983) words - as dependent on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness [...] the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference’ (Bhabha, 1983, p.18). In other words, the national museum exhibitionary complex negotiates identity and employs historically specific mechanisms, which produce discourses that function as ‘true’ in particular times and places.

As explained earlier in the chapter, in the early 2000s, museums met the contemporary demands of the rapidly changing pluralistic societies to which they belonged, and began to re-theorise their roles and reconsider their meaning making practices. As Szwaja and Ybarra Frausto (2007) explain ‘a persistent aim in scholarly research has been to question rigid and closed art history canons and museological practices, recognising museums as arenas of discourse and negotiation, useful in defining new forms of public culture’ (Szwaja and Ybarra Frausto, 2007, p. xi). Terry Smith (2012) gave an insight into how the complexities of globalisation have affected Bennett’s (1995) notion of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ giving optimistic perspectives on museums’ potential to encourage genuine public debate and intellectual
exchange. Within this framework, Paul O’Neil (2012) brought into the discussion the contemporary curatorial practices of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ by essentially presenting curatorship as a constellation of creative activities not unlike artistic praxis. In agreement with O’Neil (2012), Smith (2012) explains that ‘when it comes to radical renovation of exhibition forms, curators have mostly followed artists’ also, he explains that museums everywhere use artistic strategies of context, framework, background, or of a new theoretical interpretation ‘to “contemporise” their offerings’ (Smith, 2012, p. 71). This describes the nature of the curatorial bricolage explained earlier.

In other words, within the context of the new global conditions of accumulation, contemporary museum institutions encountered ‘democratisation’ (which is often presented as an array of social negotiations and thus, performed as an evolving process). Today, museum exhibitions are the result of varying forms of negotiation and collaboration between subjects and objects across space and time (O’Neill, 2012). But what does this finally mean in the context of contemporary national museum institutions? Are they democratic or not?

The ‘democratic’, ‘inclusive’ museum is a recent construct (Rodehn, 2015), which made its appearance in the last ten to fifteen years. Within this context, contemporary national museums are of particular interest. In the 19th and 20th centuries, they clearly embraced outright the task of nation building (Bennett, 1995). Hence, traditionally they are thought to express the identity, history and aspirations of the country in which they are placed (Wilson, 1992, p. 83) but equally, to make and reproduce meanings and political positions, as they were influenced by the
prevailing policies of each time, due to their relationship with the institution of the nation-state and governmental authorities.

As explained above, in the recent years, following the demands of contemporary curating and the directions of new museology, national museums have attempted to become inclusive and to enhance and maintain the prosperity integral to peace; briefly, this could be explained by what is identified as the ‘democratic turn’ by Hardwick and Harrison (2013): a mapping in ‘democratic’ trends in practice and in scholarly interest. One of the first things national museums have done to this end is the attempt to incorporate the contemporary curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification into their practices. However, as has been already explained the power system of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ is still in play. As Szántó (2013) explains while investigating the significance of a national museum in the midst of the global kaleidoscopic diversity, ‘for large national museums, embracing the world has become a priority, while curators are tasked with unspooling art-historical narratives that are still freighted with Eurocentric overtones’ (Szántó, 2013). Following this, it could be said that museum curators of large, national museums in Europe navigate between the Scylla of the priority of embracing the world and the Charybdis of wandering around the European and national ideal. Despite shifting into the era of the democratic museum (Fleming, 2008) I argue that the construction of the exhibition messages by national museums is still influenced by/constructed according to the ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined community regarding its identity, and I also link it to the particular image of the nation that governments want to promote (Benton, 2010; Schubert, 2009; Heumann-Gurian, 2002). This cannot but include any colonial and global implications they may have (Bennett, 2004), as well as
the consumer-oriented approach to heritage management, since governments see heritage as a means of boosting tourist revenue (Benton, 2010).

I argue that the shifting landscape of the national museum exhibitionary complexes is the result of the variations and changes in museum structure deriving from a range of cultural, political and social factors surrounding each museum and influencing the way that museum exhibitions and especially national ones, are seen and used over time. Also, changes in financial, educational, technological, and environmental factors play an important role in the various shifts of the exhibitionary complexes. However, most importantly, as explained above, these changes and variations interact with curatorial practices, which are responsible for the construction of the museum exhibitionary complexes. But equally, as curatorial discourse proliferates, curatorial practices in national museums are in the midst of a ‘democratic’ change, which in itself is not yet fully defined. Therefore, the ‘democratic turn’ is questionable, as there is not an absence of power.

Within this framework, Smith (2012) examines Bennett’s (1995) concept of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ and suggests that nowadays the mechanisms, which according to Bennett (1995) turn the curatorial products into apparatuses of power relations, have met some form of resistance. The attempts of the contemporary ‘curatorial’ for interventions in the traditional model of the ‘exhibitionary complex’ attempt to demonstrate this resistance; these interventions attempt to shift the powerful framework of the museum ‘exhibitionary complex’ to an inclusive exhibition ensemble and evolve national museums into ‘democratic’ institutions. Smith (2012) observes this shift, by mentioning that contemporary museums have turned from institutions of institutionalised permanent exhibitions to ‘temporal museums that
openly display their temporality' (Smith, 2012, p. 69). He explains that museums today curate temporary exhibitions and host ‘large-scale travelling exhibitions organised by international curators and large scale installations organised by individual artists’ (Smith, 2012, p.69). For Smith (2012) as well as O’Neil (2009) such exhibitions are indicative of ‘emergent, more inventive and more critical alternatives’ (Smith, 2012, p. 67) to the traditional exhibitionary complex. Travelling exhibitions for Smith (2012) are ‘made with the intention of designing a new order of historical memories, of proposing new criteria for collecting by reconstructing history’ (Smith, 2012, p.69). Smith (2012) realises that the exhibitionary framework is changing and by highlighting the implications of globalisation for exhibitions, asks: what do the changes mean for curating?’ (Smith, 2012, p. 68). He refers to biennials, the challenge of constant reinvention and the rapidly changing patterns of curatorial practice around them and asks further: ‘are these the indicators of infrastructural shift?’ (Smith, 2012, p. 68).

I will attempt to answer this question by summing up the main points of my argument on resistance. In my account, the resistance is not found in the ‘traditional’ -in Bennett’s (1995) terms- exhibitionary meaning making practices, although it may seem at first that this is the case. The resistance is ultimately to be found in the attempt of museums to apply such interventions, which in the case of the museums under study are expressed in terms of the curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification. In that sense it could be said that the attempt at democratisation and demystification is a form of resistance towards the powerful mechanisms of the wider structures/institutions: the wider historical and political structures generate notions of national identity -and museums generate notions of
democratisation/demystification. So each is resistant to the other, and there is no outside of power and therefore there is not power being operated by one side against or over another side, which does not have power. But democratisation/demystification ultimately fail, because the exhibitions come down on the side of national identity and the dominant narrative, using Byzantium.

Museums are in the midst of a ‘democratic’ change, which is not fully defined or understood yet. This makes questionable whether it is possible for national/history museums to ‘move beyond their appointed role as places where one learns the stories of a nation’s ‘progress, triumph and exceptionalism’ (Maleuvre, cited in Trofanenko, 2010, p. 270). Witcomb (2013, p. 255) seeks to answer Maleuvre’s question and at the same time she explains that while there are plenty of examples of history exhibitions that use strong linear displays, often based on chronological narratives to produce exhibition narratives ‘whose purpose is to inspire and mobilise cohesive societal commitments based on the dynamics of recognition, identification, affirmation, and judgment’ (Bonnell and Simon, cited in Witcomb, 2013, p. 255), there is an increasing number of exhibitions that seek to do the exact opposite, i.e. ‘to use the dynamics of recognition and identification to unsettle received narratives about the past and/or to produce new forms of subjectivity’ (Witcomb, 2013, p. 255). All these could be taken as attempts at infrastructural change, and therefore, democratisation. However, the common characteristic of these efforts in national museums is that although they attempt to produce new forms of subjectivity, they finally fail to do so, or they manage only to partially do so. The analysis of the exhibitionary complexes under study will illustrate my argument and will provide an understanding of the reason for this failure, which I argue is the interaction of
curatorial practices with cultural knowledge. An understanding of these processes, which account for a lack of success in attempts at exhibition democratisation and demystification, and which ends up in the (re)construction/(re)production of the ideas beliefs and values of each country's imagined community on its own identity and on Byzantium, will contribute to the further development of these contemporary museum practices and to the further development of the museum's democratic turn.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a cultural account of meaning and explained that the interaction of the characteristics and socio-cultural norms of each imagined community with the making of exhibitionary meaning, as well as national and global politics have an effect on the construction of the exhibitionary meaning. I argued that although museum exhibitionary complexes are products of curatorial research and design, in the national museum context they are indicative of the perception and transmission of the ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined community on Byzantium, and as an extension of their ideas, values and beliefs on their own 'national' identity. Hence, I argued that curatorial practices in the exhibitionary complexes of different national museums shape the vision and interpretation of artifacts and creations, according to the different presuppositions of each imagined community.

National museums cannot but be related to time and the political, cultural, social, technological, financial, environmental, educational and geographical developments of the countries to which they belong. The implications of the above to the collecting and exhibiting of Byzantine art and culture cannot be ignored in the frame of the examination of cultural presuppositions, the making of exhibitionary
meaning, and consequently the making of identity and the making of nation. By analysing the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices and explaining their role in constructing the different representations of Byzantine culture in the national museums under study, and by explaining the uses of Byzantium in the construction of an idea of ‘national’ identity, I have argued that in the national museums’ context, the process of making exhibitionary meaning, far from being ‘democratised’ and ‘demystified’ is in fact ideological or ‘mythical’, as each museum presents the cultural constructions of the imagined community of its country as a ‘work of nature’, and not of culture, doing the opposite of what the contemporary curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ suggest. Instead of ‘democratising’ their Byzantine exhibitionary complexes, the national museums under study have ‘naturalised’ their imagined community, i.e. their ‘nation’ using Byzantine history, art and culture as the means through which this is accomplished. Hence, the museums present a culturally constructed ideology of Byzantium within their exhibitionary complexes: The presented ideology is entangled with the image of the imagined community that each country in effect promotes.

The above points have been explained and understood though the Foucauldian understanding of power/knowledge and resistance and Barthes’ (1977) concept of ‘myth’. Briefly, by taking the cultural meaning of ‘invisible power’ and ‘truth’ as a lens with which to look at the exhibitionary complex, Foucault’s approach explained that curatorial power is productive, in the sense that it (re) produces meanings, knowledge(s) and truths, through the exhibitionary complexes. Hence, it is expected that curators have chosen the cultural message of their own imagined
community on Byzantium and have reconstructed the new meaning of the past
culture of Byzantium in the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes. The
‘myth’ analysis that is central to the present enquiry, will facilitate the identification of
the presuppositions involved in the construction of exhibitionary meaning that are
responsible for the different ideologies/meanings of Byzantium which manifest
themselves within the different exhibitionary complexes under study.

Therefore, it has been explained that curation is not the disinterested and
innocent presentation of existing identities and truths but the products of power,
politics and cultural ideas, values and beliefs. This is why the curatorial attempts at
‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ of the museum exhibition have been
unsuccesful. This is why the museum’s ‘democratic turn’ in itself cannot be defined
yet. ‘Democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ are undermined by the wider politics of
globalisation and are in conflict with certain practices/policies of the imagined
community. As a result, what we actually see at the exhibitionary complexes is the
effort of holding the elements and characteristics that would compose the ‘unique
identity’ of a group of people in tension with one another. In other words, the
national museum exhibitionary complexes negotiate identity and employ historically
specific mechanisms, which produce discourses that function as ‘true’ in particular
times and places. Hence, within each exhibitionary complex under study, the
narratives concerning Byzantine culture and art are based on specific arguments that
each museum has selected to adopt and promote. These arguments are
predominantly arguments supported by the national historical narratives of each
country on Byzantium and reflect each country’s national aspirations on the making
of nation, identity, empire and religion. These narratives will be the object of study of the following chapter.
Chapter 2

The ‘Byzantine Question’

Introduction

Having argued in Chapter One that curating is a process of meaning making and having shown how power relations and myth function within the framework of national museum exhibitionary complexes, the primary objective of this chapter is to investigate where the meanings of Byzantium constructed by the museums come from; in other words, to investigate the origins of those meanings. Seeing the imagined community of the country that each museum under study belongs to as the common ground where preceding discourse and background cultural knowledge on Byzantium is constructed, this chapter will first explore the different theories and arguments on the origin and meaning of Byzantium as they appear in broad history and art history literature and then, more specifically in culturally accepted/national history and art history literature of each country. The aim of this exploration is to explain the way that Byzantium is historically perceived and culturally understood and interpreted within/by the different imagined communities involved in the present study.

Barthes (1977) argues that the process of making meaning begins with denotation, and then moves into connotation where cultural myth and historical knowledge are accessed, fortified, extended or, on occasion, even challenged. Messages of connotational meanings depend on the cultural and historical
background (context) of knowledge of the conditions lived and experienced i.e. what the image or/and text means to each personally and socially. O’Neil refers to Barthes’s myth, as a ‘type of speech’ in which ‘everything can be myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse’ (O’Neil, 2012, p. 37), so as to explain the function of the practice of demystification which ‘is now widely accepted within curatorial discourse as a method of defining and representing a curatorial position’ (O’Neil 2012, p. 34). However, as explained in Chapter One, in national museums, this position is the position of the imagined community of each country towards its identity, which means that demystification is actually another practice of mystification; to use (and repeat) Barthes’ (1972) words, ‘there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘substantial’ ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions’ (Barthes, 1972, p.107). Hence, there is no outside of myth and therefore, in the Barthesian sense of myth, Byzantium exists as a series of connotational meanings or ideological constructions, generated by the cultural values and beliefs of the museums/curators, which differ and vary according to the characteristics of the imagined community of each country of which museums/curators are members.

In the examination of the different meanings and identities of Byzantine culture a first step to mythological analysis is to look at the historical positions formally adopted by each national culture, i.e. the subsequent view of the state. This may be achieved by reviewing the general history and art history literature around Byzantium and then, by reviewing the history and art history literature around Byzantium as formulated in each country of interest, i.e. the U.K. and Greece. The latter will be achieved through research in culturally accepted/national literature i.e.
history schoolbooks (where applicable), museum publications, as well as the history
literature of Byzantium produced and proposed by the national museums under
study through their own publications and promoted by their own museum shops.
General history and art history literature on Byzantium can give insight into the
interpretations of Byzantium, as seen and represented within each imagined
community historically, and culturally accepted history and art history literature can
give insight into the different ideologies of each national and cultural context. I chose
to examine the particular literature, since I want to investigate the ideology around
Byzantium that each national museum accepts and reproduces.

By the examination of the particular literature, I will understand the perception
and transmission of ‘official’ or culturally accepted messages of Byzantine history and
art as they are formed by the imagined community of each country and (re)presented
within the exhibitionary complexes of their national museums. The particular literature
review will help the investigation of the presuppositions involved in curatorial
practices of the exhibitionary complexes under study.

Historians’ Perspectives on Byzantium

History and art history literature present various perspectives on the history
and culture of the Byzantine Empire. Modern Byzantine historians adopt a number of
arguments towards the Byzantine past. They see the Byzantine Empire either as the
Eastern half of the Late Roman Empire i.e. the continuation of the Roman Empire to
the East after the division of the Roman Empire to the East and the West or as a new
Empire, that derived from the Roman Empire but different in that it had its own
identity: it was Christian in religion and Greek-speaking. (As will be explained in detail
further down, it is in this latter conception that Modern Greek society sees the origins of its identity).

As Cormack (2000) explains, some contemporary art historians still see Byzantine art either as ‘the continuation of Greco-Roman art’, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, put ‘the greatest emphasis on discontinuity with antiquity’ (Cormack, 2000, p. vi). In the first case, the Byzantine Empire would be the next stage in a story in which ‘traditions, culture and aesthetic ideas of antiquity move on and are developed in different circumstances of a society that described itself as Roman but thought and wrote predominantly in Greek rather than Latin’ (Cormack, 2000, p. vi). In the second case, Christianity would be the reason why classical learning, art and culture were radically rejected as they were thought pagan and hence, not acceptable by Christianity, the official state religion of the Byzantine Empire.

Each of the above perspectives on the history, art and culture of the Byzantine Empire, stems from cultural values, ideas and beliefs relating to national historical narratives constructed by ignoring historical multiperspectivity and focus on dominant groups and communities which coincide with particular political interests of the imagined community of each country.

Nonetheless, the nature of Byzantine culture and art is and has been ambiguous. On the one hand, Byzantium was crucial in the maintenance of the 19th century Classical ideal, so central in the creation of modern European identity; on the other hand, it was instrumental in the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, and subsequently, to the end of the ancient Greek religion, practices and art (e.g. Cameron, 2014; Stathakopoulos, 2014; Ahrweiler, 2012; Pyrovolaki, 2012; Herrin, 2007). However, the Byzantine Empire had developed a distinctive society under its
Emperors, Patriarchs, and all-pervasive bureaucracy. As is broadly accepted, the Byzantine Empire was Greek in language, Roman in legal system, and Christian in religion (e.g. Ahrweiler, 2012; Pyrovolaki, 2012; Jeffreys, Haldon and Cormack, 2008).

What is very hard to estimate today is the impact of Byzantium in the European Middle Ages: ‘as a bulwark against invaders, as a meeting-point for trade from Asia and the Mediterranean, as a guardian of the classical literary and artistic heritage, and as a creator of its own magnificent artistic style’ (Jeffreys, Haldon and Cormack, 2008). However, by bringing cross-cultural perspectives into the way that Byzantium is thought of and seen in national museums, I will explain what the most important aspect of the impact of Byzantium in the European Middle Ages is according to each national museum nowadays and why.

The qualities attributed to Byzantium by western scholars until the early 19th century were largely negative. The term ‘Byzantinism’ came to mean a body of ideas different from and inferior to those of the West. As an extension to this, in the 1960s Eastern block ‘the ‘autocracy’ of the Communist regimes was linked to the cultural inheritance from the Byzantine Empire’ (Pyrovolaki, 2012, p. 30). Still, little is known about the history and culture of the Byzantine Empire (Cameron, 2014). It is significant that the word ‘Byzantine’ becomes synonymous with highly intricate, complex, and often, devious dealings (e.g. Hughes, 2014a; James 2014). Yet, Byzantine art and culture are ‘widely regarded as the most intractable – the most ‘Byzantine’ - in the art history’ (Cormack, 2000, p.1). However, the rise of archaeology, history and art history in the 20th century may shed much light on the period and offer a more nuanced understanding of its positive developments (Tainter, 1999). Since curatorial practices encompass literature surveys as the first step in the curation of a museum
exhibition (Nicks, 2002), the curatorial choices in exhibitionary meaning depend on their choice of literature sources and the selection of particular content. Therefore, the construction of meaning around the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes’ images and is based on available literature on Byzantine history, culture and art. The selection of particular messages over others for the reconstruction of Byzantium however, will reveal the underlying ideas, values and beliefs of the imagined community of the country in which each national museum under study belongs, on Byzantium.

**Byzantine identity matters**

Hughes indicates the importance of understanding the Byzantine world today, pointing out that ‘Byzantium is now racing back up our modern political agenda’ and arguing that ‘without understanding the Byzantine world, we cannot properly understand our own’ (Hughes, 2014a). As she further explains:

The Middle East, the division between the Islamic world and the West, the Balkans and Russia are up in the headlines. All these were once Byzantine imperial lands. A number of their boundaries, religious and national, were drawn by Byzantine hands. In many ways Byzantium has given us the geopolis for [the] map that we live with today. Far from being irrelevant, Byzantium is a Rosetta stone for world affairs (Hughes, 2014a).

Many Byzantine historians support Hughes’ (2014a) argument that Byzantium has contributed in many ways in the formation of modern Europe. (e.g. James, 2014; Wicham 2009). Some highlight the cultural contribution, i.e. that Europe has inherited its modern cultural identity from Byzantium (e.g. Arhweiller 2010, cited in Bakounakis,
Faltin and Wright, 2007). Ahrweiler (2010, cited in Bakounakis) presents the question concerning what it is to be European:

What is the European? As Paul Valery said, the European is the one who has the philosophical influence of ancient rational thought, who has lived with Judaic-Christian spirituality and has been under the influence of Roman administration and Roman institutions. Athens, Jerusalem and Rome. Without them there is no Europe. And all these three, concentrated together is Byzantium. Therefore, Byzantium is Europe, because it is Greek-speaking like Athens, Christian like Jerusalem and it has adopted throughout the Roman administration (Ahrweiler, 2010, cited in Bakounakis).

Derrida (1978) supports the claim that Europe connotes these three, and Ahrweiler supports the same claim for Byzantium. Derrida asks: ‘Are we Greeks? Are we Jews? But who, we? Are we (not a chronological, but a pre-logical question) first Jews or first Greeks?’ (Derrida, 1978, p. 192) For Ahrweiler, it is impossible, as Derrida also explains, to ‘say ‘Europe’ without connoting: Athens-Jerusalem-Rome-Byzantium’ (Derrida, cited in Anidjar, 2003, p. 49). Indeed, ‘the responsibility towards memory calls for a historical self-understanding based on difference and heterogeneity’ as noted by Borradori (2003, p.171). Machowski (2010) explains that ‘Europe has always been a continent of extreme plurality and it is futile to ever attempt to separate Europe from its neighbours’ (Machowski, 2010). Derrida ‘objects to the idea of the internal homogeneity of identities and indicates that ‘identity emerged as a cluster of unstable boundaries’ that are not so much about identity itself but rather about what they exclude (Derrida cited in Borradori 2003, p. 145.) and hence for Derrida, what we are not is a constitutive part of what we are. The question then of who or what represents ‘otherness’ or the rationale of the same is complicated, as each is
necessarily tangled up with the other. But then, the question is not what we are, or
what we were, but rather what we will become. This will be answered by analysing
the museums’ interpretations, which use national historical narratives attempting to
explain the identity of the imagined community of each country, based on who the
imagined community were, and who they are, (by separating ‘themselves’ from the
‘others’) – thus, contributing to a future imagined community, through the
(re)production/(re)construction of the ideology on a national identity. In other words,
by analysing an imagined/constructed past and the (re)construction of an
imagined/constructed present through the exhibitionary complexes, I will provide
insights into the conditions of the possibility of a (re)imagined/(re)constructed future.

Hence, the perceptions and understanding of Byzantium of the imagined
community of each country, through culturally accepted/national history and art
history literature, will enable me to identify the cultural presuppositions involved in
curatorial practices around the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes under study, and
will constitute the basis for the understanding of their cultural functions in relation to
the making of identity, nation and even religion. Ultimately, this will lead to the
identification and explanation of curatorial choices on exhibitionary meaning and
consequently, this will enable me to identify and explain the different interpretations
of Byzantium as presented within each exhibitionary complex in Chapter Three.

The debate

In contrast to the opinion of Herrin (2007) that Byzantium is a ‘lost world,
which is hard to define, because it doesn’t have a modern heir’ (Herrin, 2007, p. xiv)
some scholars argue that Modern Greece is the heir of Byzantium (e.g. Ahrweiler,
2012). Brownworth (2011) argues that the obvious modern heir to Byzantium would
be Greece, but he explains that the modern state draws much more of its identity from Athens than Constantinople.

Byzantium was always a multi-national empire so no one modern nation can really claim to be a direct descendant although many have a piece of it. The truest scion—some would say a living remnant of the empire itself—is Mount Athos; administratively separate from modern Greece, it still keeps Byzantine time and flies the imperial flag (Brownworth, 2011).

As I will demonstrate later, for the imagined community of each country under study, each argument signifies the beginning of a series of negotiations concerning its own claim to cultural continuity from Byzantium. Each imagined community presents Byzantine history in a particular way claiming cultural continuity of Byzantium with either the classical or the Roman past in the attempt to explain its own identity. In that sense each country attempts to control and domesticate the past in the form of knowing it, without placing it in question. According to Poster (1982) this is the practice of historical writing, which Foucault also contends—that it is a practice that has effects that tend to ‘erase the difference of the past and justify a certain version of the present’ (Poster, 1982, p. 120). The purpose of it is to maintain the importance of a specific ideological interest while at the same time denying that there is a certain power at stake.

I argue that the attempt of each imagined community to support one argument over another is similar to the practice of the history of ideas as Foucault (1972) explains it: as a return to the innermost secret of the origin, the layers of meaning behind the great themes of the history of ideas: Genesis, continuity, totalisation (Foucault, 1972, p. 138). Themes, according to which, historical discourse
would be regular and continuous over time and dressed up as 'objective', as the only 'truth'. However, in a transition from one time to the next, as Foucault (1972) explains, there will also be discontinuities, breaks and overlaps. Hence, the attempt of each imagined community to support one argument over another is an effect of power, which attempts to not only to minimise but also erase discontinuities under a circularity of ideological control, aiming for the establishment of a continuous historical discourse, which constitutes 'truth' or reason for the time being. What is at issue within this practice 'is the act of an individual claiming to contain within his or her consciousness and to represent in writing a certain truth about the past' (Poster, 1982, p. 119-120). I argue that each country places itself in the position of the individual historian of ideas and narrates history with the non-difference of perfect continuity. For the history of ideas, as Foucault explains:

the appearance of difference, indicates an error, a trap; instead of examining it, the clever historian must try to reduce it: to find beneath it a smaller difference, and beneath that an even smaller one, and so on until he reaches the ideal limit, the non-difference of perfect continuity (Foucault, 1972, p. 170-171).

However, the ideal limit, that of perfect continuity is an active operation that, as Poster (1982) suggests is 'working on the production of a discourse with a set of meanings that acts upon everyone who comes into contact with it' (Poster, 1982, p. 120). In the case of the arguments on continuity of Byzantium either from the ancient Greek or the Roman past that each museum supports, the set of meanings imposed on each of the arguments acts upon the cultural group of people who learned to think in the way these meanings were imposed by/explained within their imagined
community. Hence, unpacking the history of ideas that has resulted in the adoption of the specific argument on the origin of Byzantine culture and art by each imagined community will help us to understand the historical reasons according to which each museum has acquired the particular knowledge/view on Byzantium and (re)produces it within each of the exhibitionary complexes.

1. Arguments concerning the origin of Byzantium

The existing arguments concerning the origin of Byzantine culture and art in history and art history literature are diverse and contradictory. However, it is important to know what the arguments are and what they are negotiating with, as this will further help me to identify the specific argument that the involved imagined community of each country supports in its ‘national’ literature and is expected to display within the utterances of the curatorial discursive formations of the respective museum exhibitionary complexes under study.

Briefly, the arguments found in the history and art history literature boil down to the idea either that the origin of Byzantine culture and art is Roman or that the origin of Byzantine culture and art is Greek, or that the origin of Byzantine culture and art is both Greek and Roman. Acknowledgements that Byzantium had also developed its own distinctive cultural and artistic elements are found in all arguments. In some cases, all arguments are found reconciled in the effort to acknowledge the contribution of both Greek and Roman culture to Byzantine culture. However, the different interpretations concerning its origin(s) influence the interpretation and explanation of all the aspects of the culture and art of Byzantium.

The issue around the complexity of the origin of Byzantine art in art history is often called ‘the Byzantine question’ (e.g. Bon, 1972; Demus, 1972). The Byzantine
question though, as Demus (1972) explains, concerns more than just origin(s). It is also about the importance of Byzantine art to European art, and based on Derrida’s (1992) and Ahrweiler’s (2010, cited in Bakounakis) arguments, which are explained above, I would add to Byzantium’s contribution to the European identity.

1.1. Arguments

**Argument 1. Byzantine Culture and art emerges from Roman culture and art**

In order to answer the Byzantine question, some scholars use chronological sequence to claim continuity of Byzantine culture and art from the Romans (e.g. Kaldelis, 2007; Loverance, 2008; Haldon, 1999). For example, Kaldelis explains that, like almost all other subjects of the Empire, the Byzantines firmly believed themselves to be Romans (Kaldelis, 2007). Loverance (2008) explains that ‘Byzantium is the name historians give to the Roman Empire in the east, which continued when in the west it fell to the barbarians’ (Loverance, 2008, p. 6). And Cormack (2000) argues that ‘Byzantium and Byzantine art are products of the Roman world’ and that ‘any stark east-west polarity in culture had already been broken down by the internationalism of the Roman Empire when Christian art developed’ (Cormack, 2000, pp. vi-vii). This, along with the issue that the name “Byzantine” is a recent construct is why Bury supports that ‘Byzantium never existed, Rome fell in 1453 AD’ (Bury, cited in Ahrweiler, 2012, p. 17).
Argument 2. Byzantine Culture and art emerges from Classical Greek culture and art

Veyne (2003) ironically supports the argument that the origin of the Byzantine Empire is Roman, only because the name “Byzantine” is a recent construct and the Empire never called itself Byzantine, but Roman (e.g. Stathakopoulos, 2014; Ahrweiler 2012; Brownworth 2011; Herrin, 2007, Loverance 2008). Veyne (2003) raises the question: Why not the Greeks? And he explains: ‘because the Greeks are in Rome, are the essence of Rome’ (Veyne 2003, p. 2). In his point of view, ‘the Roman Empire is Hellenistic civilization, brutally manhandled by a state apparatus of Italian origin’ and hence, ‘the civilization, culture, literature and even religion of Rome came almost entirely from Greeks, over a half millennium of acculturation’ (Veyne, 2003, p.2). He continues: ‘Rome adopted as its own the culture of another nation, Greece’ (Veyne, 2003, p. 3). Thus, the Empire is called Roman, ‘but might just as well be called Hellenic’ (Veyne, 2003, p. 3). In agreement with Veyne (2003) –but even more strongly, Ahrweiler (2012) states that Byzantium is an inappropriate name given to the ‘medieval Greek Empire’ (Ahrweiler, 2012, p. 12). In addition, she explains that the names Eastern Roman Empire or Late Roman Empire were given by modern Protestant Byzantinists due to an illegitimate document constructed by papal authorities in late 8th –early 9th centuries AD, known as Constantinian Donation (Ahrweiler, 2012). According to this document, Constantine the Great donated the old Rome to Pope Sylvester before leaving for Constantinople in AD 315 (Coleman, 1922). The aim of the donation was to allow papal authorities to fight against the demands of the political power of the West on the issue of the bishops’ designation. As Ahrweiler (2012) explains, the document was not denounced as illegitimate by
Constantinople, because unwittingly, it allowed the explanation that the inheritors of the Roman Emperors were established from then and on in Constantinople. This automatically removed each and every right of imperial claim from the western rulers, the ones who lived in old Rome and the western part of the Empire (Ahrweiler, 2012). However, it also allowed the emergence and use of the name “Eastern Roman Empire” or “Late Roman Empire” in modern historiography.

**Argument 3. Byzantine Culture and art are distinctive, but incorporate elements of Classical Greek and Roman culture and art**

Some scholars argue that Byzantine culture and art, which emerged from the religious context of the Empire are unique and distinctive, but that they incorporate cultural and artistic elements of the Greek and Roman culture and art (e.g. Herrin, 2007; Rice, 1963).

According to Herrin (2007) Byzantine culture ‘sprang from ancient Greek, pre-Christian sources, as well as Roman and Christian Ideas, both ideological and practical (for instance, philosophical arguments and military fortifications)’ (Herrin, 2007, p. xv). In this sense, as Herrin (2007) further explains, Byzantine culture embodies Braudel’s notion of the *longue durée* ‘that which survives the vicissitudes of changing governments newfangled fashions or technological improvements, an ongoing inheritance that can both imprison and inspire’ (Herrin, 2007, xv).

As Rice (1963) explains, Byzantine art is broadly of a very distinct and basically uniform character, ‘despite the numerous variations of style due to epoch or locality’ (Rice, 1963, p. 7). The rhythmical or spiritual basis of a composition is more important than resemblance to nature. Profound meaning underlies the form and this is why it is considered a sophisticated and complex art, but not a primitive art depending for
its appeal principally on the attraction of colour or intuitive qualities of design (e.g. Cormack, 2000; Demus, 1970; Rice 1963). However, it is considered a figural art that owes a considerable debt to the motifs and ideas that were prevalent at an earlier date in the classical world ‘indeed, the classical heritage was never lost sight of it, in spite of the penetration of new and distinct ideas from the East’ (Rice, 1963, p. 7). In support of his argument Rice (1963) explains that the ivories are the most important from the artistic point of view. He explains that in Alexandria, which until the 7th century AD constituted part of the Byzantine Empire, classical themes and a certain degree of classical elegance continued in art for quite a considerable time after the adoption of Christianity (Rice, 1963). As he explains, the purity of the Alexandrine Hellenistic style began to degenerate in the fifth century, ‘and when once the process had begun it went forward and remarkably quickly’ (Rice, 1967, p. 23). The process resulted around the sixth century in the establishment throughout northern Egypt of the debased style we know as Coptic, which rapidly stifled the purer and more refined Hellenistic manner.

1.2. Explaining the different interpretations of the origin of Byzantium

In this section I will offer perspectives on the differences in the interpretation of Byzantium as presented in the broad history and art history literature. I will then revisit these perspectives in the sections of Greek and British understandings of Byzantium.

One possible explanation of what allows such diversity is that the Empire went through several cycles of decline and recovery. As its borders evolved over its 1000-year existence, the same happened with the cultural elements that Byzantines absorbed or chose to incorporate or not into their culture and art. The incorporation
or not, of the cultural elements depended on the history and geography of each place and the laws set by each Emperor. For example, what creates a turn in the culture of Byzantium is the closure of the Platonic Academy in 529 AD by Emperor Justinian I because it was seen as a political and religious opponent. Due to this action, this date is often cited as the end of Antiquity (e.g. Brownworth, 2011). However, ironically, Byzantium has, by copying, editing and commenting on them, preserved texts by major philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, geographers, historians and doctors. Above all, Byzantium cherished the poems of Homer and produced the first critical editions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Although public performances of theatre died away, the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes were closely studied and often committed to memory by generations of schoolchildren, who also learned the speeches of Demosthenes and the dialogues of Plato (e.g. Herrin, 2007; De Leeuv, 2014).

In times of political weakness, Byzantine cultural influence, as Herrin (2007) explains, expanded almost in inverse proportion to its political strength. For example: ‘From 1204 AD, when numerous works of art were taken back to Western Europe, Byzantium’s contribution to the revival of western art and learning is notable’ (Herrin, 2007, p. xix). In 1204 Western European and Venetian crusaders sacked Constantinople. Byzantine Empire in the aftermath of the sacking was weakened and this allowed neighbouring groups (e.g. Ottoman Turks) to gain influence. At the time, Byzantines willing to avoid the destruction of their cultural heritage, sent works of art to Western Europe.

Again, in the fourteenth century, the Byzantine Empire experienced Byzantine-Ottoman wars and a civil war that begun in AD 1373 and lasted until 1379. However,
this was a period of time that ‘Byzantine teachers of Greek were appointed to Italian Universities and along with their pupils, they began to translate the writings of Plato’ (Herrin, 2007, p.xix).

Byzantium is said to have also contributed to the Italian Renaissance. Following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, refugees, who fled to Italy from Byzantium, are thought to have strengthened the learning and art of the time. One of the most striking examples of Byzantine influence in the Italian Renaissance painting is seen in the work of Giotto, one of the important Italian artists of the early Renaissance (De Leeuw, 2014).

Furthermore, a few decades later, in 1517, Martin Luther posts his 95 theses, which can be seen as marking the beginning of the Protestant Reformation (Cobbett, 1832). Following Luther’s theses on indulgences the Protestant Reformers condemned religious art and argued for a more spiritual style of Christian worship, since material interests were often behind the veneration of cultic images (MacCullough, 2004). Pilgrimages to such supposedly wonder-working images were often associated with indulgences, and so the places where they were kept attracted large numbers of pilgrims. Opposing this, Protestant Reformers employed all the biblical and patristic texts collated by Byzantine iconoclasts of the eighth and ninth centuries (MacCullough, 2004).

The issues mentioned above explain why interpretation of Byzantine culture and art is open to various and mutually exclusive readings. However, the different perspectives can also be explained by controversies in Byzantium that are not rare, and which allow for several differencing interpretations. For example, the Emperor’s rise on the shield, a habit bequeathed by the roman military tradition, had a clearly
symbolic meaning: ‘it was a reminder of the military origin and the mission of the Emperor’ (Benesis, 2007). This effectively supports the argument on the origin of Byzantium from the Romans. However, the Emperor received the crown from the Patriarch of Constantinople, not from a general as claimed in the Roman Empire. The relation between the State and the Church in the Byzantine Empire is inseparable and this is an element that differentiates the Byzantine sociopolitical structure from the Roman. The Emperor in the Byzantine Empire was a lot more than a secular monarch. The Emperor was seen as the representative of God on earth and was required to rule in accord with the laws of God and of the state. Haldon (1999) explains the onset of the different arguments here:

The term “Byzantine Empire” refers to the eastern Roman empire from the end of the “late Roman” period in the eastern and central Mediterranean / Balkan region (from the sixth century therefore) to the fifteenth century, that is to say, from the time when a distinctively East Roman political formation began to evolve with the recognition of the cultural divisions between “Greek East” and “Latin West” in the empire’s political structure to the fall of Constantinople on 29 May 1453 at the hands of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II (Haldon, 1999, p. 1).

Haldon (1999) attempts to define what the Empire is, instead of “Byzantine”, by bringing up two issues that are crucial to the development of the different arguments concerning the origin of Byzantine culture and art.

The first issue is where the end of the “late Roman” period in the eastern and central Mediterranean / Balkan region is thought to be. It would be reasonable to think that by knowing the end of the “late Roman” period, the beginning of the Byzantine period would be chronologically defined. Haldon (1999) explains that the
end of the “late Roman” period is in the sixth century. However, this is not where the beginning of the “Byzantine Empire” is thought to be. The beginning, despite the various approaches on the issue, is thought to be much earlier.

The identifying knowledge of the beginning of the Empire would potentially clarify issues around its Roman or non-Roman origin. However, the inability of determining the beginning, along with the complexity of the elements combined under the Christian character of the Empire and ‘the many years that the study of Byzantine civilization suffered from prejudices and preconceptions’ (Bon, 1972, p. 11) has left open the readings on issues concerning the origin of the Empire’s culture and the same is applied to every aspect of the history of the Byzantine culture and art.

The second issue is the recognition of the cultural divisions between “Greek East” and “Latin West” in the Empire’s political structure. These cultural divisions emerged from the break between the Church of Rome and the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1054. The divergence, aggravated by the separation of the two churches is responsible for much of the differentiation on the arguments that have developed around the origin of the Empire's culture and art, that circulate around the two assumptions on whether the origin of the Empire is Roman or Greek.

As a consequence, Byzantium does not have a definite starting date. However, it is commonly accepted that different historians place the ‘beginning’ of the Byzantine Empire at different dates according to which event they consider more important. There are three main explanations for the beginning of the Empire: 1. In 285 AD, when Diocletian split the Empire (Treadgold, 2007), 2. In 324 AD, when Constantine started building the new capital (e.g. Vasiliev, 1952, The Oxford
Dictionary of Byzantium, 1991, p. 508), 3. In 330 AD, when the new capital, Constantinople, was founded and became the capital and symbol of the Empire (Herrin, 2007; Loverance, 2008; Norwich, 1998). Most historians however, have found it convenient to take the last date as the beginning of the Byzantine Empire (Loverance, 2008).

As for the name-construct, 'Byzantine Empire' or 'Byzantium', these are the names given in the attempt to avoid the various terms used to define the Empire. Ahrweiler (2010) explains: 'Byzantium never called itself Byzantium' (Ahrweiler, 2010 cited in Bakounakis, 2010). Following this, Brownworth (2011) argues that Constantine the Great was Roman, but by calling him the founder of the Byzantine Empire he is actually being called something other than Roman. Brownworth (2011) claims that the Byzantine people did not call themselves Byzantine, but Roman. In accordance with Brownworth (2011), Loverance states that: 'the Byzantines thought of themselves as Romaioi, Romans, called their city of Constantinople New Rome, and looked back to the classical past across an unbroken tradition’ (Loverance, 2008, p. 6).

The name ‘Byzantium’ first appeared in 1562 AD in the text of the German philologist Hieronymus Wolf (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 42). Also, as Evans (2004) mentions, whereas Wolf initiated Byzantine studies in Germany, particularly through the editing of texts, other sixteenth-century humanists were doing the same in Holland and Italy. Another explanation of the name ‘Byzantium’ given to the Empire, is offered by the book Byzantine collections, published by the Byzantine and Christian museum of Athens. In brief, it says that 'Byzantium' is named 'Byzantium' after a small Greek township with this name, located in the region where Constantine I
founded the capital of the Empire, Constantinople, which means the town of Constantine (in Greek, the name Constantinople comes from the words Constantine + polis (town)). According to Evans (2004) at around 1845 AD the term had been established arbitrarily and from then and onwards, despite its historical nature it started to be seen as natural.

2. The British response

This sub-chapter will examine the significance of Byzantine culture and art to the United Kingdom through the investigation of the formative history of Byzantine history in the U.K., and through the British culturally accepted history and art history literature. The work of Rowena Loverance (2008) on Byzantium, published by the British Museum is used as the main source for the identification of the ‘myth’ of Byzantium as presented in the British culturally accepted history and art history literature. Byzantine history in Loverance’s work is narrated with reference to the items of the museum’s Byzantine collection and the texts are based on the work of many Byzantine scholars, ‘more Byzantine scholars than it is possible to acknowledge’ (Loverance 2008, p. 4). Also, the work of Judith Herrin (2007) on Byzantium that Loverance (2008) suggests for further reading and is sold at the British Museum shop is used as a source to give insight to the perception of Byzantium. However, Herrin brings together the British perspective and international perspectives on Byzantium. The Byzantine scholars I quote in this chapter are the scholars whose work Loverance (2008) and Herrin (2007) selected and used as their sources.
2.1. A look at the formative history of Byzantine history in the U.K.

Here, I will investigate the formative history of Byzantine history in the U.K., as I consider it important to get an insight into the way that this particular history is perceived and understood in the U.K. over the years. Within this framework, I will make a first approach to the way that the contemporary British think about Byzantium.

It is worth mentioning that investigation of the British history curriculum as well as personal conversations with people who have had a British education have shown that Byzantine history is not systematically taught in British schools. Hence, Byzantium is irrelevant to history as represented by the British history school curriculum, and therefore, in the U.K., knowledge acquired from school does not include Byzantium.

Johnson and Watanabe (2014) explain that ‘since the 19th century, the scholarly discipline of art history in the U.K. has been dominated by nation-based narratives, which still have a powerful influence and presence’ (Johnson and Watanabe, 2014). This has happened in all the arts, social sciences and humanities, including history. Particularly, as Munslow (2001) states on the subject of the development of historical narratives in the U.K.: ‘despite the use of statistics, the new themes (society, women, gender, culture) and the application of fresh concepts and theories, there remain two steady points in the historian’s cosmos: empiricism and rational analysis’ (Munslow, 2001). Following this, he says that the question that is increasingly being put, is: ‘How can we be sure that empiricism and inference really does get us close to the true meaning of the past?’ (Munslow, 2001). He explains that: ‘this is the essence of the postmodern challenge, the turn to the narrative-
linguistic and its implications’ (Munslow, 2001). This turn, he says, ‘demonstrates a deeper change in the views of British historians concerning the conditions under which they create historical knowledge’ (Munslow, 2001). The narrative linguistic ‘has challenged history not with new topics or methods as such, but by confronting the discipline’s empirical-analytical foundations’ (Munslow, 2001). For Munslow (2001):

Historians continue to rely on the empirical-analytical model, but it extends the epistemology to include its narrative-linguistic representation, the form given to the past within historians’ texts, and it accepts history as an essentially literary activity, one that is self-evidently authored (Munslow, 2001).

Along with the linguistic turn in history comes historical revisionism. Since the 1960s, ‘the discipline of history has experienced a ‘social science turn’, a ‘cliometric’ or ‘statistics turn’, a ‘women’s history turn’, a ‘cultural history turn’ and so on [...] These have become and remained a significant way for historians to reflect upon and write about change over time’ (Munslow, 2001). What is particularly interesting at this point and derives from historical revisionism, is the turn from the narration of history around the theory and practice of kingship, to the narration of history based on chronology or historical events. Following this, the narration of Byzantine history used to be made with reference to the powerful figures of kingship, such as the Emperor Constantine I, or the Emperor Justinian I (e.g. Vasiliev, 1952; Norwich, 1998). This has changed with the intervention of historical revisionism. Stathakopoulos (2014) through his work A short History of the Byzantine Empire, presents Byzantine history through events. Largely, he presents political history, ‘which in Byzantium includes matters pertaining to the Church and questions of dogma’ (Stathakopoulos,
Also, by the exploration of important issues of economic and social history, and cultural history in the broadest sense, dealing with the material environment, as well as the dominant intellectual trends in each period (Stathakopoulos, 2014).

However, as Snape explains: ‘historically, medieval art was largely viewed in terms of technique, and as teaching aids for craftsmen’ (Snape, 2014). Also, she mentions that ‘interpretive methods, which have endured into contemporary curatorial practice, crystallised British understanding of medieval objects as decorative art’. Furthermore, one of the problems for Western Europeans who are educated to believe that the classics and the Renaissance are the two high points of civilization, is that Byzantium is neither (James, 2010, p.1). The period that would be the equivalent of the Byzantine period in European history is characterized as the Dark ages, a term referring to the transitional period between Roman times and the High Middle Ages. It is characterised as a period of intellectual darkness between extinguishing the ‘light of Rome’ after the end of Late Antiquity, and the rise of the Italian Renaissance in the 14th century. The rise of archaeology and other specialties in the 20th century has shed much light on the period and offered a more nuanced understanding of its positive developments (Tainter and Barker, 1999). With the intervention of historical revisionism, the term as Dark Ages is no longer thought as useful. Now, the term ‘dark’ suggests the lack of sources and information about the time period previously characterised as Dark Ages, instead of the lack of culture. Modern scholars would avoid the use of the term ‘dark’. Popular terms that have been used to describe this period are: Late Antiquity (e.g. Brown, 1992), the Early/High/Later Middle Ages (e.g. Boswell, 1988), and also, the Great Migrations (e.g. Spinei, 2003). However, as we
shall see in the next section, Byzantine history is narrated in parallel with periods that compose the historical time equivalent of Europe, including the Vikings, Normans, Visigoths and Lombards.

It is worth mentioning that the term ‘Great Migrations’ is adopted by the British Museum and used as a title of a section of its exhibition concerning Europe AD 300-1100. The Byzantine Empire constitutes another section of the exhibition and it is placed within the sections concerning the Roman Empire, the Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent, Celtic Britain and Ireland and the Vikings.

Before the intervention of historical revisionism, historians used to characterise Visigoths and Lombards as barbarians. This term has negative significance and was intended to indicate a lack of culture. Also, the way that the figure of Empress Theodora (born in AD 500 and died in AD 528) used to be explained shows how narrations around women figures were done in pre-feminist history. It is remarkable that the only source of information about the personal life of Empress Theodora and Justinian is the book Unedited or Secret History written by the historian of the epoch, Procopius. Procopius was a keen critic of Theodora, so his words are ‘proofed’ for their objectivity. He is the first who characterises her as a prostitute in this book that was written, but remained unedited, for more than 100 years.

Nowadays, there are scholars who, following his position, refer to her as the most famous and successful prostitute in history (e.g. Loverace 2008). However, other scholars (e.g. Herrin, 2001) consider Empress Theodora as an early feminist, because she took a series of measures aimed at enhancing the position of women in the empire: she changed the law that forbade marriage between emperors and women of lower social class, like herself; she was a proponent of abortions; she did not
punish women for committing adultery; she forbade forced prostitution; she gave women more rights in divorce cases; she allowed them to have assets rights; and she triggered the death penalty for rapists. The difference between the narration of history before and after the intervention of historical revisionism can be explained by the following example.

James (2010), in contrast to the opinion of Lecky (1989, cited in James, 2010, p.1) thinks Byzantine history as perpetually interesting, not only because of the intrigues of women, priests and eunuchs, but also because, as she observes: ‘there is a great deal more to Byzantium than political history’ (James, 2010, p. 1). For James (2010) Byzantium seems too strange, bizarre and alien in the use of both its Christian nature and inheritance of the classical world.

Also, Herrin (2007) shows a whole series of positive features of Byzantine life: the vigour of a continuing system of Roman law, the advantages of a well-run bureaucracy (where legal rights could be upheld because the documents confirming them had been properly archived), the value placed on education (including, at least in upper-class families, the education of girls) and the nurturing of classical Greek heritage. At the geopolitical level, Herrin (2007) puts special emphasis on an achievement which she thinks is still not credited widely enough, even by professional historians, namely, when Arab armies made their astonishingly rapid advances in the seventh and eighth centuries, reaching as far as Samarkand and Spain, it was the city of Constantinople that blocked their progress. If that city had fallen, and its shipyards and other resources had been put to Arab use, most of Europe might then have been overrun. Being a bulwark against oriental hordes, however, is not the only function that Byzantium performed. In many ways, oriental
influence could pass through Byzantium. Byzantine imperial dress and ceremony imitated the style of the early Persian court; the game of polo was also borrowed from central Asia; traditional dress for men, involving ankle-length robes, not trousers, must have looked oriental to western visitors; and there were cultural influences from Christian Arabs, Jews, Armenians and others. The final century of the Byzantine Empire involved contacts at many levels with Muslim Turks, including military alliances and even dynastic marriages. As Noel (2007) writes on his critique of Herrin’s book: ‘though this takes us some way beyond the scope of Judith Herrin’s book - large elements of the Byzantine way of life would be incorporated into Ottoman culture and society’ (Noel, 2007), and by this he aims to show how influential Byzantium had been both to the west and to the east.

2.2. Constructions of the history of Byzantium in British culturally accepted literature

I consider that knowing the British culturally accepted history of Byzantium will facilitate my understanding of the interpretation of the British imagined community on Byzantium, as this will enable me to identify the presuppositions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning in the British Museum exhibitionary complex (in the sense that this will help them to be deciphered). The following text is informed by the British culturally accepted Byzantine literature. I consider British culturally accepted literature - the literature produced by modern British Byzantine historians whose books are supported by the British museum and sold at the British Museum shop (e.g. Herrin, 2007; Loverance, 2008).

Earlier in the thesis, I explained that one of the on-going and central debates between the scholars of Byzantine history is the placement of the date that can be
considered as the beginning of Byzantium. Here, I will demonstrate that Byzantium for modern British Byzantine historians is seen as the continuity of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. Below, I raise the main points of the narration of Byzantine history as presented in the British culturally accepted Byzantine literature:

1. The history of the Empire is traced from the founding of its capital Constantinople in 330 A.D. to its capture by the Ottoman Turks in 1453 (e.g. Herrin, 2007; Loverance, 2008).

2. Emperor Constantine I, the founder of Constantinople has a pre-eminent place in Byzantine history and memory, because he gave the Roman Empire a new state religion; however, his reign had not changed the essential character of Roman life (Loverance, 2008).

3. The ‘barbarians’, a name originally coined to mean anyone who could not be understood because they could not understand Greek were a familiar phenomenon to Romans (Loverance, 2008). The term barbarians in this context is applied to a range of Germanic, Slavic and Turkish tribes living in central and Eastern Europe. The barbarians had been settled for many centuries on the Rhine and Danube frontiers, but they always wanted to cross the frontier into the richer lands of the Mediterranean (Loverance, 2008). This pressure became irresistible with the arrival in Europe of the Huns, a nomadic tribe from the Asian steppes (Loverance, 2008). Also, the Visigoths were the first to make their presence fell, defeating the Roman army at the battle of Andrianopolis in AD 378 less than one hundred and fifty miles from Constantinople itself and killing the emperor Valens (Loverance, 2008). Constantine’s successor Theodosius I with his tactic moved the Visigoths out of the
Balkans and into Italy. Instead of threatening Constantinople, they sacked Rome in 410 AD.

4. The sacking of the ancient city had little political effect in Italy or in the East. The two halves of the Empire had been divided in 395 and this division was to prove permanent (Herrin, 2007; Loverance, 2008). The Eastern Empire shared the military threat posed in the middle of the century by the Huns under Attila who raided freely and extorted huge sums in subsides (Loverance, 2008). By the end of the fifth century military and economic stability were beginning to return. The gold coinage known as the solidus or *nomisma*, which retained its value almost unchanged until the eleventh century was one of the great achievements of the byzantine state. Also, under the emperor Anastasius I the taxation system was reformed and the *chrysargyron*, a tax on buying and selling was abolished (Herrin, 2007). Following this, Justinian created a new state monopoly in the sixth century, when he discovered the secret of silk production by despatching two monks to China. Justinian freed Byzantium from the high transport costs and customs dues of importing silk through Persia (Loverance, 2008).

5. The astonishing range of achievements of Byzantium in the sixth century seem to have the unity of purpose which reflects the character of Justinian himself, and stems directly from his conception, both philosophical and practical, of the nature of the Roman Empire. It was a conception that was on the one hand classical and on the other hand Christian (Loverance, 2008). Christ embodies the heavenly harmony; the Emperor is his living representative. This conjures up the threefold spheres: human, imperial and universal, which made up the Byzantine world view, the
so-called *Omonoia* ring, expressing the philosophical unity of the Empire (Loverance, 2008).

6. A second wave of barbarians, the Lombards in the west and the Slavs in the east, were to pose great threats to Byzantium before the end of the sixth century, but of a brief moment the classical shape of the Mediterranean world seemed to have been recreated (Loverance, 2008). It affected the lives of people in the Eastern Empire, however the character of the classical world had never been lost (Loverance, 2008). The life of Justinian’s wife, Theodora, ‘one of the most successful prostitutes in history’ (Loverance, 2008, p. 26) bears witness to another aspect of classical city life in sixth century Byzantium, the life of the Hippodrome and the amphitheatere.

7. Ironically, it was Justinian who was responsible for closing down ‘the last surviving centre of pagan learning, the University of Athens’ (Loverance, 2008, p. 29; Herrin, 2007). Love for classical antiquity did not extend to the actual teaching of pagan philosophy. Justinian was determined to establish orthodoxy by force if necessary, but was hampered in this by Theodora’s openly expressed willingness to harbour heretics (Loverance, 2008). Justinian’s church buildings are his real gift to the Christian ‘oecumene’, which he hoped to establish (Herrin, 2007). The masterpiece of his buildings is Hayia Sophia, started after the Nika riots in 532 AD and finished in 537 AD.

8. In the seventh century, Byzantium as the victor in Sasanian wars ‘fared little better than Persia in the face of the Arab Assault’ (Loverance, 2008 p. 46). The first attack in 636 AD was directed against Palestine and Syria, and Jerusalem fell for the second time in 638 AD. It was to remain in Islamic hands until the first Crusade at the end of the eleventh century. In 640 AD, the Arabs turned West into Egypt and
advanced relentlessly through North Africa, which was thus permanently lost to the Byzantines (Loverance, 2008).

9. In political terms, however, little more than a century after the death of Justinian, Byzantium had lost North Africa to the Arabs, Spain to Visigoths, most of Italy to Lombards, Egypt, Palestine and Syria to Arabs, Greece and the Balkans to the Slavs (Loverance, 2008). Wars on this scale placed a great stress on the institutions of Byzantine society and lead to the phenomenon of iconoclasm. The iconoclasts had one striking fact in their favour; not only were the icons failing to protect Byzantium, but her principal enemy, the Arabs, ruthlessly banned all figural images and were proving victorious on all fronts (Loverance, 2008). Ecclesiastical diplomacy on such a scale had brought Byzantium into direct conflict with Rome, ‘the other ecclesiastical powerbroker’ (Loverance, 2008, p. 61). The Byzantines had a deep attachment to the concept of God existing in three persons and kept a keen sense of the separate character of each.

10. Byzantium’s material fortunes changed many times over its thousand-year history, but none of these changes is more dramatic than the collapse, which occurred within fifty years of the death of Basil II in 1205 (Loverance, 2008). During this period, there is a disjunction between military, economic and cultural achievements. In 1071 Byzantine forces were defeated at the Battle of Manzikert, north of Lake Van, and the emperor Romanus IV Diogenes was taken prisoner (Loverance, 2008). The new victors were the Seljuks, who first appeared as chiefs of the confederation of Islamicised Turkish tribes. The pressure on Byzantium came not only from the Turks, ‘ever since its foundation, Byzantium had acted as a magnet for the west’ (Loverance, 2008, p. 67). However, while Byzantium was in much reduced
state by the end of the eleventh century, new medieval kingdoms were emerging in Western Europe. Normans of Viking descent had begun to settle in Italy and Sicily in the early eleventh century. The Normans acknowledged the cultural sway of Byzantium by building great churches in the next century at Palermo and Monreale in the Kingdom of Sicily, that were decorated with Byzantine style mosaics by Greek artists (Loverance, 2008).

11. In 1097 the first crusade arrived in Byzantium. The arrival of the crusaders coincided with the collapse of the main Seljuk Empire in the Middle East. Three more crusades followed with the Fourth Crusade being the most important. On 13 April 1204, the Crusaders entered Constantinople aiming to sack it (Loverance, 2008). They stripped the city and partitioned the empire ‘Byzantium had ceased to exist’ (Loverance, 2008, p. 75). However, Byzantium had not been completely obliterated by the Fourth Crusade. It was no longer really an empire because it was geographically reduced to the eastern parts of Greece and the Balkans and the western parts of Asia Minor, and all other national groups except Greek had fallen away (Loverance, 2008). This limitation, though, was to give a political and cultural cohesion to the Paleologan period.

12. Weakened by internal strife and isolated from the Christian west, Byzantium was ill fitted to withstand the pressure from the Ottoman Turks. In a battle at the river Marica in 1371 the Turks seized Macedonia from Serbia. Byzantium had to meet the final attack alone (Loverance, 2008). The siege of Constantinople began on April 1453 by the Sultan Mehmet II. The sultan launched his decisive attack during the night before 29 May, and just before sunrise, the Turks broke through a small
postern gate near the Blachernae. The city of Constantinopolis had fallen and with it the Empire (Loverance, 2008).

In summary, the British culturally accepted Byzantine literature supports the following propositions/narrative: Byzantium is the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean, which has a new state religion; however, this didn't change its essential character of Roman life. The ‘barbarians’ (e.g. the Huns, the Visigoths) defeated the Roman army at the battle of Andrianopolis in AD 378; Theodosius I moved the Visigoths out of the Balkans and into Italy, and this resulted in them sacking Rome in 410 AD, instead of threatening Constantinople; however, the Roman Empire had been already divided into two halves (eastern and western) and this had little effect on the eastern half (i.e. Byzantium); the Eastern half thrived under Justinian: the nature of the Roman Empire became a conception that was classical and Christian; the philosophical unity of the Empire is preserved: human, imperial and universal; its economy, powerful; the Sasanian Wars and iconoclasm that followed Justinian’s reign weakened Byzantium; however, by the end of the eleventh century, Normans of Viking descent acknowledged the cultural sway of Byzantium and formed new medieval kingdoms in Western Europe.; in the twelfth century, they built great churches at the Kingdom of Sicily, that were decorated with Byzantine style mosaics; after the fourth crusade in 1204 Byzantium was reduced in size, but the Palaiologan era (political and cultural rebirth) began; finally the city of Constantinople, and with it Byzantium, felt in 1453 (seized by Ottoman Turks).

3. The Greek response

In this section I will present the significance of Byzantine culture and art to Greece through Greek culturally accepted history and art history literature. I will
explain that Greek culturally accepted history and art history literature about Byzantium have been developed after the work of the so-called ‘national’ historian of Greece, Constantinos Paparigopoulos and I will demonstrate that his work has influenced the way that the Greek imagined community interprets its identity and that it still influences modern Greek historians.

The work *Byzantine Collections: The permanent exhibition*, published by the Byzantine and Christian museum in 2008 is used as the main source for the identification of the interpretation of Byzantium in contemporary Greek culturally accepted history and art history literature. Byzantine history in the *Byzantine Collections: The permanent exhibition* (2008) is narrated with reference to the items of the museum’s Byzantine collection. The texts of the book are written by curators, historians and archaeologists working for the museum. The book doesn’t indicate any sources, but, after informal conversations I had with museum curators -the authors of the book- I was informed that their work was based on international literature (Byzantine and Christian Museum curators, 2014, personal communication, August and September 2014). However, I argue that messages and meanings reproduced within the book are close to the views of the Greek historian Constantinos Paparigopoulos, as expressed in his work *History of the Greek nation* (1871). I argue that phrases used in the texts of the book, and also, the museum catalogue and the accompany texts of the exhibition, stem from Paparigopoulos’ work. The following is an example:

The Greek language, the sense of a common tradition and above all, Orthodoxy are resisting at the moment of the crisis of 1204 [the sack of Constantinople by the 4th
Crusade] and constitute the identity of Greeks. Opposite to them are the ‘others’, the ‘heterodox’, the Catholics (Konstantios, 2010).

Also, in one of the accompanying texts of the exhibitionary complex we read:

the identity of Greeks has been gradually formed against the ‘others’, [i.e. the Ottoman Muslims and Catholic Christians] in the Venetian territories, through the common language [Greek], the common religion [Orthodoxy]- and the common Byzantine tradition and customs (Byzantine and Christian Museum: IV.3. The Ottoman Conquest and the “Genos”, introductory text, 2016)

Paparigopoulos (1871) expresses these views through the construct of ‘Hellenic Christianism’ that will be explained below. However, the effort of the museum to set its narratives free from the past nationalist ideas that accompany the notion of ‘Hellenic Christianism’ is made obvious through the foreword of the Byzantine Collections: The permanent exhibition (2008), where the former museum director Konstantios states that:

we would neither seek to represent the ‘united national narrative’ nor the ‘national time and its unity [...] We did not have as an objective the ‘united and continuous Hellenism’ (Konstantios, 2008, p. 19)

I argue that this is a product of the interaction of cultural knowledge with the making of meaning and that it illustrates my account on the implications of cultural presuppositions in the making of meaning.
3.1. A look at the formative history of Byzantine history in Greece

At this point it is important to explain who Constantinos Paparigopoulos is, what the main points of his work are and why his work is considered important to Greece. Paparigopoulos was born in Constantinople in 1815 and died in Athens in 1891. He was a Greek historian characterized by Modern Greek historians as the ‘father’ of Greek historiography, and also the national historian of Greece (Politis, 1998, p. 39). This makes his paradigms themselves ‘myths’, or even himself as a historian a ‘myth’. Paparigopoulos is the founder of the concept of historical continuity of Greece from antiquity to today, since he established in his teaching at the University of Athens, the Greek tripartite division of history (ancient, medieval and modern). He also sought to set aside the prevailing views of his epoch, that the Byzantine Empire was a period of decadence and degeneration, which was not recognised as part of the Greek history. It is believed that he laid the groundwork for the formation of the national identity of Modern Greek society (e.g. Mavromatis, 2005; Politis, 1998, p. 47). Paparigopoulos began the publication of his work in 1860 and completed it in 1876. His original work is divided into 16 books. Below, I will briefly explain the main points of his work.

a. Hellenic Christianism and the Great idea

The term ‘Hellenic Christianism’ becomes the canvas on which the ideology of the Greek state was developed and shaped. Under the term ‘Hellenic Christianism’ Paparigopoulos (1853) argued that the ancient Greek civilization was not extinguished, but had proceeded and been transformed during its meeting with Christianity that took place within the Byzantine Empire. His view about Byzantium is demonstrated in 1849, in his writings about the middle period of Hellenism, where he
states that: ‘We Greeks, owe to pay attention to the Byzantine state, because we owe
to it the preservation of our language, religion and in general our ethnicity’
about Hellenic unity (or national unity) are highly influenced by the ‘Great Idea’. The
term ‘Great Idea’ refers to political and nationalistic ideals popularised in the Greek
world from the second half of the 19th century. The Great Idea is a diverse concept,
deriving from the political and nationalist context of this period, ‘making it
problematic for historical research’ (Margaritis, 1999, p. 203). The emergence of this
idea in the collective consciousness of the Modern Greek state is not self-existent or
instantaneous, but ‘it seems to come as a result of the emergence of the
phenomenon of the conscious nationalist movements in Europe in the 19th century
employing the particular elements of Greek society’ (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 192).

The ‘Great Idea’ was the axis of the internal and foreign policy of Greece until
the third decade of the 20th century. The onset of the ‘Great Idea’ was to broaden
the Greek borders to include areas with Greek populations that were under foreign
domination. More Particularly, the Great Idea, the ideological expression of Greek
nationalism, had as its goal ‘the liberation of all Greeks who were under Turkish
sovereignty and their integration into a nation-state with its capital in Constantinople’
(Veremis, 1999, p. 31). Also, the ‘Great Idea’, was inspired as a term for demagogic
reasons, from the first Constitutional Prime Minister of Greece, John Koletis in the
mid 19th century and particularly in 1844 (Vlachodimou, 2008). It is worth mentioning
that Koletis based his entire policy on the ‘Great Idea’. ‘The Great Idea’ endeavors to
regain the lost territories of the Byzantine Empire and it remained the aim of all
Greek governments until August 1922, when it was finally abandoned after the catastrophe of Asia Minor (Skopetea, 1988).

b. The ‘Greek ethnicity’ of Byzantium

When Paparigopoulos speaks of Greek ethnicity, or else Hellenism, he refers to all people who speak the Greek language and share the same traditions and religion. When he speaks of the Greek nation he refers to all people who are originally Greeks. Hellenism is the term to describe the influence of Greek culture on the peoples of Byzantium. Also, for Paparigopoulos Hellenism saved Orthodoxy:

The medieval Hellenism, after saving the Christian doctrine of internal and external risks and after struggling to spread it through the whole of northeastern Europe, attempted to make great improvements in ecclesiastical and social matters. Hellenism did not achieve this completely. However, Hellenism did manage to transplant the Christian decree in the West (Paparigopoulos, 1871 in the foreword of the Volumes C and D: ιδ´)

According to Vlachodimou, this means that: ‘the two commands that the medieval Hellenism fulfilled was the salvation and the dissemination of the Christian doctrine and the awakening of the West’ (Vlachodimou, 2008, p. 112). The term ‘medieval Hellenism’ is used by Paparigopoulos throughout his work, in parallel with the term ‘western Roman state’ (Paparigopoulos, 1871 in the foreword ια’). This is because Paparigopoulos (1871) sees Byzantium as a Hellenic Empire. He makes the point that the Emperors, with a few exceptions, were Greeks, but even the ones who were not were highly Hellenised. Throughout his texts he argues that the Patriarchs and most of the clergymen were Greeks, the legislators were Greeks. Most of the
generals, admirals and emperor’s councilors were Greeks. Also, the missionaries spreading Christianity and teaching writing to Slavs (Methodius and Kyriilos) were Greeks. The language and religion (the Greek tendency of Christianity, Orthodoxy) were Greek and Greeks constituted the Government structure, in education, justice and army. Also, the intellectuals, scholars, historians, chronicle writers, theologians, music composers, mosaic workers, artists, sculptors were Greeks.

Furthermore, despite the fact that Greek people who lived in the area continued to regard themselves as citizens of the Roman Empire, they never spoke Latin, a language that they disdained as Scythian (barbaric). Other peoples, such as Armenians, Georgians, Syrians, Bulgarians, Italians, Albanians, Russians belonged to the Empire only partially and unstably. They were not identifying with the Empire since they didn’t consider it as their state. This is why sometimes they were in favour of it and sometimes against it and very often they cooperated with the Empire’s enemies. The Empire wasn’t theirs. It belonged to Greeks: the language, the traditions, the ideas, beliefs and values they had were Greek. According to Paparigopoulos (1871), Byzantium was the bridge between the Hellenistic and the ancient Greek World. Paparigopoulos (1871) saw their history as ‘an unbroken chain’. Hence, for Paparigopoulos (1871) the Byzantine Empire is considered as a Greek Empire.

3.2. Byzantium and the foundations of the Modern Greek Nation

According to Papparigopoulos (1871) the foundations on which the existence and conscience of the Greek nation is formed are the Byzantine omoaimon, a notion which means people with the same blood; the Byzantine omoglosson, (co-lingual) a notion which means people who speak the same language; the Byzantine
omothriskon, a notion which means people who have common religion; and the Byzantine omotropen, a notion which means the common way of living and understanding deriving from common values, traditions, memories, common habits and customs. According to Vlachodimou: Paparigopoulos in 1849 had decided to write the Manual of General History for school use. It would include the Ancient, Middle and New history of Hellenism’ (Vlachodimou, 2008, p. 85). The division of Greek history into periods assumes that ‘the thought of K. Paparigopoulos had established the new historiographical perception’ (Dimaras, 1986, pp. 123-124). In the thought of Paparigopoulos, the ‘construction’ of Greek history without the Hellenisation of Byzantium could not be made (Vlachodimou, 2008, p. 86).

The division of Greek history in periods assumes that ‘the thought of K. Paparigopoulos had established the new historiographical perception’ (Dimaras, 1986, pp. 123-124). In the thought of Paparigopoulos the ‘construction’ of Greek history without the Hellenisation of Byzantium could not be made (Vlachodimou, 2008, p. 86).

The use of certain highly religious terms in Paparigopoulos texts is made with political content. For example, terms such as ‘universality’, ‘heresy’ and ‘schism’ are used in an argument for tackling Panslavism (Vlachodimou, 2008). Since Papparigopoulos’ (1853) work, the content of Greek education, the orientation of historical studies and the study of tradition have been organised on this basis. (Dimaras, 1986).

Following this, until the decade of the 1980s, the Greek schoolbooks of Byzantine history taught students about the origin of their identity through the Byzantine omoaimon, omoglossen, omothriskon, and omotropen. However, in recent
years, after the 1980s, schoolbooks have changed and do not make references to the above concepts. It is at this point that historical revisionism took place. In historiography, historical revisionism is the reinterpretation of orthodox views on evidence, motivations, and decision-making processes surrounding a historical event. The Byzantine commonalities were used in the past to connote a political or a national perspective. As perceptions of nationalism change, so do those areas of history that are driven by such ideas and this is why schoolbooks were subject to change. However, this particular change has raised a storm of reactions from the Greek Church and some extreme nationalist parties. Furthermore, some teachers, depending on their own ideas and beliefs, were resistant to change, by teaching their students about the notions mentioned above and using examples from the schoolbooks of the past (primary and secondary education teachers, 2014, personal communication, 2 August 2014). For example, they have been using the example of the Kryfo Scholeio, (pronounced as krifó scholiō; translated as Hidden School), which was supposed to be an underground school for teaching Greek language and Greek Orthodox religion, provided by the Greek Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule in Greece between the 400 years of ‘blackness’ (Angelou, 1997). Some Greek historians agree that there is no evidence that such schools ever existed (e.g. Kambouroglou, Gedeon, Vlahoyannis, cited in Angelou, 1997). Other Greek historians accept that secret schools only existed during periods of intense islamisation (e.g. Veremis, 2011).

The Greek Orthodox Church has also influenced the way that the imagined community of Modern Greeks understands its Greek-Byzantine identity. For the Greek state the ‘Church of Greece’ is a legal entity of public law, while the Canon Law (church rules) is divine Foundation. Greek Orthodoxy is recognized by the
Constitution as the prevailing religion in Greece and the Statutory Charter is state law. The Greek Church is in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and other omodox Churches.

Before the enactment of the Autocephalous Greek Church, Greek society was shocked by a series of events: the Revolution of 1843, the first Constitution in 1844 and the controversy of the indigenous and heterochthons: the so-called *Manousia events*, which ended in 1848 (Vlachodimou, 2008). The *Manousia events* were considered as acts of conspiracy from the Phanariots side, which allowed Paparigopoulos to be promoted in the position previously held by Manousis in the liberal and popular movement of Papoulakos in 1850 –the movement, was part of the circle of the ‘Folk Orthodoxy party’ of Thomas Flamiatos (Vlachodimou, 2008). The case of Kairis from the opposing faction is typical of the developing relations between the modern Greek state and the Greek Church. As a follower of the ideas of Enlightenment, Kairis resists in Athens and Constantinople and he is charged with heresy and imprisoned in 1852. ‘Church and state are joined when threatened’ (Matalas, 2002, p. 99). The ‘restoration’ of Byzantium happened during the decade 1850-1860 and according to Scopetea: ‘this is not a random time’ (Scopetea, 1988, p. 179). The ecclesiastical judgment declaring the Autocephalous Church of Greece was maintained until 1850, and the release of the *Synodal Volume* normalised relations between the Greek state and the Patriarchate. This latter event released historians from their hesitations about Byzantium and its relation to Hellenism (e.g. Petropoulos, 1997, p. 224; Matalas, 2002, p. 48). Now it could be argued by the historians of the epoch, that Byzantium was a Hellenic Empire, which as Leftchenko (1955) explains: ‘lost the character of an Empire and took the look of a Greek state. The Greek
language put aside the Latin’ (Leftchenko, 1955, p. 165). Nevertheless, for 800 years after 650 AD, Byzantium is in Greek hands. The loss of the non-Greek territories (Syria, Palestine, Egypt) to the Arabs in the 6th century is thought to have contributed to the restriction of the Empire under Southern Italy, Sicily, Crimea, Southern Balkans including Greece with Crete and Cyprus, as well as the Greek territories in Asia Minor.

The Eastern Empire was thought of as a continuation of the Hellenistic states of Alexander the Great. The prevailing idea of the time was that ‘The Eastern Empire was Greek and not Latin in its civilisation’ (Russell, 1946, p. 261). The term ‘Byzantium’ was first used by Geronymo Wolf to suggest that Byzantium was a Greek Empire (Georgalas, 2006). Montaigne called Byzantium the Greek Empire (Georgalas, 2006). For Haizemberg (cited in Georgalas, 2006) the Eastern Empire is the Christianized Roman state of the Greek nation. The name ‘Byzantine Empire’ was finally established by the work of Du Cange (1648) Historia Byzantina (Georgalas, 2006). The above, were highlighted especially after the 1840s by the Greek Church and reproduced by Paparigopoulos.

In conclusion, the above developments have shaped the way that modern Greeks interpret their own identity. From the establishment of the Modern Greek Nation until very recently, students in Greek schools have been taught that they are descendants of the Byzantines, and that Byzantines are coming from Greeks (ancient Greeks); hence Byzantines are not different from ancient Greeks. Therefore, modern Greeks have adopted the idea that their identity results from the Byzantines, whose identity results from the ancient Greeks. On the other hand, they have had it explained to them that Greeks entered into a period of darkness after the Turkish occupation from the fall of the city in 1453 onwards. They have also been taught that
during this period many efforts were made by the Ottoman Turks to ‘erase’ the ‘Greek’ identity of Greeks by Islamising them using severe methods. However, they have learned that Greeks did not lose their pride and identity as they had found ways to maintain and preserve their religion, traditions, customs and language through, for example, the Hidden School. Hence, Greek students know that they are ‘Greek-Byzantine’; they are ‘Greek’.

3.3. Constructions of the history of Byzantium in Greek culturally accepted literature

Here, I will present the culturally accepted history of Byzantium as written by Greek historians. This will allow me to understand the Greek imagined community’s interpretation of Byzantium and will enable me to identify the presuppositions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning in the exhibitionary complexes of the Greek Museums. Below, I raise the main points of the narration of Byzantine history as presented in the Greek culturally accepted Byzantine literature:

1. For Greek historians, when Constantine became Emperor of the Roman Empire in 324 AD, Christianity, the Eastern Religion, ‘was destined to be the religion that would constitute the bond of his multiracial Empire’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 42). The heart of his Empire would beat in the East. In his Empire, all the big centers of civilization, such as Alexandria, Antioch, Damascus, Bergamo, Ephesus, Smyrna, Salonika, Athens and Corinth would co-exist. Also, his Empire would include all the Universities, philosophical schools, technical, and art schools, and above all, the wealth of knowledge, the biggest libraries in the known World so far, that existed in the above centers.
2. In 330 AD Emperor Constantine relocated the new capital of his Empire to the East, to ‘the small Greek township named ‘Byzantium’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 42), which was located in a very important and strategic location. The new capital city was renovated, adorned and renamed by the Emperor Constantine the Great. It was named ‘Constantinople’ after him (Constantinople means the city of Constantine). ‘Byzantium’ the ancient colony of the Greek city of Megara at the coast of Bosporos, was positioned on the cross roads of the two continents, Asia and Europe, and between two seas, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and it had been inhabited by hundreds of Greek colonies for a thousand years. In the middle ages, the terms ‘Byzantium’ or ‘Byzantines city’ were referring only to Constantinople and the term ‘Byzantines’ to people who ‘were originaly from Constantinople’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 42). After the fall of Constantinople, the term ‘Byzantinus’ was referring to ‘Greek scholars who left Constantinople before or after its fall to go to Italy’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 42).

3. Constantinople was to become the main centre of culture for the entire medieval world. Until the fifth century the Empire extended in the three continents around the Mediterranean Sea: in Europe, Asia and Africa. In late fifth century however, when German tribes occupied Rome and the Empire’s Western part, it was limited to the Eastern lands of its old territory. Since then, its borders continuously changed. ‘In the sixth century it was a vast, multinational and still multireligious state’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 43).

4. In eleventh and twelfth centuries, still multinational, it extended over the Hellenic, Aegean and Asia Minor territories. In the thirteenth century, in 1204, it ceased to exist, after being abolished by the Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade, and
was substituted by small states, in Bithynia (Nicaea), Epiros and Pontos (Trebizond).
After its reconstitution, in August 1261, and mainly during the next two centuries,
fourteenth and fifteenth, it extended 'only over some Greek lands around
Constantinoplis' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 44). Byzantium was by no means immutable; it was characterized by endless changes in its structures, its function and its character. The barbaric raids (2nd-6th c.), the expansion of the Arabs (7th c.), the epidemic plague, the climatic changes and other factors were 'leaving their traces on its citizens, its administration and its culture' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 44).

5. As a result of the progressive changes after the establishment of Christianity (381 AD), the loss of the lands (5th-7th c.) and the Iconoclasm (8th-9th c.), only few Roman characteristics survived in the 9th century. At the time the State was land-limited and multinational but Christian, and it had its own original culture; the language in use was Greek. The administrative structure and the economy changed. 'The enormous provinces of the fourth century disappeared and the urban framework collapsed and was substituted by fortified settlements' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 45). Byzantium was ruralized and remained mainly rural in the years of prosperity (10th, 12th c.) and up to 1204. Only the emperorship remained immutable in time. It was shaped in the early centuries by 'incorporating the spirit of Christianity into the Hellenistic and Roman political ideas about kingship' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 44). The emperor, surrounded by a strictly structured government and ecclesiastical hierarchy, acted as an ecumenical leader of the unique ecumenical Empire 'as the
representative of God on earth, who looks after the citizens of the whole world and leads them to the real faith’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 45).

6. The transition from the ancient world to the Byzantine was gradual. The political, economic and religious structures of the ancient world began to break down from the end of the second century, 'a time when Christianity was starting to gain ground and the first examples of Christian art appeared' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 48). A milestone in this transition was the legalization of the Christian religion in 313 by the emperor Constantine the Great. Christian art now 'acquired a public character and was put to work in the further propagation of the new faith' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 48). In parallel, the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople in 330 represented 'a decisive shift in the empire's centre of gravity from the Latin West to the Hellenized East' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 49). The division into a western and eastern empire in 395 and the dissolution of the western half in 476 were significant stages along the way to the end of antiquity, which can be said to have breathed its last with 'the closure of the philosophical schools in AD 529, the onset of the barbarian invasions, and the decline of the great urban centres after the sixth century' (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 49).

7. The end of the dynasty founded by Emperor Justinian (6th c. AD) in effect marked the end of antiquity, and signalled the beginning of medieval Byzantine society. Slav and Arab incursions and the Iconoclastic Controversy led to a loss of territories, although this contributed to the Empire's homogeneity, since it now embraced primarily Greek-speaking population. The structure of Byzantine society rested on three main foundations: 'a flexible but powerful administration, headed by the Emperor; the Christian religion, with the Patriarch at the head of the Church; and
the Greco-Roman tradition and Greek language’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 65). All three left their mark on both the daily life of the Empire and its cultural and artistic modes of expression.

8. The sacking of Constantinople by the Frankish and Latin crusaders in 1204 delivered a crippling blow to the Empire, but also ‘led to new relations and channels of contact’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 66). Despite their persistent efforts, the Palaiologan emperors could do nothing to halt the political decline of the Empire following their restoration to the Byzantine throne in Constantinople in 1261. Nonetheless, ‘the Palaiologian revival in the arts and letters was a vitally important cultural event that was to have a stimulating effect on both East and West’ (Byzantine Collections, 2008, p. 66).

9. The gradual loss of Byzantine territory began as early as the 11th c. but gained momentum from 1204 onwards, culminating in the final loss of Constantinople in 1453. This process helped to create a complex social and political system in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The populations who lived in Byzantine territory, whether Greek or otherwise, experienced these gradual but decisive changes in a variety of ways. In the Venetian-held areas living side by side with Westerners led to the creation of new social and cultural structures: Byzantine tradition and the Greek language encounter, sometimes with glorious results, the beginnings of the European Renaissance. This is evident in the urban centres of Crete and the Cyclades, the Ionian Islands and the Peloponnese. On the other hand, in areas that came under Turkish rule, the local populations become part of the administrative system of another empire. Under this regime all the "Rum" (Romioi, i.e. the – mostly Orthodox – Christians, regardless of ethnic origins or language) were
subjects of the Ottoman sultan with the Ecumenical Patriarch as their religious leader. In those days, the Orthodox Church was an institutional part of the Ottoman state. At the same time, it was a point of reference for the Christians: a nexus preserving Byzantine tradition, Greek Orthodox instruction and the Greek language, which would go on to contribute to the creation of a Greek national identity (Byzantine Collections, 2008).

In summary, the Greek culturally accepted Byzantine literature supports the contention that: Constantinople was founded in 330 AD by Emperor Constantine at a place, which had been inhabited by hundreds of Greek colonies for a thousand years. The transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople shifted the empire's centre of gravity from the Latin West to the Hellenized East. Constantinople was to become the main centre of culture for the entire medieval world. In the fifth century, the Empire extended in the three continents around the Mediterranean Sea: in Europe, Asia and Africa. In late fifth century however, when German tribes occupied Rome and the Empire’s Western part, it was limited to the Eastern lands of its old territory. In the sixth century, it was still a multinational and still multireligious state. After the establishment of Christianity, the loss of the lands to the Arabs and Iconoclasm, only few Roman characteristics survived. At the time, Byzantium had been reduced in size, was and multinational, Christian, and had its own culture and language, which was Greek. Emperorship remained immutable in time: it was shaped in the early centuries by bringing Christianity and the Hellenistic and Roman political ideas about kingship together. Slav and Arab incursions and the Iconoclastic Controversy led to a loss of territories, although this contributed to the Empire’s homogeneity, since it now embraced primarily Greek-speaking populations.
The structure of Byzantine society rested on three main foundations: Emperorship, Christianity, Greco-Roman tradition and Greek language. All three left their mark on both the daily life of the Empire and its cultural and artistic modes of expression. Until the 12th century, it extended over the Greek territories, including Asia Minor. Until the 15th century, it was restricted in the Greek territories. The sack of Constantinople by the Frankish and Latin crusaders in 1204 weakened the Empire. But the Palaiologian revival in the arts and letters was a vitally important cultural event that was to have a stimulating effect on both East and West: In the Venetian-held areas Byzantine tradition and the Greek language encounter, sometimes with glorious results, the beginnings of the European Renaissance. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it extended only over some Greek lands. In areas that came under Turkish rule after its fall in 1453 the local populations become part of the administrative system of the Ottoman Empire. The Orthodox Church was an institutional part of the Ottoman state and a point of reference for the Christians: a nexus preserving Byzantine tradition, Greek Orthodox instruction and the Greek language, which would go on to contribute to the creation of the modern Greek national identity, which is explained as ancient Greek, Byzantine, Orthodox, as well as European.

**British and Greek cultural understanding of Byzantium**

Here, I will summarise the main points of the British and Greek cultural understanding and interpretation of Byzantium presented in this chapter, and the differences between them.

1. **British cultural understanding and interpretation of Byzantium** has been shaped through the standards of Western European historical scholarship around Medieval times, which until the 1980s was largely viewing medieval art in terms of
technique, and as teaching aids for craftsmen. This resulted in the crystallisation of British interpretations of medieval objects as decorative art. Knowledge acquired from school does not include Byzantine history, as it has never been included in the national curriculum. ‘Western Europeans’, British people among them, ‘are educated to believe that the classics and the Renaissance are the two high points of civilization, but Byzantium is not’ (James, 2010, p. 1). Also, Byzantium is not included in either of these. The period that would be the equivalent of the Byzantine period in European history is usually characterized as the Dark Ages; a period of intellectual darkness between extinguishing the ‘light of Rome’ after the end of Late Antiquity, and the rise of the Italian Renaissance in the 14th century. Investigation in the British culturally accepted literature on Byzantium showed that the contemporary British perception of Byzantium is that Byzantium is the continuation of the Roman Empire. More particularly, Byzantium is thought of as the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean, which has a new state religion: Christianity. However, Christianity, didn’t change the character of Roman life. Hence, Roman traditions continue through time. The ‘barbarians’ (e.g. the Huns, the Visigoths) sacked Rome in 410 AD. However, as the Roman Empire had been already divided into two halves (eastern and western) the eastern half was not affected by this. The Eastern half, (which today is called Byzantium) thrived under Justinian: The nature of the Roman Empire became a conception that was classical and Christian. The philosophical unity of the Empire as human, imperial and universal was preserved; its economy remained powerful. The Sasanian Wars and iconoclasm that followed Justinian’s reign weakened Byzantium. However, by the end of the eleventh century, Normans of Viking descent acknowledged the cultural sway of Byzantium and formed new medieval kingdoms in
Western Europe. In the twelfth century, they built great churches at the Kingdom of Sicily that were decorated with Byzantine style mosaics. Hence, they had been influenced by Byzantium. After the fourth crusade in 1204 Byzantium was reduced in size, but the Palaiologan era (political and cultural rebirth) began. Finally the city of Constantinople, and with it Byzantium, felt in 1453 (seized by Ottoman Turks).

2. **Greek cultural understanding and interpretation of Byzantium** has been shaped through 19th century national historical narratives. Particularly, through the work *History of the Greek nation* (1871) of the so-called national historian of Greece, Constantinos Paparigopoulos, who has influenced the way that the imagined community of modern Greeks interprets its identity and which still influences contemporary Greek historians. Paparigopoulos is the founder of the concept of historical continuity of Greece from antiquity to today through Byzantium, which has become the canvas on which the ideology of the Greek state was developed and shaped. Paparigopoulos sees Byzantium as a Hellenic Empire. The main points of his work are the concept of Hellenic Christianity, i.e the argument around the interconnection of the ancient Greek world with Byzantium, the ‘Greek ethnicity’ of Byzantium and the Greek-Byzantine foundations of the Modern Greek Nation. These concepts also connect with the political construct of the Great Idea. The Great Idea was the axis of the internal and foreign policy of Greece until the third decade of the 20th century. It had as its goal the liberation of all Greeks who were under Turkish sovereignty (after the fall of the city in 1453) and their integration into a nation-state with its capital in Constantinople. Until the decade of the 1980s, the Greek schoolbooks of Byzantine history taught students about the origin of their identity through Byzantium; they have been taught that they are descendants of the
Byzantines, and that Byzantines are coming from Greeks (ancient Greeks). Hence they think that Byzantines are not much different from ancient Greeks, and they identify themselves as coming from the Byzantines, who are coming from the Greeks. In the 1980s, historical revisionism took place and perceptions of nationalism changed; so did those areas of history that were driven by such ideas, and schoolbooks were subject to change. However, the Greek Church and some teachers were resistant to change. Some teachers, depending on their own ideas and beliefs, were teaching their students about the notions mentioned above, using examples from schoolbooks of the past. The Greek Church supported those narratives of long ago. Furthermore, this is where Paparigopoulos got the idea to initiate his argument on ‘Hellenic Christianism’.

Investigation of the Greek culturally accepted literature on Byzantium showed that the contemporary Greek perception of Byzantium is that Byzantium is the continuation of the Greek language, customs and traditions. It is explained that the Emperor Constantine founded Constantinople in 330 AD at a place, which was historically inhabited by Greeks for a thousand years: ‘to the Hellenized East’. Constantinople is seen as the main centre of culture for the entire medieval world. In the fifth century, the Empire reached its greatest extent: it contained regions in Europe, Asia and Africa. In late fifth century however, when German tribes occupied Rome and the Empire’s Western part, it was limited to the Eastern lands of its old territory. In the sixth century, it is interpreted as a vast, multinational and still multireligious state. After the establishment of Christianity (381 AD), the loss of the lands (5th-7th c.) and Iconoclasm (8th-9th c.), the portrayal is that very few Roman characteristics survived. At the time the State was land-limited and multinational but
Christian, and it had its own original culture; the language in use was Greek. Emperorship, which remained immutable in time, incorporated the spirit of Christianity into the Hellenistic and Roman political ideas about kingship. Slav and Arab incursions and the Iconoclastic Controversy led to a loss of territories, although this contributed to the Empire's homogeneity, since it then embraced primarily Greek-speaking populations. The structure of Byzantine society rested on three main foundations: Emperorship, Christianity, Greco-Roman tradition and Greek language. In eleventh and twelfth centuries, still multinational, it extended over the Hellenic, Aegean and Asia Minor territories. The sacking of Constantinople by the Frankish and Latin crusaders in 1204 weakened the Empire. But the Palaiologian revival in the arts and letters was a vitally important cultural event. It is seen as having a stimulating effect on both East and West: In the Venetian-held areas Byzantine tradition and the Greek language encounter the beginnings of the European Renaissance. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it extended only over some Greek lands. In areas that came under Turkish rule after its fall in 1453 the local populations become part of the administrative system of the Ottoman Empire. However, the Orthodox Church is said to have been an institutional part of the Ottoman state and a point of reference for the Christians: a nexus preserving Byzantine tradition, Greek Orthodox instruction and the Greek language, which would go on to contribute to the creation of the modern Greek national identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the British cultural understanding and interpretation of Byzantium has been shaped through the Western European historical scholarship around Medieval times. Byzantine history is not part of the British curriculum. The
period that would be the equivalent of the Byzantine period is usually characterized as the Dark Ages; a period of intellectual darkness between extinguishing the ‘light of Rome’ after the end of Late Antiquity, and the rise of the Italian Renaissance in the 14th century. As a result, British people value the classics and the Renaissance as the two high points of civilization, but ignore Byzantium.

The Greek cultural understanding and interpretation of Byzantium has been shaped through the 19th century Greek national historical narratives of historical continuity of Greece from antiquity to today through Byzantium, which were introduced to modern Greeks through the national curriculum. As a result, Greeks see the Byzantine period as the opposite of what the term Dark Ages implies. More strongly, they see Byzantium as an evolution of Greek ideas, values and beliefs. Characteristic of this view is that they see the period that followed the sacking of the city of Constantinople by the Frankish and Latin crusaders in 1204 as a period of revival in the arts and letters that had a stimulating effect on both East and West. To them in the Venetian-held areas, Byzantine tradition and the Greek language encounter the beginnings of the European Renaissance. After its fall in 1453 the local populations become part of the administrative system of the Ottoman Empire. However, the Orthodox Church is seen as a nexus preserving Byzantine tradition, Greek Orthodox instruction and the Greek language, which contribute to the creation of a Greek national identity.

Hence historically, British and Greek people understand Byzantium differently. The British integrate it into the wider narrative of the medieval period and acknowledge only the Classics and the Renaissance as periods of cultural development and evolution. The Greeks see it as the main centre of culture for the
entire medieval world and a period of cultural continuity, with a significant contribution to the period of the Renaissance and hence to the making of Modern Europe; continuity of the Greek traditions, customs, language, and hence identity. For the British, Byzantium’s origin is interpreted as Roman. More strongly, Byzantium is seen as the continuation of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean, which had a new state religion: Christianity. However, Christianity, is not thought to have changed the character of Roman life so that Roman traditions are seen as continuing through time. For the Greeks, Byzantium’s origin is interpreted as Greek. After the establishment of Christianity (381 AD), the loss of the lands (5th-7th c.) and Iconoclasm (8th-9th c.), it is thought that only few Roman characteristics survived. Byzantium is seen as the continuation of the Greek language, customs and traditions and constitutive of part of their contemporary identity. Besides, to them, Constantinople, and hence, Byzantium was founded at the Hellenized East; at a place historically inhabited by Greeks for a thousand years.

Both British and Greek people agree that with the sacking of Rome by the German tribes (e.g. the Huns, the Visigoths) in the fifth century, the Roman Empire had been already divided into two halves (eastern and western). However, the British interpretation is that this did not affect the eastern half; hence they see Byzantium as only apart of half of the Roman Empire. The Greek interpretation is that the Empire was limited in the Eastern lands of its old territory, hence they see that the entire Empire had been concentrated into the eastern half. Also, they both agree that Byzantium thrived under Justinian. The British understand the nature of the Roman Empire in the sixth century as a conception that was classical and Christian. They interpret the philosophical unity of the Empire as human, imperial and universal; its
economy as powerful. The Greeks understand its nature as multinational but Christian; to them Byzantium had its own original culture: the language in use was Greek. The structure of Byzantine society from the sixth century onwards is seen as resting on three main foundations: Emperorship, Christianity, Greco-Roman tradition and Greek language. Greeks also interpret Emperorship, which remained immutable in time as the incorporation of the spirit of Christianity into the Hellenistic and Roman political ideas about kingship. Finally, they both agree that the Sasanian Wars and iconoclasm that followed Justinian's reign weakened Byzantium. However, the Greeks see that this contributed to the Empire's homogeneity, since the territories that were left embraced primarily Greek-speaking populations. The British see that by the end of the eleventh century Normans who had inhabited the old territories of the Roman Empire (the western half) had been influenced by Byzantium (they refer to artistic influences). They both understand the Palaiologan era that followed the fourth crusade in 1204 as a period of political and cultural rebirth, and they acknowledge the fall of Byzantium in 1453 to the Ottoman Turks.

As explained in Chapter One, museums that belong to the 'imagined communities' of each country under study construct meaning based on cultural knowledge and understanding. Briefly, cultural knowledge interacts with the exhibitionary meaning making process, and as a result the values, ideas and beliefs of each imagined community are (re)produced/(re)constructed in each exhibitionary complex. This will be demonstrated in the images and texts of each exhibitionary complex under study in Chapter Three below: after knowing the cultural interpretation and understanding of Byzantium as formulated in each country, I am in
a position to begin to examine, analyse and explain the museum (re)presentations of Byzantium i.e. to conduct the semiotic analysis of the museum images and texts.
Chapter three

Exhibitionary Complexes Case studies

Introduction

Chapter one explained that museum exhibitionary complexes are products of curatorial practices and that in the national museum context they are indicative of the perception and transmission of the culturally accepted interpretations of the history, art and culture of the Byzantine Empire, as formed by the imagined community of each country. Chapter two explained that historians present different perspectives on the history and culture of the Byzantine Empire. There are two main interpretations: the Byzantine Empire is seen either as (1) the eastern half of the Late Roman Empire i.e. the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east after the division of the Roman Empire to the east and the west or (2) as a new Empire, different from the Roman that had its own identity: Christian in religion and Greek-speaking. The British historians are generally in agreement with the first interpretation and the Greek historians are generally in agreement with the second. However, the rise of archaeology and other specialisms in the 20th century have shed different light on the period. Many contemporary Byzantine historians support that Byzantium has played a decisive role to the development of Europe, as we know it today (e.g. James, 2014; Wicham 2009) and that Europe has inherited its modern cultural identity from Byzantium (e.g. Arhweiller, cited in Bakounakis, 2010; Faltin and Wright, 2007). The original contribution of the present study to this debate is to explain how Byzantium is thought and seen nowadays, by bringing the interpretations of different
European cultures together through the ‘myth’ analysis of their national museum exhibitionary complexes. The ‘myth’ analysis results in the revelation of both latent and patent ideological and cultural layers of discourse within each exhibitionary complex and enables the explanation of the way that Byzantine culture and art is understood and interpreted by different cultures. Consequently, the present chapter will explain the meanings and identities of Byzantine culture as the products of the curatorial discourses of three European national museums that exhibit Byzantine collections. These exhibitionary complexes are in the British Museum in London, U.K., the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, Greece and the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki, Greece.
Case Study 1. The British Museum

**Introduction**

This section offers a critical reading of the interpretation of Byzantium as presented in the British Museum Byzantine exhibitionary complex. Specifically, it understands and explains the ideological positions on Byzantium and on British identity communicated through the British Museum Byzantine exhibitionary complex.

The British Museum is one of the most visited museums in the world (Global Attractions Attendance Report, 2013) and as it is explained on the museum’s website, its exhibits are actively studied and researched to promote worldwide understanding of the cultures that are represented within its displays (The British Museum, 2015). On the subject of the museum’s policy on acquisitions, it is also explained that the British Museum is a ‘Universal Museum’ (British Museum policy on acquisitions, 2013) and that its core purpose is ‘to reach a broader worldwide audience by extending engagement with this audience’ (The British Museum, 2016). This engagement with the audience concerns not only the collections that it possesses, but also ‘the cultures and territories that they represent, the stories that can be told through them, the diversity of truths that they can unlock and their meaning in the world today’ (The British Museum, 2016). Here, it is suggested that the British Museum disseminates ‘truths’ and ‘meaning'/accurate knowledge about the historical past by exhibiting the world cultures and explaining their identities. Since the aim of the British Museum is to influence a worldwide audience with the representation of cultural identities from around the world and has become of great importance to the world, the way that Byzantium is (re)presented (interpreted and communicated) through the curatorial
work/exhibitionary complex of the British Museum cannot but be central to the present study. An additional reason that makes the Byzantine exhibitionary complex of the British museum even more important to the present study is that room 41, which hosts the theme *The Byzantine Empire* was refurbished and opened to the public in March 2014. This means that the part of the exhibitionary complex that represents the Byzantine Empire has been constructed using the latest practices, and hence the research data it offers are products of current curatorial practice.

It is important to bring into my discussion the formative history of the museum's Byzantine collection, as this will enable the analysis of the museum's contemporary Byzantine exhibitionary complex in the section that follows.

Byzantine culture in the British Museum was left on the margins of curatorial inquiry until the 1980s. As explained in Chapter Two, Byzantine history, art and culture were little known in the U.K. before the 1980s. In European history, they were seen as part of the period known as the 'Dark Ages', and only in the 1980s did a turn in the thinking around this period take place (this happened within the framework of historical revisionism). Since then, a lot more research on archaeological evidence has been undertaken, and the period traditionally known as the 'Dark Ages' has narrowed to the point where many historians no longer believe that such a term is useful. Many modern British scholars who study the era, (James and Norwich, for example), tend to avoid the term for its negative messages, finding it inaccurate and even misleading as a term for any part of the middle ages. Following this, present day British scholars (as well as international ones) think of the Byzantine Empire as playing an important role in the development of the modern world. Thus, they are giving Byzantium a special place in the narration of world history.
Research on the British Museum Trustees’ Minutes archive showed that most of the Byzantine collection was acquired between the years 1970 and 1995 and mainly in the 1980s. Particularly in the mid 1980s plenty of Byzantine works of art and artefacts were acquired, including the most valuable icons of the British museum Byzantine collection (e.g. the icons of St John the Baptist and St George were acquired in 1986).

During the same period, in 1983, the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies was established in the U.K. This period also saw many U.K. Universities establish Byzantine Studies within their History Faculties (e.g. Birmingham University Centre for Byzantine Studies and Modern Greek, established in 1984; King’s College London Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies established in the late 1980s, now incorporated into the Centre for Hellenic Studies; Byzantine Studies at Royal Holloway University of London established in 1987). This is indicative of the turn in British scholars’ interest in Byzantium (the so-called ‘Byzantine turn’) and explains why the collecting and exhibiting of representative Byzantine works of art (i.e. icons), in the displays of the museum was thought necessary.

The intention of the British Museum Trustees and curators of the time was to create a ‘wide ranging collection, much of which would be of historical interest rather than aesthetic merit’ (Trustees Minutes, 23 January 1982). This statement marks a turn in the way that Byzantine art is thought of and seen by British curators at the time. According to Snape (2014), British curators used to see Byzantine art as decorative art, and as such, they overlooked its religious significance and the meaning it had in the context of its time. The British Museum curators of the time realised that Byzantine art was of historical significance, and decided to create a
collection that would be of historical interest. Nevertheless, some contemporary
British curators still see Byzantine art as merely decorative (Snape, 2014).

In 1982 the museum director thought of the Icons as a continuation of the
Museum’s Byzantine Collection (Trustees minutes, 23 January 1982). Until then, the
museum’s Byzantine collection consisted of coins, liturgical and decorative objects, as
well as jewelry - mostly, gold and bronze rings (A guide to the Early Christian and
Byzantine Antiquities, 1921). Trustees, however, were not sure why a collection of
icons would be valuable for the British Museum and they suggested the National
Gallery as the most suitable national institution to present it. It is mentioned though,
that there was no national collection of icons at present: ‘neither the V&A, nor the
National Gallery concerned themselves with such material’ (Trustees minutes, 23
January 1982. p. 3376). Hence, the most characteristic kind of Byzantine art, the icons,
had not been acknowledged as of importance until then (e.g. historical importance).

However, in the eyes both of the National Gallery and the Reviewing
committee on the export of works of art, the British Museum was the institution
providing expert advice in this field. ‘Prof. Lasko said that the collection of icons had
always been the museum’s responsibility, and as Ms. Strandford had reported, the
museum already had a Byzantine collection. ‘The principle therefore, was not in
question’ (Trustees minutes, 23 January 1982, p. 3377) and the acquisition of the
Icons collection was put forward. However, at the time, the museum had insufficient
curatorial expertise in the field and it was suggested that a policy of purchasing
minor icons would help to develop curatorial expertise (Trustees Minutes, 23 January
1982). It was also suggested that a specific member of the staff should educate
herself about icons in order to become the Department’s specialist in the field
(Trustees Minutes, 23 January 1982). Trustees subsequently endorsed the suggestion that Mr. Bradley’s collection (19 icons, mostly Russian, that had been on loan from the collection of Mr. C R A Rae since 1979) should if possible, be exhibited at the British Museum to signify the Museum’s interest in the field (Trustees Minutes, 23 January 1982).

As research on the previous permanent museum exhibitionary complexes has shown, from then until 2014, the Byzantine material that had been incorporated into the collection of the museum had been presented alongside medieval material, (The British Museum: Britain, Europe and Prehistory Curatorial Department: Digital assets 7.1 (live) database. Accessed 11 February 2014).

The first and only exhibitionary complex that was exclusively dedicated to Byzantium was a temporary one, named: Byzantium. It opened in 1994 and lasted for almost a year (The British Museum, Britain, Europe and Prehistory Curatorial Department: Temporary exhibitions archive). Byzantium received some harsh criticisms. For example, the art critic Brian Sewell (1994) wrote:

The failure [of the exhibition] is an accumulation of beautiful and sometimes puzzling and provoking artefacts and works of art, but no matter how great the number and individual significance of manuscripts and ivories, reliquaries, pots, textiles, spoons, bottles and fragments of sculpture and mosaic, it cannot communicate the sense of grandeur, awe and wonderment experienced by the traveller in any part of the lost Byzantine Empire on entering a church, for Byzantine art, though often informed by the pagan past of Greece and Rome, is essentially the art of intense Christian religiosity (Sewell, 1994; ‘An Awe-full exhibition’, Evening Standard: The Arts article found in the British Museum press-cuttings archive).
Sewell (1994) argued that while the exhibition consisted of a considerable number of Byzantine objects of value, the museum had not managed to communicate either the cultural and religious ideas of Byzantium or the splendour of Byzantine art. He suggested that this *would* had been communicated if Byzantine art had been explained in relation to both its pagan (Greek and Roman) influences and, most importantly, the essence of Orthodox Christian faith and spirituality. Hence, Sewell (1994) suggested that the exhibition had not succeed in communicating the cultural values and religious identity of Byzantium.

This was the last Byzantine exhibition that the British Museum held until the opening of the present permanent exhibitionary complex in room 41. The new section of the permanent exhibitionary complex opened in March 2014. However, in my analysis below, I argue that even now, a unified approach towards Byzantine culture has not been achieved through the British Museum curatorial work/exhibitionary complex. Byzantium is still presented alongside medieval material. I argue that within the present permanent exhibitionary complex, Byzantium is used politically: namely, Byzantium is used to communicate issues of British identity that are negotiated through the exhibitionary complex (i.e. through the British Museum curatorial work).

To rehearse my argument about the use of Byzantium at the museum’s exhibitionary complex: I argue that Byzantine history, culture and art are used within the museum’s exhibitionary complex as a way of explaining the identity of ‘the’ ‘nation’ and ‘the’ ‘culture’ of the country to which the museum belongs, i.e. Britain, and for the promotion of the desired image of ‘the’ British ‘nation’. This meaning is
presented as ‘natural’ and hence as the only ‘truth’. My argument consists of two parts. First, I argue that within the British Museum exhibitionary complex:

- Byzantium is interpreted as the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east, as exotic, non-European, non-British,

- Byzantium is used within the narrative of European and British history as the ‘different’, the ‘other’ to European and to British identity,

- British identity is (re)presented/(re)produced as European, but at the same time, it is ‘reduced’ to English by being (re)presented/(re)produced predominantly as Anglo-Saxon.

Second, I argue that the mixed narration of these histories undermines the very idea that Byzantine history, European history and British history are very different. British history and identity are presented in relation to a notion of ‘empire’, by reflecting in a sense the British colonial and imperial ideology of the past. The British history is dominant and both Byzantine history and European history are presented as subordinate and complementary to the British.

In order to illustrate my arguments, I will look at rooms 41 (Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300-1100), and 40 (Medieval Europe AD 1050-1500), that constitute the Byzantine exhibitionary complex in the British Museum. The rooms are articulated in ‘sequential thematic structure’ (Nicks, 2002, p. 361) based on chronology, as shown in Chart 1 below.
Chart 1: Sequential thematic structure of rooms forty-one and forty. Based on Nicks’s model of sequential thematic structure (Nicks, 2002, p. 360)

The rooms consist of the following themes:

Room 41. Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300-1100

The Sutton-Hoo Ship burial: An Anglo-Saxon royal grave?

Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-650

The Roman Empire and Beyond AD 300-600

The Byzantine Empire AD 330-650

Celtic Britain and Ireland AD 300-1100

Great Migrations AD 400-750

Northern and Eastern Europe AD 500-1100

The Vikings AD 750-1100

Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent AD 650-1100

Room 40. Medieval Europe AD 1050-1500
According to the titles given to each room, the core idea that binds them together is the narration of the history of Europe from AD 300 to AD 1500. At first sight, the involvement of Byzantine culture within these two rooms, which according to their titles narrate the history of Europe, seems awkward. Not (only) because they narrate the history of Europe including Byzantium in the narrative, but (also) because most of the themes in these rooms refer to the history of the formation of Britain e.g. The Sutton-Hoo Ship burial: An Anglo-Saxon royal grave?; Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-650 (British Museum: room 41); Celtic Britain And Ireland AD 300-1100 (British Museum: room 41), The Wars of the Roses (British Museum: room 40); also, to the history of Britain in relation to the history of Europe e.g. Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent AD 650-1100 (British Museum: room 41, 2015).

As explained above, I argue that Byzantium is used to communicate issues of British identity that are negotiated through the exhibitionary complex. I will demonstrate this by identifying, analysing and explaining the concepts of: Roman
I will also demonstrate that these interpretations are the result of the (re)presentation/(re)production of the cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on its own identity (explained in Chapter One) and on Byzantium (explained in Chapter Two). Specifically, I will demonstrate that the construction of exhibitionary meaning is based on:

(a) the British cultural perceptions of Byzantium as Roman, but also, as bizarre and alien; as a result, at the exhibitionary complex, Byzantium is (re)presented/(re)constructed as a continuity of the Roman Empire in the east, as different, exotic, ‘other’, non-European, non-British, non-English.

(b) the ‘Romanist school’ ideas that are making themselves obvious in the interpretation of the Ostrogoth, Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms as continuities of the Roman Empire in the west, and in the interpretation of these kingdoms as the ancestors of Europe and Britain in the exhibitionary complex. As a result, within the exhibitionary complex, British identity is (re)presented/(re)constructed as Roman and European.

(c) the ideas expressed in the ‘Germanist theme’. As a result, within the exhibitionary complex, British identity is (re)presented/(re)constructed as predominantly Anglo-Saxon, and therefore English.

I will achieve this by identifying, analysing and explaining the visual and textual museum constructions where cultural presuppositions interact with the making of exhibitionary meaning within the context of the operation of the
museum’s (micro-) power relations. This will enable me to understand and explain the ideological positions on Byzantium and on British identity that make themselves apparent within the exhibitionary complex’s images and texts, as well as the unsuccessful attempt(s) at demystification and democratisation, resulting from the interaction of cultural knowledge and Byzantium with curatorial practices.

What is Byzantium? The interpretation of Byzantium as presented in the British Museum

1. Roman continuities

Here, I will identify, analyse and explain the interpretation of the Byzantine Empire as a continuation of the Roman Empire in the east. Also, I will identify and explain two more interpretations of Roman continuities in the west: the Ostrogoth kingdom as a continuation of the Roman Empire and the Frankish kingdom as a continuation of the Roman Empire. This will be done by indicating the specific texts and images of the exhibitionary complex where these meanings are constructed, i.e. the specific selections of texts and museum objects that enable these interpretations (rather than others). This will further enable me to explain the use of Byzantium to the narrative of British identity as the ‘other’ and the use of the western kingdoms as the ‘same’, which form the first part of my main argument: the (re)construction/(re)production of British identity as English and European through Byzantium.
a. Byzantium: a Roman continuity in the east

In room 41, Byzantium is represented through the exhibits and narrative texts of the theme *The Byzantine Empire AD 300-650* and through references concerning Byzantine influences on other cultures (e.g. Ostrogoths, Vandals). The introductory text of the theme *The Byzantine Empire AD 330-650*, reads:

The Byzantine Empire comprised the eastern part of the Roman Empire following its division into east and west in AD 395. Its Capital, Constantinople, became a powerful political, religious and artistic centre -a 'new' Rome.

Rooted in classical and Late Roman traditions, Byzantine culture also developed its own distinctive elements (The British Museum: room 41, *The Byzantine Empire AD 330-650*, introductory text, 2016).

Here, it is suggested that Byzantium is the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east. However, the information on the elements that composed its culture, i.e. both Greek and Roman, and 'its own distinctive elements' support the third argument examined in Chapter Two. I argue that this is an inconsistency in the interpretation of Byzantium's Roman origins/continuity provided by the British Museum, and constitutes an (unsuccessful) attempt at demystification. Below, I will demonstrate that Byzantium is presented as leading in influencing the medieval world, but is also presented as Roman: as a Roman continuity with only Roman elements composing its history, culture and arts. By looking at Byzantine influences to the cultures (re)presented in room 41, I will explain that Byzantine influences are (re)presented as Roman influences, and thus, Byzantium is (re)presented as Roman. I argue that this is a product of the interaction of British cultural knowledge of Byzantium (as a
continuation of the Roman Empire in the east), with curatorial practices, in the context of the museum’s ‘productive’ (micro-) power relations.

i. Byzantine influence on Ostrogoths explained as Roman

In room 41, under the theme *Great Migrations AD 400-750*, in the sub-theme entitled *Ostrogothic Italy* the museum text reads:

In the AD 490s the Ostrogoths established a kingdom in Italy where they were influenced by Roman traditions. Their first king Theoderic, made consul by the Byzantine Emperor, is named on the Byzantine-style square weight. The coins of King Baduila are also Byzantine in style and show the bust of Emperor Anastasius I. Despite these influences, Ostrogothic women still wore Germanic-style dress on arrival in Italy, like these radiate-headed (Knobbed) and birds’ head brooches (The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 1. Ostrogothic Italy*, accompanying text, 2016).

The text refers to Roman influences to Ostrogoth people. But those Roman influences are explained as Byzantine. According to the text, the Ostrogoths (who established their Kingdom in Italy) were influenced by the Roman traditions. An example of such influences is illustrated by the Byzantine-style square weight, which bears Theoderic’s name, and by the Byzantine-style coins of King Baduila (*Fig. 3* below). I argue that this is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as a product of the museum’s (micro-) power relations.
Fig. 3. The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 1, Ostrogothic*  
*Italy, 2016*

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

> These spectacular items are from a hoard of Ostrogothic jewellery suitable for an aristocratic woman. Made from gold and shimmering with garnets, their style reflects Byzantine influence on the Ostrogothic court (The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 2. The Domagnano Treasure*, accompanying text, 2016).

Again, here, through these selections and their assembly, i.e. the combination of this text and these objects, (the items from a hoard of Ostrogothic jewellery, *Fig. 4 below*) and the corresponding accompanying text, it is suggested that the Byzantine influences in Ostrogoth jewellery-making are Roman.
The sub-themes *Domagnano Treasure* and *Ostrogothic Italy* are both part of the syntagm of the theme *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples*. Therefore, the paradigmatic relations in the sub-theme *Domagnano Treasure* involve the same functional contrast with the sub-theme *Ostrogothic Italy*. The cultural knowledge that Byzantium is Roman is taken for granted and hence, Byzantine influences are interpreted as Roman influences; by saying Byzantine influences here, the text actually suggests Roman influences. These turns of phrase are not there by chance. They have been specifically selected and combined in a particular way; their selection (over others) and combination is a product of the interaction of cultural
presuppositions with curatorial practices. To sum up, the Byzantine influences in Ostrogoth people are interpreted as Roman. This demonstrates that British cultural knowledge on Byzantium (i.e. that Byzantium is a continuity of the Roman Empire in the east) interacts with the making of exhibitionary meaning and is (re)produced/(re)constructed within the exhibitionary complex. The connotations of Roman influence on Ostrogoth people, using the Byzantine-influenced objects, are the product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with curatorial practices.

ii. Byzantine influence on central and eastern Europe explained as Roman

In the sub-theme ‘Central and eastern Europe’ the museum text reads:

Many different peoples settled the lands of central and Eastern Europe. Slav groups speaking various Slavic languages inhabited vast territories while horse-riding nomads from the eastern steppes occupied areas once partly under Roman control. Some Nomadic groups like the Avars and Magyars grew powerful, but in part of present-day Hungary, a small Romanised community persisted under Avar rule. The entire region and its peoples were influenced by the Byzantine Empire (The British Museum: room 4, Central and eastern Europe, introductory text, 2016).

Here, it is explained that nomads from eastern steppes occupied areas once partly under Roman control. The syntagm of the text, i.e. the phrases ‘Roman control’ and ‘small Romanised community’ which ‘persisted’, that are placed immediately before the explanation about the influences of the Byzantine Empire on the entire region and its peoples, suggest that Byzantium is a continuation of the Roman Empire (however, the messages here are mixed: the text does not explain what this influence had been or what it meant to the region and its peoples).
In the sub-theme, *Central and eastern Europe*, the accompanying text in the object label of the exhibit *The Martynivka Hoard, Ukraine about AD 550-650* (Fig. 5 below) reads:

The two bow brooches imitate eastern Germanic types and are decorated with birds, which were popular in Slav art. The choice of peacock may also reflect Byzantine influence - they symbolised immortality in Christian Byzantine art (The British Museum: room 41, *Central and eastern Europe: The Martynivka Hoard*, accompanying text, 2016).

*Fig. 5.* The British Museum: room 41, *Central and eastern Europe: The Martynivka Hoard, Ukraine, about AD 550-650, 2016*
Here, it is suggested that the peacock symbolised immortality in Christian Byzantine art of the sixth and seventh century (*The Martynilvca Hoard* is dated between AD 550-650). However, the peacock was a symbol of immortality for the Romans (they had used it in the same way as Greeks), as well as the early Christians (Anđelković et al., 2011, p. 233). They believed that the peacock had flesh that did not decay after death. For the ‘Byzantines’ of the sixth and seventh century, the peacock was a symbol of rebirth and renewal for Christ, i.e. resurrection of Christ (Anđelković et al., 2011, pp. 233, 243), not immortality. As explained in Chapter Two, Byzantium is thought to depart from its early period during the rein of Justinian I, i.e. in the sixth century. The fact that an earlier explanation about the symbolism of the peacock in Byzantine culture is presented within the exhibitionary complex shows that the decisions in relation to the meaning of exhibitionary text are mythologically constructed: the beliefs, ideas and values reflected in this explanation are compatible with the interpretation of the Byzantine Empire being a continuation of the Roman beliefs, ideas and values, and hence of the Roman Empire.

iii. Byzantine influence to Vandals explained as Roman

In the central exhibit of the theme *Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions*, visitors see a buckle showing a lion hunt (*Fig. 6* below).
Fig. 6. The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions, buckle showing a lion hunt, 2016

The text reads: ‘The buckle showing a lion hunt is a typical eastern Mediterranean or Byzantine form’ (The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions, accompanying text, 2016). The buckle is dated in the late 5th - early 6th AD century (The British Museum: Collections Online, 2016; Maguire, 2011). I argue that the term ‘eastern Mediterranean’ at this time period refers to Byzantium, and that the phrase ‘a typical eastern Mediterranean or Byzantine form’ is ambiguous and even confusing/misleading. The eastern Mediterranean during the period of Justinian’s reign (527-565 AD century), which is approximately the time that the buckle was made, was part of Byzantium. Byzantium at the time, had reached its greatest extend, including Italy, part of Spain and North Africa (i.e. part of the ‘western half’ of the Roman Empire). Here, it is suggested that
the eastern Mediterranean form/style is the same with the Byzantine. This suggests that Byzantium extended only to the eastern Mediterranean, which would mean that Byzantium is the eastern Mediterranean. The underlying belief here (i.e. what is taken for granted) is that Byzantium is different from the west, eastern, ‘other’.

Byzantium is counted as a Roman continuity in the east –as different, other from the west. Yet, the form of the buckle is not typically Roman. The comment from the curatorial report of the buckle is that it ‘technically differs from eastern Mediterranean type’ (British Museum: Collection online, 2016). The form of the buckle, i.e. the simple, undecorated oval-shaped of the loop resembles to what today is classified as Byzantine i.e. it resembles the buckles that were made in Byzantium. However, the theme that appears on the buckle, (i.e. the lion hunt theme), first appears in official Roman art during the reign of Hadrian (Musei Capitolini, 2016; Maguire, 2011), i.e. in the 2nd AD century. In the 2nd AD century, the eastern Mediterranean region was included in the Roman Empire. As Maguire (2011) explains, ‘the images of the imperial hunt [lion and boar hunt] survived in Byzantine art until the end of the twelfth century’ (Maguire, 2011, p. 137). The lion hunt was indeed a very popular theme in Byzantium. For example, it appears in the mosaics of the Great Palace in Constantinople. The comment that the buckle ‘technically differs from eastern Mediterranean type’ suggests that it technically differs from this earlier Roman type (the one that appears in official Roman art during the reign of Hadrian). As the form is not typically Roman, but Byzantine (first, because of the style and second, because of the place and the time period that the buckle was made) it could not be counted as Roman. But as the theme here is counted as typically Roman (since it was used/preserved in Byzantium) and also, Byzantium is counted as the
continuation of the Roman Empire to the east, it could not not be counted as Roman either. Hence, the ambiguous information: ‘Eastern Mediterranean or Byzantine’. Nevertheless, this reveals that the underlying idea here is that Byzantium is a Roman continuity to the east and different, other from the west.

I also argue that the phrase: ‘Eastern Mediterranean or Byzantine form’ is an illustrative example of the unsuccessful attempt at demystification. I say ‘attempt’, as the information provided does not exclude the interpretation that the form is Byzantine (which may suggest a form other than typically Roman). And I say unsuccessful, since:

(a) the use of both terms, i.e. ‘Eastern Mediterranean’ and ‘Byzantine’ still result in an ambiguous message that could be seen as confusing/misleading, and

(b) this construct is part of the syntagm of the exhibitionary complex, where Byzantium is presented as a Roman continuity. Interpretation is led by the symbolic meaning of the object. The confusing/misleading linguistic message of the text ‘Eastern Mediterranean or Byzantine form’ can be counted as the first order of meaning of the sign or the factual meaning, as described by Panofsky (1982). The text is complementary to the image and it has what Barthes calls both an ‘anchoring’ and a ‘relay’ function (Barthes, 1977, p. 38-41). The interpretation of the image of the buckle is based on the second order of signification as described by Barthes (1972), which contains connotation, myth and symbol. The connotations in the exhibitionary complex do the ideological/mythological work of establishing Byzantium as a continuation of the Roman Empire. The chain or series of signs (a syntagm) that coexist in the exhibition is a collection of related connotations because they are culturally or paradigmatically related and invoke each other a paradigm as a set of
items that could replace each other in a syntagm. The objects and texts that constitute the exhibitionary complex, lead interpretation since they function as signs of Byzantium as a Roman continuity. The following example, illustrates my analysis and explanation. MacDowall (2016) by seeing the buckle in the British Museum exhibitionary complex understands and interprets the following: ‘The engraving on this sixth century Vandal belt buckle, [which] depicts a lion hunt, shows how the Vandals had adopted the lifestyles of the Roman aristocracy once they had settled in Africa’ (MacDowall, 2016, p. 87). Simply, the buckle here is interpreted as evidence of Roman continuity. The confusing linguistic message of the text has been interpreted in the light of the chain or series of signs of Byzantium as a Roman continuity that coexist in the exhibitionary complex. This example demonstrates why this attempt at demystification is unsuccessful: the interpretation that the Vandals had adopted the lifestyles of the Roman aristocracy is based on the underlying ideology of the exhibitionary complex according to which Byzantium is the Roman Empire in the east.

To sum up, the above examples, where Byzantine influence is explained as Roman influence, reveal that the exhibitionary complex is mythologically constructed: it is based on British cultural ideas values and beliefs on Byzantium as a continuation of the Roman empire in the east.

b. The Western Kingdoms as Roman continuities in the west

Here, I will identify, analyse and explain the use of Byzantium in the (re)presentations of:

- the Ostrogoth kingdom as a Roman continuity in the west
- the Frankish Kingdom as Roman continuity in the west
- the Anglo-Saxon and Celt Roman (dis)continuities in the west
The above will enable me to explain the British Museum’s understanding and use of the western kingdoms as responsible for the formation of Europe and European identity, as well as the formation of Britain, British identity and finally, English identity.

i. Theoderic’s Ostrogoth kingdom: a Roman continuity in the west

Above, I explained that Byzantium is (re)constructed/(re)produced, based on the British cultural perception, according to which Byzantium is a continuation of the Roman Empire. Also, I explained that the Byzantine influences to Ostrogoth people are interpreted as Roman. Here, I will explain that the interpretation of Theoderic’s kingdom within the exhibitionary complex is based on the British cultural perception, according to which Theoderic’s kingdom is explained as ‘a continuation of the Roman Empire’ (Catholic Encyclopedia 1912, cited in Mark, 2014; also, Arnold, 2014). For this, I will once more examine the text of the sub-theme *Ostrogothic Italy*, and more specifically, I will focus on the first two sentences:

In the AD 490s the Ostrogoths established a kingdom in Italy where they were influenced by Roman traditions. Their first king Theoderic, made consul by the Byzantine Emperor, is named on the Byzantine-style square weight (The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 1. Ostrogothic Italy*, accompanying text, 2016).

I argue that the phrases (a) ‘the Ostrogoths established a kingdom in Italy, where they were influenced by Roman traditions’ and (b) ‘Their first king Theoderic [was] made consul by the Byzantine Emperor’ suggest two things. First, that the Ostrogoth kingdom is the continuation of the Roman Empire in the west (through
the use of the words ‘Italy’ and ‘Roman traditions’) and second, that both Byzantium and Theoderic’s kingdom are direct Roman continuities, which shared the same Roman traditions. Through the latter, it is suggested that not only did they have common Roman origins, but also common ideas and beliefs (the phrase ‘made consul by the Byzantine Emperor’ suggests these common ideas and beliefs). I argue that the use of these words (instead of others) is where ‘decisions’ in relation to meaning-making are accomplished and the operation of power are revealed. A consul in Byzantium was the highest-ranking member of the judiciary and member of the Byzantine Senate. The sequence in which this information is provided, i.e. immediately after explaining that ‘the Ostrogoths established a kingdom in Italy where they were influenced by Roman traditions’ functions as a trigger for the interpretation of the Ostrogoth kingdom as the continuation of the Roman Empire in the west. The ‘underlying’ thematic paradigm here implies that Theoderic had power and authority in Byzantium i.e. it implies that Theoderic played an important part in the strategic map and decisions of Byzantium, which was the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east. However, the text does not explain why the Byzantine Emperor made him consul. The presentation of this information would have shown that Theoderic and Byzantium did not share the same ideas and beliefs. Below, I will explain the reasons for this.

It is known that Theoderic grew up as a hostage in Constantinople (Burns, 1991, p. 53). After spending ten years of his boyhood in Constantinople (Norwich, 1998), it is believed that he had received education that allowed him to have a ‘functional literacy of Latin with reading skills in Latin capitals, including numbers and acronyms’ and he ‘understood the concept of separate writing systems, such as
Greek and Latin’, as well as ‘the difference between Catholicism, Arianism and paganism’ (Fischer, 2013, p. 99). It is believed that the above knowledge stood him in good stead (Norwich 1998) when he became the Gothic ruler of ‘a mixed but largely Romanised barbarian people’ (Mark, 2014). However, Fischer (2013, p. 99) argues that the society that Theoderic lived and acted in, in his years as a ruler was a ‘kleptocracy’. According to the definition given in the Cambridge Dictionary (2016) a ‘kleptocracy’ is a society whose leaders make themselves rich and powerful by stealing from the rest of the people. Ficher (2013) explains that ‘a major factor for a rule to be termed as ‘kleptocracy’ is the a priori existence of an imperialist power’, and he supports the idea that Italy ‘provided that backdrop for Theoderic’ (Fischer, 2013, p. 99). For Fischer (2013), a kleptocracy can only exist as a subsidiary development to an Empire. This can explain why Theoderic sought for alliance with the Byzantines, but it does not explain why he would be treated with favour by the Byzantine emperors Zeno, Anastasius and Justin I, and why Zeno would make him consul under the guise of a reward: ‘for his service to the empire in keeping at bay another Ostrogothic leader named Theodoric Strabo who harassed the empire, when he was not fighting for its cause’ (Mark, 2014).

I argue that making Theoderic consul is a demonstration of Byzantine diplomatic tactics and not a demonstration of Theoderic’s influence to Byzantium. Byzantium’s strategy was to maintain an alliance with Theoderic, in order to manipulate him, by giving him a sense of power and authority. Theoderic would rule post-imperial Italy through the reign of the above consecutive Byzantine emperors (Fischer, 2013). A proof of this is that Theoderic’s image after his death was to prevail in the east, while in the west:
he was remembered only for his last years, for the imprisonment and execution of 'the senator and ex-consul Albinus, Albinus' defender, the philosopher and theologian Boethius, and of Boethius' father in law Symmachus, and the death in mysterious circumstances of Pope John (Moorhead, 1983, p. 106).

As Moorhead (1983) explains, for these reasons Theoderic's rein was to end up shamefully, with charges being levelled against his motivations. Levillain (2002) interprets the election of Pope John I as ‘a provocation to Theoderic, who would presumably have had no influence in the choice of the new pontiff’ (Levillain, 2002, p. 831). It appears that Theoderic wanted to have influence in the Pope’s election, but according to Norwich (2011), Theoderic was only serving his own purposes, resulting in his uncompromising Arianism: ‘the only thing that made him unacceptable to the [Byzantine] Emperor and the Pope alike’ (Norwich, 2011, p. 25). At the time of Pope John’s I pontificate, the Byzantine Emperor was Justin. Emperor Justin had initiated a campaign against Arianism. According to Norwich (2011) Theoderic executed Albinus, Boethius and Symmachus, who were Justin’s advisers as a reaction to this. Accordingly, the pontificate of Pope John I who collaborated with Justin for the overthrow of Arianism (Norwich, 2011) was ‘brief and notable for the persecution he suffered from King Theoderic’ (Levillain, 2002, p. 831). In doing so, Theoderic was also serving his old ambition to rule ‘a kingdom in which all the former peoples known to the Romans as ‘barbarian tribes’ could live together peacefully’ (Mark, 2014). Norwich (2011) explains, that in search of this place, Theoderic:

had spent the better part of twenty years fighting sometimes against and sometimes for Zeno, and both must have welcomed the agreement, that Theodoric should lead
his entire people into Italy, overthrow Odoacer, and rule the land as an Ostrogothic Kingdom under imperial sovereignty (Norwich, 2011, p. 25).

Nevertheless, Theoderic had his own tactics. Apart from alliance with the Byzantines, he was also looking for alliance with the Franks. As Mark (2014) explains, shortly after his victory over Odoacer in 493 CE Theoderic married the Frankish Autofleda, sister of King Clovis I of the Franks in order to achieve it.

It is remarkable though, that although Theoderic sought for alliances, ‘his coinage continued to bear witness to his willingness to maintain a discrete independence within the imperial orb’ (Burns, 1991, p 87). I argue that the reason for this, apart from the religious conflict was that Theoderic’s beliefs on the notion of belonging were fundamentally different from those of the Roman Empire, adopted and adapted to Byzantium. Mark (2014) explains that:

Theodoric’s policy was in direct and fundamental contradiction to the Roman conception, by which all national individuality was to be lost in the State as a whole. This theory of government, which sought to suppress nationalities, was opposed by Theodoric; he had a profound respect for national independence, and had repeatedly taken up arms to maintain it (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1912, cited in Mark, 2014).

As explained in Chapter Two, the ideas of the Roman state in Byzantium were preserved in the use of the term ‘Romaioi’ (the Greek name for Romans): the Byzantines described themselves as ‘Romaioi’. And ‘Romaioi’ connotes the continuation of the notion of the Roman state in Byzantium; in Byzantium, the Roman conception was adopted and evolved, and this is why Byzantium is also described as ‘Byzantine Commonwealth’ (e.g. Obolensky, 1971; Kaldellis, 2015), which (in a sense), suggests democracy.
The above explain that Theoderic’s kingdom and Byzantium did not share a common ideology and that Theoderic’s Kingdom could be said to be autonomous, and even, not a continuity of the Roman ideas. Nevertheless, the interpretation at this part of the exhibitionary complex is that Theoderic’s kingdom is a continuation of the Roman Empire in the west and that it shared the same Roman traditions, values, ideas and beliefs with Byzantium, which is the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east. Again, these ‘facts’ are not there by chance/accident; they have been selected and combined in a particular way. The selection of those meanings (instead of others) is the outcome of curatorial work and I have demonstrated that this is a result of the interaction of cultural knowledge with curatorial practices. To sum up, Byzantium and Theoderic’s Kingdom are presented as having/sharing the same Roman traditions; Byzantium is in the east and the Ostrogoth Kingdom in the west. Hence, what it is finally suggested here is that the Roman Empire continued as the Ostrogoth Kingdom in the west and as Byzantium in the east.

ii. The Frankish kingdom: a Roman continuity in the west

Under the theme, *Great Migrations*, in the sub-theme entitled *Roman Continuities: signet rings and brooch (Fig. 7 below)* the Franks are presented as the ones who ‘wanted to promote themselves as the rightful successors to Rome in the west’, and I argue that this constitutes part of the interpretation of the Frankish kingdom as a Roman continuity in the west.
The museum text reads:

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


I argue that here it is suggested that the Franks were the continuity of the Roman Empire in the west from as early as the 500-600s AD and that the signet rings and brooch dated between AD 500-600s are evidence of this continuity.

According to the text, the Franks wanted to promote themselves as the rightful successors to Rome in the west. This indicates that it was their desire, but it also leaves space for ambiguity: they wanted to be so, therefore they were not - or they wanted to be so and hence they were? It could be said that this is another
unsuccessful attempt at demystification. ‘Attempt’, as it seems that the museum did not want to impose a specific idea upon its interpretation. Unsuccessful, as the practice of demystification would not be expected to have an effect of confusing or ‘mystifying’ the visitor –mystification would not be the expected outcome.

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

I argue that the Frankish Kingdom is (re)constructed/(re)presented within the exhibitionary complex as a Roman continuity, from as early as the 6th century following Fischer’s (1925) ideas. Fischer (1925) introduced the idea of continuity of the Roman Empire among the Franks of the 5th and 6th centuries. He based his explanation on the ‘fact’ that Theoderic’s death in 526 marked the decadence of the Ostrogoth Kingdom, which was later conquered by Emperor Justinian I, to then be lost to the Lombards in 568. The Ostrogoth and the Franks coexisted from after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 4th century (I refer to the Imperial Romanum)
until the late 6th century AD. It is known that in AD 508, Theoderic defeated Clovis I at Arles (Blair, 1856, p. 228) and established Ostrogothic control over Provence. He made his grandson king of the Visigoths, and re-gained control in the western part of the Mediterranean coast of Gaul. The Franks gained Aquitaine, but it was only in 613 that Chlothar II reunited the Frankish realm (James, 1988, p. 93).

Hence, the Frankish realm was reunited in the 7th century, after experiencing the Ostrogoth conquest. At the time, the Franks were weakened by the Ostrogoth conquest, and hence it could be said that for a while, the Ostrogoth had achieved their aim, i.e. to form the kingdom they wished for, by conquering the Franks, and to rule a kingdom in which all the former peoples known to the Romans as ‘barbarian tribes’ could live together peacefully. But the Lombards, Germanic people who invaded Italy from western Hungary in 568, ruled for approximately two centuries and held the key cities of Rome and Ravenna. This appeared as a discontinuity in the narrative of Roman continuity, which 19th century scholars would attempt to overcome, following the spirit of the 19th century romantic nationalism and the historiography of their time (as outlined in Chapter Two this is exactly what happened in Greece with the writings of Paparigopoulos).

It is possible that Fischer (1925) had been influenced by these earlier romantic ideas when suggesting continuity of the Roman Empire among the Franks of the 5th and 6th centuries. Contemporary scholars argue that this idea did not actually establish itself, at least not until Charlemagne’s reign and the so-called Carolingian Renaissance in the second half of the 8th century (e.g. Wilson, 2016; Williams, 2010). Others support the opposite, i.e that it was Charlemagne who disrupted Roman continuity. For example, Laiou (1992) explains that for the Byzantines, the name Frank
was ‘a generic name’ for all who today would be called western Europeans (Laiou, 1992, p. 62) and that in the middle ages, the Franks, although ‘many tensions existed, and sometimes acquired an acute form’ (Laiou, 1992, p. 62), were rulers of most of what today is called Western Europe (including Britain).

For the Byzantines, the old Roman Empire still existed; there was still only one legitimate Roman Emperor, (the one ruling from Constantinople); and Western Europeans ‘although no longer under Byzantine suzerainty, were nonetheless, closely connected to Byzantium’, in the sense of ‘unity with Byzantium’ (Laiou, 1992, p. 62). According to Laiou (1999), this idea is seen as shared by Western Rulers of the time ‘until Charlemagne had himself crowned emperor in Rome [...] thus, starting a dispute about unicity of authority’ (Laiou, 1992, p. 62).

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

The Lombards are also (re)presented within the exhibitionary complex, but no relation between the Lombards and the Romans is suggested. For example, it is not suggested that they had inherited Roman traditions, although it is explained that they established a kingdom in Italy in AD 568. More specifically, the text reads:

the Byzantine Empire held onto the key cities of Rome and Ravenna [...] [when] the Lombards succeeded in establishing a kingdom in Italy [...] Lombardic art shifted away from traditional Germanic styles and adopted local Byzantine and Christian fashions
It could be said that the word ‘Byzantine’ here suggests ‘Roman’. But as the text refers to AD 568, the time after Justinian’s reign, (i.e. the time when Byzantium is thought to have departed from its earlier pagan past), it could also be said that by saying ‘Byzantine and Christian fashions’, the text suggests (a) the transition of pagan Roman to Christian-Byzantine and (b) by using the word fashion, suggests a sense of temporality. The Ostrogoths and Franks on the other hand are introduced as follows:

Gothic peoples

[...] The Ostrogoths took power in Italy and adopted Roman traditions, which strongly influenced their impressive art and architecture. In Spain the Visigoths developed their own style inspired by the arts of the Byzantine Empire and Christianity (The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750. Gothic peoples, introductory text, 2016).

Ostrogoths are introduced as the ones who had adopted Roman traditions. The phrase: ‘their impressive art and architecture were influenced by Roman traditions’ suggests and introduces their relationship to the Romans. But the Visigoths are described as having developed their own style, inspired by the arts of the Byzantine Empire and Christianity, which suggests that they were different from the Ostrogoth. The reference to Byzantium and Christianity suggests Christian Byzantium (it has the same function as in the Lombards above).

The Franks
The Franks were a confederation of Germanic peoples settled by the Romans in the province of Gaul (present day France, Belgium and western Germany). They formed a successful and wealthy kingdom, ruled by the powerful Merovingian Dynasty. Frankish art was some of the most impressive of its time, and drew on Late Roman and Germanic traditions, the art of Anglo-Saxon England and the fashions of the Byzantine Empire (The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750. The Franks, introductory text, 2016).

Here, it is explained that the Franks were settled by the Romans in the province of Gaul, by which, it is suggested that they were part of the Roman Empire. Their kingdom is described as successful and wealthy and their rulers as powerful; their art as some of the most impressive of its time, which is described as a mix of Late Roman, Germanic traditions, the art of Anglo-Saxons and the fashions of the Byzantine Empire. Hence, Franks are interpreted as Germanic and Roman, and are related to Anglo-Saxons through art. As is explained, they also followed the fashions of Byzantium. Again, ‘fashion’ suggests temporality. Their relation with the Romans and Anglo-Saxons though, is no in doubt.

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

Here, I say (dis)continuities as the messages about Anglo-Saxons’ continuity from the Romans are mixed. It seems that the exhibitionary complex suggests that there is both continuity and discontinuity. On the contrary, the exhibitionary complex establishes Roman influences on Celtic people.

The interpretation of Anglo-Saxons and Celts as Roman (dis) continuities will enable the explanation of the British Museum’s understanding of Britain and British identity, but most importantly, of English identity, which as I argue is presented by the museum as British.

In the theme Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-650 the text reads:

After the Roman army withdrew from Britain in AD 410, groups of Germanic peoples from Northwest Europe crossed the North Sea to settle parts of southern and eastern Britain. Eventually, a new Anglo-Saxon culture and several distinct kingdoms emerged (The British Museum: room 41, Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-650, 2016).

Here, it is explained that the Anglo-Saxon culture was new and emerged after the Roman army withdrew from Britain in AD 410, along with several distinct new kingdoms. Hence, Anglo-Saxons are presented as something new. It seems that the underlying belief here is the so-called ‘Germanist theme’ (Jones, 1996), according to which the Anglo-Saxons destroyed or displaced the Romano-British civilization and created a ‘fresh beginning’ (Jones, 1996, p.1). However, the text of the sub-theme that follows reads:

From the AD 400s Germanic peoples from Northern Germany, southern Scandinavia and the Frisian coast migrated to south and east Britain. While there was some continuity with the existing Romano-British culture, different types of settlement,
burial customs and objects with continental parallels appeared in the generations that followed. A new Anglo-Saxon culture developed and eventually became dominant, as new communities were established and existing inhabitants either moved away or assimilated (The British Museum: room 41, *Anglo-Saxon England AD 450-650*. The earliest Anglo-Saxons, 2016).

Here, it is explained that there was ‘some continuity’ with the existing Romano-British culture, but again, it is explained that there were differences between the Romano-British and ‘new’ Anglo-Saxon cultures. Archaeological evidence i.e. different types of settlement, burial customs and objects with continental parallels, which appeared in the generations that followed, are used in support of this explanation. It seems that the text transmits mixed messages, as it suggests that there is both continuity and discontinuity with the Romans. I argue that here, archaeological evidence is used in support of the interpretation of Anglo-Saxon domination. The use of archaeological material in support of a culturally specific position brings up the so-called ‘archaeological objectivity in interpretation’, explicitly explained in Chapter One. To reiterate, this term is used to indicate that archaeological interpretation can be an ideological construct: interpretation may depend on current interests, since ‘the material presence of the past is an emotive field of cultural interest and political dispute’ (Shanks and Hodder, 1995, p.12). Nevertheless, I argue that the ‘new’ Anglo-Saxon culture is presented as dominant within the exhibitionary complex, and that this is the British Museum's conception in this part of the exhibitionary complex.

As explained in Chapter One, in the recent years, a ‘Romanist school’ (Jones, 1996 p.1) has stressed ‘the significant continuity of Roman and Celtic British society
into the Middle Ages’ (Jones, 1996 pp.1-2). This mainly serves as proof of (primarily) Roman but also, Celtic historical continuities that occur in the formation of modern British culture. This view does not reject the idea of Anglo-Saxon domination, but also sees Roman values as fundamental to the development of the modern British identity. Many Roman elements, as well as Celtic elements, are thought to have continued through time, from the period marked as the end of what today is called ‘Roman Britain’ until the present day (e.g. Frere, 1969; Dark, 2000; Armitage, 2000).

The text in the theme Celtic Britain and Ireland AD 300-1100, presents Anglo-Saxons and Celts as being ‘both in conflict and collaboration’:

The peoples of Ireland and Northern and western Britain spoke Celtic languages and shared ancient traditions and beliefs. These differed from the neighbouring Anglo-Saxons, whose eventual dominance of areas once settled by Celtic-speaking groups led to both conflict and collaboration.

A distinctive style of Christian art developed in these regions, fusing influences from Roman, continental, Anglo-Saxon and traditional Celtic art, Intricate designs in style were used to decorate metalwork, stone sculpture and illuminated manuscripts full of colourful images.

Although the Celtic Kingdoms of Britain and Ireland lay on the margins of the old Roman world, they were not isolated. Their adoption of Christianity from the 300s placed them within the wider Christian world, while contacts with Anglo-Saxon England, Europe and the Mediterranean were also maintained. From the late 700s Scandinavian Vikings brought new cultural influences and trading links to the region (The British Museum: room 41, Celtic Britain and Ireland AD 300-1100, introductory text, 2016)
Again, the Anglo-Saxons are presented as ‘eventually dominant’. They are distinguished from the Celts. Celts are seen as different, but also as collaborating with Anglo-Saxons. This collaboration is presented in terms of art: ‘a distinctive style of Christian art’. In the text, it is explained that the artistic elements that influence the Celts are Roman, continental and Anglo-Saxon. Christianity is seen as a common element between Celts and Anglo-Saxons and Roman-Christian elements as no different. It is made explicit that the Celts maintained contacts with Anglo-Saxon England, Europe and the Mediterranean. The text *Celtic culture* reads:

The culture of the Celtic-speaking peoples of Britain and Ireland was distinctive in many ways. They developed a new art style that fused traditional swirling and geometric designs with Roman motifs and Germanic style interlaced animals, while characteristic dress accessories and techniques like enameling were popular. They also exploited links with the distant Mediterranean, trading resources like leather and tin from south-west Britain for wine and oil (The British Museum: room 41, *Celtic Britain and Ireland AD 300-1100: Celtic culture*, 2016)

Roman influences on Celtic people are established by the claim that Celts ‘developed a new art style that fused traditional swirling and geometric designs with Roman motifs and Germanic style interlaced animals’. I argue this part of the exhibitionary complex is actually a (re)construction/(re)production of the ideas presented in the Romanist school. By establishing the Roman influences/continuities mentioned above, the exhibitionary complex establishes Roman relationships between the people who lived in Britain i.e. the geographical area inhabited by Romans, Celts, Romano-Celt and later Anglo-Saxon, in order to facilitate the (re)construction/(re)production of the interpretation of the British identity; put simply,
a narrative which affords an account of those people relating to the Romans and the consequent Roman-influenced/Celtic-speaking culture of those people of Britain later being appropriated as British, is facilitated by this interpretation.

2. British identity as English

In this section I will explain the interpretation of the British identity as English. This will enable me to demonstrate that Byzantium is used in the narrative of the exhibitionary complex as the ‘different, the ‘other’ to Britishness/Englishness. And that British history and identity, and thus English identity, is presented as dominant. This forms the second part of my argument on the (re)presentation of British history and identity in relation to a notion of ‘empire’, which reflects in a sense the British colonial and imperial ideology of the past: British history is dominant and both Byzantine history and European history are presented as subordinate and complementary to the British.

This section is another example of how power functions in the exhibitionary complex and how cultural knowledge interacts with the making of the exhibitionary meaning. I am referring here to the productive function of power: the ‘transformative’, or ‘productive’ element of power that Giddens (1979) identifies and which I explain using Foucault’s (1990) conception of power. As explained earlier, the making of exhibitionary meaning is an outcome of museum power relations. Curatorial work is made possible by powerful structures and these structures are in turn transformed as the museum works in them in a dynamic process. The (re)construction of identity within the exhibitionary complex, which is an outcome of curatorial action or practice, interacts with the imagined community’s values, ideas and beliefs on its ‘own’ identity and the museum (micro-) power relations. In this
case, I argue that the underlying values, ideas and beliefs on the British identity are that the British identity is predominantly Anglo-Saxon and hence, English; is constituted of Frankish elements; and links to Roman values. This reveals the (re)production/(re)construction of the ‘Romanist school’ ideas, but also of the Germanist theme, explained in more detail in Chapter One.

I choose to begin my analysis with the -professedly- most unexpected and surprising theme related to the The Byzantine Empire theme: the centerpiece of room 41, the Anglo-Saxon ship burial found at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk.

The Anglo-Saxon ship burial dates from the early 600s and is ‘one of the most spectacular and important discoveries in British archaeology’ (British Museum 2016). As explained in the accompanying text (2016) the burial was arranged inside a wooden chamber built in the middle of 27-metre-long ship covered by a high earth mound. It is by far the richest grave yet discovered from early medieval Europe and is thought to have commemorated a leading figure, perhaps a king of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Anglia, ‘whose true identity remains an unsolvable mystery’ (The British museum exhibition catalogue, 2015). In the text it is also noted that:

The form of the long carved whetstone and glittering shoulder-clasps evoke Roman symbols of authority, perhaps, in a deliberate attempt to associate their Anglo-Saxon owner with the might of the old Roman Empire (The British museum: room 41, Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Power and authority, accompanying text, 2016).

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

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

By the phrase ‘the deliberate attempt to associate their Anglo-Saxon owner with the might of the old Roman Empire' it is being suggested that the Anglo-Saxons associated with the Romans and in a sense this information associates the Anglo-Saxons with the Romans. The text in effect transmits the message of a relation between Anglo-Saxons and Romans, but also, between English and Romans. The implication here is that Anglo-Saxons who are responsible for the formation of the English cultural identity relate to the Romans and hence, the English nation traces its roots back to Roman times. Although the Anglo-Saxon culture and language are presented as something ‘new’ that replaced the Romano-British culture and
language, here, the underlying belief complies with idea according to which those people relate to the Romans. This might seem complicated, but it actually isn’t. Simply, it reflects the idea (introduced in Chapter One) that the English [of the nineteenth century] often identified themselves with the classical Romans (Hingley, cited in Bell, 2007, p. 208).

The ship burial contained sixteen pieces of silver tableware and a set of ten silver bowls made in the eastern Mediterranean, ‘possibly for religious use’ (British museum: room 41, Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Mediterranean silver, 2016), a large Byzantine silver platter stamped on the back with the control marks of Emperor Anastasius I (reign AD 491-AD 518), two silver spoons from the Byzantine Empire with Greek inscriptions on their handles, a ladle and cup (not typically Byzantine) as well as a copper basin with animal motifs made in the eastern Mediterranean (Fig. 8. below). The text reads:

The silverware probably reached Sutton Hoo through a network of gift exchange between rulers across Europe, bringing Byzantine luxuries to the Frankish realm (centring on present day France, Belgium and western Germany) and onwards to Anglo-Saxon England. Early Anglo-Saxons did not produce silver dining sets, they typically used wood and horns instead. The silverware may have been used for dining or perhaps, as a display of ‘royal treasure’. Exotic and costly, it would have demonstrated its owner’s status, wealth and connections (The British museum: room 41, Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Mediterranean silver, accompanying text, 2016).
Here it is suggested that Byzantine craftsmanship was more advanced than Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship, and that in the Anglo-Saxon cultural context Byzantine objects were perceived as ‘exotic’. Also, it is suggested that in the 600s Byzantine objects were brought to Anglo-Saxon England as gift exchanges. Hence, the text implies that the Anglo-Saxons did not have direct relations with the Byzantines, as the gifts were brought to them ‘through a network of gift exchange between rulers across Europe’, and exclusively not between rulers of the Frankish realm. Through this ‘account’, it is being suggested that the Anglo-Saxons had relations with the Franks, who had relations with the Byzantines, and by implication, that the Anglo-Saxons did not have relations with the Byzantines. However, as Campbell explains, ‘recent work has suggested considerable Byzantine influence on late 6th century Gaul, in particular on fashions’ and ‘there are indications that such influences appear in England also’
(Campbell, 2000, p. 78). Although Carver (1989, cited in Campbell, 2000, p. 78) explains that the range of contacts indicated by the finds at Sutton Hoo does not imply that 7th century East Anglian merchants, were in direct contact with Syria or Byzantium, Campbell (2000) further explains that the density and nature of relations between England and Byzantium has a special interest in relation to the Gregorian mission; as he points out, ‘if we knew what Gregory the Great thought when dispatching Augustine, we might find that realpolitik had played a part beside pastoral zeal’ (Campbell, 2000, p. 79). The construction of this part of the exhibitionary complex is based on the commonly shared knowledge that the Gregorian mission, headed by Augustine of Canterbury, was sent by Pope Gregory the Great in AD 596 to convert Britain’s Anglo-Saxons, resulting in the establishment of Christianity in southern Britain by the death of the last missionary in AD 635 (Mayr-Harting, 2010, p. 50).

To sum up: the underlying ideology in this part of the complex is that Anglo-Saxons who are responsible for the formation of the English nation relate to the Romans, and that in the 600s they had active relationships with the Franks, but not with the Byzantines, who are (considered) exotic, ‘other’. Also, that the Anglo-Saxon’s conversion to Christianity, links to Western Christianity (hence, not to Eastern Christianity, i.e. Orthodoxy, not to Byzantium). This seems to contradict the argument presented through the British Museum exhibitionary complex that Britain developed out of Byzantium. Byzantium here is presented as ‘different’, ‘other’. However, Anglo-Saxons possess Byzantine objects; they use them as symbols of wealth and power. Hence it could be said that there are Byzantine elements in Anglo-Saxon’s culture. As explained in the Introduction, for Derrida (1992) no identity is closed and pure; it is
always affected by what it excludes and hence identity is in part constituted by what it opposes - the ‘different’. The above is an illustration of Derrida’s (1992) account: the (re)construction of national identity within the national museum institutional framework is based on ideas of ‘same’ and ‘other’. Hence, the (re)construction of national identity by the British Museum is based on the ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on its ‘own’ identity: on who it thinks it is, i.e. Anglo-Saxons, and hence, English - and who it thinks it is not, i.e. Byzantium.

a. Byzantium: the ‘other’

In the sub-theme Anglo-Saxon ship Burial examined above, Byzantium is presented as different from the western kingdoms, as ‘exotic’, as ‘other’. Here, I will explain the main factor that reveals Byzantium’s ‘otherness’ in the representation of the British/English identity constructed by the British Museum. This factor is no other than religion.

The introductory text of the theme The Byzantine Empire AD 330-650 refers to the cosmopolitan lifestyles of Byzantium’s peoples, which is characterised as of great opulence and refinement; but then it refers to Christianity, which links to Byzantine art, and particularly to icons (it refers to the two periods of iconoclasm) and personal possessions relating to Christian devotion:

The Byzantine Empire comprised the eastern part of the Roman Empire following its division into east and west in AD 395. Its Capital, Constantinople, became a powerful political, religious and artistic centre -a ‘new’ Rome.

Rooted in classical and Late Roman traditions, Byzantine culture also developed its own distinctive elements. Art and craftsmanship reached new heights, influencing
peoples throughout and beyond the Empire's lands. Meanwhile, its wealthiest inhabitants enjoyed cosmopolitan lifestyles of great opulence and refinement.

Christianity, the Empire's official religion, permeated Byzantine art and culture. Christ, the Virgin Mary and saints were popular artistic subjects, except between AD 726 and 843 when two periods of 'Iconoclasm' temporarily banned images of people. Individual piety was important at all society levels, revealed by personal possessions relating to Christian devotion (The British Museum: room 41 *The Byzantine Empire AD 330- 650*, introductory text, 2016)

I argue that by referring to the Christian traditions in Byzantium and relating them to Byzantine art, the text suggests that Christianity in Byzantium had particular functions/philosophy, which related to icons. However, these functions and philosophy would relate to the Orthodox Christian doctrine of humility, which suggests an opposite lifestyle than one of great opulence and refinement. As explained in Chapter Two, in the past, Byzantium in the U.K. had been unilaterally explored for its connections between luxury and corruption, and I argue that this is the underlying idea here. In the West of the same time period however, it is broadly accepted that Christianity had different values. An example would be Benedict’s rule (around AD 530). The Christian History Institute (2016) explains that the Benedictine rule is strict but, linking it to the context of life in medieval Europe, it explains that life was poor and hence restricted and that ‘the life that Benedict describes would be a step up for the poorest people and not much of a step down for the rest’ (Christian History Institute, 2016). Hence, through the above references, it is suggested that Byzantium is different from medieval Europe and this difference is attributed to Christian values, i.e to the Eastern/Orthodox versus the Western/Catholic split.
mentioned earlier. Essentially, it is being suggested here, that in Byzantium Christian values were different from those of the West. In the three introductory panels of room 41 the museum states that:

This was a time of great change in Europe. The Roman Empire broke down in the West, but continued in the east as the Byzantine Empire. People, Objects and Ideas travelled across the continent and its seas, while Christianity and Islam emerged as major religions. By 1100 the precursors of several modern states had developed. Europe as we know it today was beginning to take shape (The British Museum: room 41 Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300-1100, text on the introductory panel, 2016)

I argue that it is being suggested here that Byzantium is a continuation of the Roman Empire, but at the same time that Byzantium is different from Europe; it is seen as a Roman continuity, in the sense of having Roman origins, but also, eastern, non-European ‘different’, ‘other’, i.e. some elements are the same (continuations) and other elements are different (discontinuities).

Firstly, the ‘time of great change in Europe’ is said to happen after the Roman Empire ‘moved’ to the east. Secondly, it is explained that ‘Europe as we know it today was beginning to take shape’, but the text does not explicitly attribute it to Byzantium, as Byzantium is seen as ‘different’. For example, in the text it is not explained that this great change happened mainly because of the trade activity that flourished in Byzantium (as it has been explained in Chapter Two). The great change in Europe is seen as a result of the Roman ideas that travelled across the continent and its seas. The text brings up Christianity, but also Islam, and explains that they emerged as major religions, but it does not explain the role of Byzantium as a bulwark against Islamic invasions, which, (as explained in Chapter Two) is the reason
why the several modern European states developed; and it does not explain that in Byzantium, Christianity means Orthodoxy. In this way, the idea of Byzantium’s contribution to the formation of Europe, as understood by modern scholars, (i.e. its contribution to the formation of modern European nations and boarders and also, its influences to the construction of the modern European identity) is excluded. Europe is seen as a product of western ideas, and of the kingdoms formulated in the continent between AD 330-AD 1100, which is what the phrase ‘the precursors of several modern states’ suggests.

For example, although the word Christianity in this text seems to have been left open to interpretation, I argue that the text actually suggests western Christianity, as opposed to eastern (Orthodox) Christianity; and further, that this suggests Byzantium’s ‘otherness’ to Europe. In the chronological framework of the room, AD 300-1100, Christianity could be interpreted either as Western Christianity i.e. Catholicism, or as Eastern Christianity i.e. Orthodoxy, or even, (after AD 1054, i.e. after the Great Schism) as Roman Catholicism. However, in the central exhibit of the theme Great Migrations AD 400-750 entitled The Vandals, the text reads:

The disc brooches are of native Mediterranean manufacture, but were worn as a pair to fasten a Germanic type of dress. Their cruciform design reflects the Vandals’ conversion from paganism to Christianity during their migration. The buckle showing a lion hunt is a typical eastern Mediterranean or Byzantine form (The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions, accompanying text, 2016).

The text refers to the conversion of Vandals from paganism to Christianity. On the one hand, it is known that Vandals had accepted Arian Christianity during the
reign of the Eastern Roman Emperor Valens in the AD 360s and from the 6th century (along with other Germanic tribes) were converted (or re-converted from Arianism) by missionaries of the Catholic Church (e.g. Filotas. 2005, p. 39; McBrien, 2005; p. 558). Hence, the word Christianity in the framework of Vandals' conversion suggests Catholicism. On the other hand, the disc brooches (Fig. 9 below) were produced in the 5th century. Therefore, although the word Christianity in the framework of Vandals’ conversion suggests Catholicism, it could well be Arianism as the conversion to Catholicism began from the 6th century onwards.

Fig. 9. The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions, Disc Brooches 2016

Arianism was opposed to the theological views held by Eastern Christians, as well as the theological views held by Western Christians. The text supports the idea
that the brooches are of native Mediterranean manufacture; also, it refers to their cruciform design, which links to Christianity. Indeed, crosses (like the ones that appear on the brooches) ‘were very common in the Mediterranean social matrix’ (Snyder, 2003, p. 62). The symbol of the cross however, first began to appear in Eastern Christianity following Emperor Constantine’s vision of a cross (I refer to the Milvian Bridge vision, AD 312), which apparently inspired him to convert to Christianity (Snyder, 2003, p. 60). The cross symbol didn’t begin to appear in Western Christianity until the mid 5th century (Snyder, 2003). Hence, as suggested by the phrase ‘The disc brooches are of native Mediterranean manufacture’ and the actual cruciform design of the 5th century brooches, it is possible that the brooches were made in Byzantium. As suggested by the phrase that follows, ‘but were worn as a pair to fasten a Germanic type of dress’, it is also possible that the Vandals used them (merely) as functional objects. In this case, the cruciform design of the brooches would not suggest the Vandals’ conversion from paganism to Christianity.

Nevertheless, the selected meanings – in preference to alternative meanings - show that the exhibitionary meaning is ‘mythologically’ constructed. As explained earlier in the thesis, for Barthes (1972) these choices depend on the set of ideas, values and beliefs through which one particular dominant social or cultural group constructs a ‘reality’ and presents it as universal and ‘given’ to an entire society. The ‘reality’ here is that Europe links to Catholicism and that Byzantium is different and ‘other’ to Europe.

b. Byzantium: a subordinate empire

Here, I will identify and explain the parts of the exhibitionary complex, where Byzantium is (re)presented as a subordinate empire and even inferior to the
kingdoms and empires that co-existed in the medieval world. This forms the second part of my argument on the (re)presentation of British history as dominant, European history as complementary to British and Byzantine history as subordinate, ‘different’, ‘other’ to European and to British (and thus, to English) history, which reflects the British colonial and imperial ideology of the past.

Here, I will present the interpretation of Byzantium as a subordinate empire. In the section that follows I will identify and explain the opposite interpretation of Byzantium: Byzantium as a powerful empire; as superior in relation to the kingdoms and empires that co-existed in the medieval world. Following this, I will demonstrate that the interpretation of Byzantium as a powerful empire is not a dominant discourse in relation to the interpretation of Byzantium as a subordinate empire. In turn, this will enable me to explain that Byzantium is used (politically) within the narrative of British, (and thus, English) identity to project British (and thus, English) identity as dominant. I will therefore demonstrate (again) that the British Museum exhibitionary complex is ideologically constructed, and that the making of exhibitionary meaning is based on the ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on its own identity.

I argue that the beliefs, ideas and values reflected in the explanation of the symbolism of the central exhibit of the sub-theme The Byzantine Empire, are compatible with the British cultural understanding of Byzantium as a continuation of the Roman Empire. Also, they are compatible with British ideas and beliefs about Byzantium as alien, strange, full of intrigues and conspiracies, ‘different’, ‘other’. I will use this example as an illustration of my argument on the interpretation of
Byzantium as a subordinate empire. The accompanying text of the central exhibit (Fig. 10. below) reads as follows:

_Body Chain_

This body chain of linked medallions is the largest item of jewelry to survive from the Byzantine Empire. It would have been worn draped over the shoulders and around the hips, as shown on the figure. In Greek and Roman art, body chains were often associated with Venus, the goddess of love. Due to its size, this chain may have adorned a statue (possibly of Venus) instead of an actual woman.

By the AD 500, statues from the neighbouring Persian Empire showed kings wearing similar body chains. The significance of the type of accessory may have changed from symbolising female sexuality to denoting male power and authority.

AD, 600s Assiût or Antinöe, Egypt, donated by Mrs Bourne 1916.0704.1

Figurine, Egypt AD 1-100s, 1926.0930.42

The text refers to Greek and Roman art and then to the statue of Venus, the goddess of love, the Roman equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty. Again here, through of the reference to Venus, it is made obvious that Byzantine Empire is thought as a continuity of the Roman Empire; in the text it is mentioned that the chain perhaps adorned a statue, possibly of Venus, which is the Roman equivalent of Aphrodite. This shows that the actual use of the object is uncertain. However, here, a particular reality has been constructed around it: the object’s interpretation involves the meaning of the symbol of the chain in the statues of Persian Empire Kings in 500 AD. The text explains that hypothetically, the significance of the type of accessory may have changed from symbolising female sexuality to denoting male power and authority. Here, the use of the terms
symbolising’ and ‘denoting’ creates confusion. The different meaning of the two terms (symbolising and denoting) and hence, the difference between the two explanations, indicates that the account presented within this part of the exhibitionary complex has been changed to suit the ideology revealed within the rest of the exhibitionary complex, which (re)constructs/(re)presents Byzantium as not being powerful, as insignificant to the medieval world. Below, I will explain how this is shown in this part of the exhibitionary complex.

The body chain comes from AD 600s Egypt, which is the Byzantine period in Egypt. The figurine comes from Egypt, but from a much earlier period: AD 1-100. The period that the figurine comes from is the Roman period in Egypt. Hence, the symbol of the body chain on the Roman figurine carries the meaning it had in its time. This meaning is different than the meaning it would have as a symbol in its Byzantine context. Evidence for this is that classical and Roman sculpture did not exist in AD 600s Byzantium. The Byzantine Empire was a Christian Empire and at this period (AD 600s) ancient Greek and Roman sculptures were excommunicated as pagan. Although in Constantine I’s period they were placed in public places, Rosser (2012) explains that attacks on paganism began in late fourth century and the intellectual component behind paganism was attacked when Justinian I closed down the Academy of Athens in AD 529. Therefore, the explanation that the chain (AD 600) perhaps adorned a statue, possibly of Venus, to symbolise female sexuality is inconsistent with Christian spirituality and faith in Byzantium of the 600s.

I argue that in the context of the museum showcase, the figurine (AD 1-100) is used in order to strengthen the female sexuality view. The figurine comes from a different historical period than that of the chain (the Roman period). Thus, it was
made and used in a time period that had a different religious context (pagan) than that of the chain (Christian). However, this is ignored. The view that the meaning of the body chain changed to denote male power in the Persian Empire attempts to give another explanation to the meaning of the symbol. This makes things even more confusing. Since Persians and Byzantines were neighbours (also, competitors), and as such, had been sharing ideas, it would be more likely that they would have used the same object as a symbol of male power. In fact, if we look at the coins of Byzantine Emperor Tiberius II Constantine (reign AD 574 to AD 582) (Fig. 11 below) and Emperor Phocas (reign AD 602 to AD 610) (Fig. 12 below), we may see that they carry on their garments something very similar to the body chain.

![Fig. 11. Golden Solidus of Emperor Tiberius II Constantine (reign AD 574 to AD 582)](image1)

![Fig. 12. Golden Solidus of Emperor Phocas (reign AD 602 to AD 610)](image2)

Byzantine art, as the archival research revealed used to be approached by the British Museum as of historical significance but of no aesthetic value. Following the above, I argue that nowadays, it simply embraces the common approach of British curators who look at Byzantine art as decorative art.
With the current interpretation of the body chain, Byzantium is presented in the exhibitionary complex as decorative, excessive and sensual, things that are not routinely cast as part of heroic masculine history. Hence, I argue that the British Museum, is introducing gender to the history of Byzantium. The Persians are presented/launched as ‘male’ by definition: the body chain in the Persian context is attributed a denotative, literal meaning of male power and authority. In contrast, Byzantium is presented as fragile and sensual: the body chain in the context of Byzantium symbolises female sexuality. Therefore, I argue that Byzantium here has been feminised. According to the male/female dichotomy in conventional/traditional western thought, male is dominant/privileged over female. This opposition implies hierarchy and hence dominance/superiority of the masculine over the feminine. I argue that by attributing male gender identity to the Persian Empire and female gender identity to the Byzantine Empire, it is suggested that Byzantium was not powerful, not as powerful as its neighbouring Persian Empire and this can even be perceived as a suggestion of Persian superiority. In support of my argument I will explain the following: the Persian Empire is still, largely perceived as a barbaric Empire and I will argue that that this stresses the view of Byzantium’s inferiority. Herodotus, in his book *Histories*, repeatedly used the words ‘barbarian’ and ‘Persian’ synonymously. In Herodotus, ‘barbarian’ meant stranger. However, Imperialist historians of the 20th c. by looking at the Persian Wars (5th c. BC) explained the victory of Greeks over the Persian army as a victory of civilization; Greek over barbarism (e.g. Immerwahr, 1985). From then on, the non-civilized became synonymous with barbarism, which became synonymous with Persian. This idea has crystalized the perception of Persian Empire as a barbaric ‘uncivilized’ Empire. Today,
historians do not accept the negative connotations attributed to the term “barbarian” (e.g. Boletsi, 2013). However, the perception of Persians as ‘uncivilized’ still influences contemporary understanding of the Persian Empire. Since the Persian Empire is (re)presented by the museum as dominant in relation to Byzantium, Byzantium can be thought of as subordinate and inferior; inferior in relation to an uncivilized Empire, and hence, inferior in relation to the rest of the medieval world.

Furthermore, in room 40, Byzantine culture is represented in the themes Byzantium and its Neighbours and Icon and Image. This part of the complex narrates the history of medieval Europe from AD 1050 to 1500. Generally, in room 40, the references to Byzantium are very limited. The themes narrate the history of Europe from AD 1050 to AD 1500 in relation to British history and vice versa. In all the themes, apart from the two mentioned above and the theme Islam, there are references to Britain and most of the objects on display are from Britain. Also, there are themes that solely concern British history, for example, the theme The War of the Roses and the exhibit The Lewis Chessmen. The accompanying text of the theme Byzantium and its Neighbours, reads:

The Byzantine Empire was the successor to the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. Its capital was Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) founded by Emperor Constantine the Great in AD 330. The objects in this case date from after AD 843, the end of the period of iconoclasm when religious images were prohibited. The Byzantine Empire collapsed in 1453 when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks. Despite the conflicts that had afflicted the empire, its art flourished. Byzantine artists were much in demand outside the empire and influenced the art of Christian cultures in the Balkans, Russia and western Europe (The British Museum: room 40, Byzantium and its Neighbours, accompanying text, 2016).
Here, the Byzantine Empire is (once again) presented as the successor to the Roman Empire in the West. AD 330 is suggested as the starting date of Byzantium (although in room 41 it was placed in AD 395). However, it is explained that Byzantium was in the eastern Mediterranean and there is no reference to the lands it included. The text aims to be simple, and this could be perceived as an indication of an attempt at democratisation. Information on Byzantium’s transformations throughout the years would have made the text complicated.

The lack of this information can be seen as an attempt at keeping it simple. However, further down it is explained that there were conflicts that had afflicted the empire. Also, there is a reference to iconoclasm and to the collapse of the empire in 1453. Since this information is presented, but information on Byzantium’s transformations are not presented, the text ends up suggesting that the empire was weak.

Despite the presentation of Byzantium as a weak empire, the text also mentions that ‘Despite the conflicts that had afflicted the empire, its art flourished’. I argue that this phrase opens the debate on Byzantium’s contribution to the Renaissance. The Byzantine Empire was indeed weakened after iconoclasm and its weakness culminated after the fourth Crusade in 1204. This period, as explained in Chapter Two, was followed by the so-called Palaiologan era (which begun with the restoration of Roman rule to Constantinople by the usurper Michael VIII Palaiologos in AD 1260 and ended with the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in AD 1453). During the Palaiologan era the Byzantine Empire experienced the so-called Palaiologan Renaissance. As explained in Chapter Two, many historians support the
contention that during this period, Byzantine art and philosophy flourished. This text mentions that 'Byzantine artists were much in demand outside the empire and influenced the art of Christian cultures in the Balkans, Russia and Western Europe'.

As explained in Chapter Two, Byzantine artists and scholars travelled to Italy seeking shelter from the new threats that besieged the empire. This has opened a never-ending argument on whether Byzantine art has indeed influenced the Italian Renaissance or not, which has divided Byzantine scholars from the 1950s until the present day (see introduction section Why Byzantium?). Briefly, it is strongly argued that migration of Byzantine scholars at the end of this period helped to spark the Renaissance in Italy. Here it is explained that Byzantine art influenced the art of Christian cultures in the Balkans, Russia and Western Europe, and through this, it is being suggested that there was influence, but limited - limited in terms of content, i.e. Christian, and context, i.e. Balkans, Russia, Western Europe. In this way, Italy is excluded and hence it is suggested that Byzantine art did not influence the Italian Renaissance. This further suggests Byzantium's non-contribution to the European identity. Nevertheless, the text underlines one of the most important elements of Byzantium: Christianity. However, in the next theme, it is suggested that Christian faith in Byzantium was incomprehensible, bizarre, strange, alien: different, other. The introductory text of the theme Icon and Image, reads:

Images of Christ and saints have been used in Christian worship since at least AD 300. Their use however, was frequently criticised for its resemblance to the pagan worship of idols. The Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire used the term ‘icon’ to describe painted images or small relief carvings. The suppression and destruction of icons is known as ‘iconoclasm’. After the period of Byzantine iconoclasm between AD 730 and 843, icons were rapidly re-established as central to the Orthodox religion.
Many images were even credited with miracle-working powers. The Western Church experienced its own period of iconoclasm in northern Europe during the Reformation of the 1530s (The British Museum: room 40, *Icon and Image*, introductory text, 2016).

Here, the Byzantine Empire is presented in a parallel line with Northern Europe. I argue that Byzantium’s otherness to Northern Europe is (re)constructed/(re)produced within the (re)presentation of Northern Europe. As explained above, identity contains difference; in the parallel narration of those histories Byzantium serves as the ‘other’ to Northern Europe. By bringing up the iconoclastic periods experienced by both, the text suggests difference in terms of faith. However, here, apart from Byzantium’s otherness to Northern Europe, it is also suggested the Romeo Catholic Church’s otherness to the Church of England. The text explains that the cause of iconoclasm in Byzantium was the criticism that icons received due to their resemblance to the pagan worship idols. It explains that the (Orthodox) Church of the Byzantine Empire used the term ‘icon’ to describe painted images or small relief carvings. Also, that after iconoclasm, icons were rapidly re-established and many images were even credited with miracle-working powers. Then, it refers to the Reformation iconoclasm, but it doesn’t give any detail in relation to it. I argue that the absence of these information foregrounds the causes of iconoclasm in Byzantium and highlights the miracle-working powers attributed to images.

The given definition of the term ‘icon’ as painted images or small relief carvings does not explain the significance/function of icons in Orthodox Christian faith – that of representation, not of realistic depiction, that of spirituality. Following the negative values attributed to Byzantium and the British understanding of the word ‘byzantine’ which was explained in Chapter Two, it could be said that in this
way, the text suggests that Christian faith in Byzantium was incomprehensible, bizarre, strange, alien: different, other. The miracle-working powers attributed to images, however, was also part of the 1530s problem in the Romeo Catholic Church (also referred to as Roman Catholic Church). It could also be said that here, by the comparison of Byzantium’s iconoclasm with the 1530s English Reformation, by which the Church of England broke away from the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church (Haigh, 1987), it is suggested that the Romeo Catholic Church is also strange: different, other. This also demonstrates the way in which English identity, Englishness is (re)presented/(re)constructed within the exhibitionary complex. Andrews (2011) explains that Englishness is tied with Anglicanism and that Anglicanism has been historically defined in opposition to Roman Catholicism. The English identity here is (re)presented as non-Catholic and therefore- following Andrew’s (2011) argument- Anglican. I use this in support of my argument on the (re)construction/(re)presentation of English identity within the exhibitionary complex.

Another thing that is notable is that in the introductory text of the theme The Crusades, there is no reference to Byzantium, although the text is placed right next to the Byzantine-style icon of St George and the youth of Mytilene (Fig. 13 below). I argue that through the use of this icon, the exhibitionary complex (re)constructs/(re)produces the argument on Byzantium’s non-contribution to the Renaissance and thus, non-contribution to the European identity.
The accompanying text of the icon reads:

[this] is a popular piece of anti-Muslim propaganda that resembles those produced in the Byzantine Empire, has certain Western features and may have been produced by a French artist working in the Crusader states (British Museum: room 41, The Crusades: Icon of St George and the youth of Mytilene, accompanying text, 2016).

According to Jacoby (2016), some scholars have argued that the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 was the culmination of mounting cultural estrangement, intolerance and hostility between Orthodox and Catholic Christians, partly fuelled by differences in theology, liturgical practices and ecclesiastical hierarchy (Jacoby, 2016). In other words, some scholars suggest that the Latin armies participating in the Fourth Crusade conquered Constantinople due to ideological
differences between Orthodox and Catholic Christians. It would not be surprising then, that a western artist who was working in the Crusader states reproduced a Byzantine icon adding western features to it. The incorporation of western characteristics into the icon could be perceived as a sign of westernisation of the non-Latin Crusader states. However, the icon carries a Greek inscription on the front, and on the reverse a patriarchal cross painted in red (the reverse of the item has been viewed on: The British Museum Collections Online; item number 1984,0601.1, 2016). This information is absent from the text. Instead, the text says that the icon ‘resembles those produced in the Byzantine Empire, has certain Western features and may have been produced by a French artist working in the Crusader states’. The presentation of this information instead of the alternative suggests the westernisation of Byzantine art. I argue that this is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as a product of the museum’s (micro-) power relations. The patriarchal cross is a Byzantine symbol, which, in the context of its time, not only had religious significance, but also, political. It demonstrated the power of Christianity but also, and most importantly, the power of the Emperor; therefore, the power of Byzantium. The golden solidus of Emperor Romanus II (8th century) may serve as evidence of this. The coin carries the bust of Christ on the one side and the busts of Constantine VII and Romanus II on the other. Constantine VII and Romanus II are depicted holding a patriarchal cross between them (Fig. 14 below).
Fig. 14. Golden solidus with Romanos II and his father, Constantine VII

The icon presented in the British Museum exhibitionary complex shows that both the Greek inscription and the patriarchal cross were embraced and reproduced by a Latin artist. As explained in the text, the particular icon is ‘a popular piece of anti-Muslim propaganda’. It is possible that the sign of the patriarchal cross was kept due to its political significance. It could be said that here, the cross is used as a symbol of anti-Muslim propaganda. But, since the artist has incorporated western artistic elements into the icon why would s/he select to keep the symbol of the power of Orthodox Christian religion and of Byzantium as well as the language used in Byzantium (Greek inscription)? The reproduction of these elements allows one to think that this piece of work, is not necessarily a product of westernisation of Byzantine art. It could be seen as a study of Byzantine art from a Latin artist. Nevertheless, the absence of the information about the cross, and the use of information on the western features suggest the westernization of Byzantine art, which is part of the argument on Byzantium’s non-contribution to the Renaissance, and non-contribution to the European identity.

In conclusion, the above examples demonstrate the idea that Byzantium is subordinate and inferior to the rest of the medieval world, other to Europe, and thus, irrelevant to the development Europe, and Britain, and England.
c. Byzantium: a powerful empire

Here, I will identify and explain the parts of the exhibitionary complex where Byzantium is (re)presented as a powerful empire. I will show that there is an opposed, or alternative, interpretation of Byzantium: one is as a powerful and influential empire and the other is of a weak and subordinate empire. Particularly, here, I will analyse the parts of the exhibitionary complex where Byzantium is presented as having influenced the Franks and Anglo-Saxons—not only in terms of art (artistic style/fashion), as explained earlier in the thesis, but also, in terms of ideas. However, I will also explain that this interpretation is not in a role of dominance over the interpretation of Byzantium as a subordinate empire. This will enable me to explain that Byzantium is used politically within the narrative of British, and thus, English identity, to project the British and thus, English dominance.

I have already explained that within the exhibitionary complex, it is suggested that:

1. the Franks had relations with the Byzantines, but the Anglo-Saxons did not have direct relations with the Byzantines,

2. the Anglo-Saxons had relations with the Franks, who had relations with the Byzantines.

Below I will explain the influences of Byzantium on the Franks and on Anglo-Saxons.

First, I will explain the (re)presentation of the Frankish and Byzantine relationships as harmonious. Then, I will explain that within the exhibitionary complex conflict and difference between the Franks and the Byzantines is also revealed. The latter is in agreement with the accounts of contemporary historians who see conflict
and difference between the Franks and the Byzantines. However, I will demonstrate that this interpretation is silenced.

I argue that the (re)presentation of Frankish-Byzantine relations as harmonious enables the (re)construction of British identity as English and European and at the same time undermines the (re)presentation of Byzantium as a powerful empire.

As explained earlier, the Franks are presented as the successors of Rome in the west and the Byzantines as the successors of Rome in the east. A smooth relationship between Byzantium and the Franks suggests a smooth collaboration between the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire after its division in the west and the east, and hence, (perfect) continuity of the Roman Empire in the west and the east. Although, as explained above, Byzantium is presented as different from the ‘western half’, a smooth relationship between the two helps the (re)construction of British identity, in which the proof of (perfect) Roman continuity is an essential element.

Under the theme *Great Migrations AD 400-750* in the sub-theme *Mediterranean influences* the text reads:

The gold items reflect influences on Frankish culture from the Mediterranean region. The finger ring is mounted with a coin of the Byzantine Emperor Marcian (AD 450-457) minted in Constantinople […] The coin is of Theodebert I (AD 534-548), the first Frankish king to issue gold coins in his own name. Minted at Cologne (present day Germany), its design imitates an early Byzantine model (The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Franks, 4. Mediterranean influences*, accompanying text, 2016).
It is known that the Byzantine Empire had had a common currency and the most powerful economy in the world, primarily based on the fact that the Byzantines strictly controlled both internal and international trade, and retained the monopoly of issuing coinage (Laiou, 2007). The first object, i.e. the ring mounted with a coin of the Byzantine Emperor Marcian (*Fig.15. below*), may be interpreted as an indication of trade exchanges between the Franks and the Byzantines. However, the coin is incorporated into the ring. From the moment of its incorporation its function changed: it became a decorative element, an ornament. It can be said that the conversion of its use shows that the Franks thought of it as something very precious and admirable. However, it can also be said that the Byzantine coin represents power.

*Fig. 15.* The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Francs, 4.*

*Mediterranean influences, 2016*

As Laiou (2007) explains, the Byzantine economy was powerful. I argue that the incorporation of the Byzantine coin into the Frankish ring shows that Franks had knowledge of it. What they actually did was to take the coin and turn it into a
symbol of power within their own system of cultural values: As in medieval times
rings were used by kings as recognisable symbols of power e.g. signet rings (Kunz,
1917), and hence were symbols of authority and power, I argue that the ‘powerful’
coin was incorporated into this ring in order to emphasise and project further its
owner’s power. This shows that Byzantium was a powerful empire, and was counted
as such by the Franks.

In the text it is also explained that Theodebert I copied and followed the
Byzantine styles and patterns in order to develop his own. Early Byzantine coins
continued the late Roman conventions. They placed the head of the Emperor on the
obverse. However, they made a slight differentiation: the head was in full face rather
than in profile e.g. the sixth century Anastasius I gold solidus with his three-quarter
or fully frontal bust in armor, on its obverse (Grierson, 1999). On the coin of
Theodebert I, the head appears in full face on the obverse, along with Theodebert’s
name (Fig.14 above). It could be said that Theodebert I copied the image of the
Byzantine coin, in an effort to attribute to his own coinage the powerful significance
of the Byzantine coin. Therefore, the connotation here would be: ‘we are also
powerful’ or even, ‘we are as powerful as Byzantium’. The text however reads: ‘The
gold items reflect influences on Frankish culture from the Mediterranean region’. The
phrase ‘Mediterranean region’ is used as an alternative to Byzantium, and this
undermines Byzantium. Hence, the interpretation of Byzantium as a powerful empire
is there, but in a sense, is hidden, undermined, and certainly, not dominant.

The example of Theodebert’s coin reveals two things: first that Byzantium had
been powerful and influential and second that the Franks were competitive towards
the Byzantines (I refer to the connotation: ‘we are as powerful as Byzantium’).
However, apart from the competition between them, I argue that there is another thing that is revealed in this part of the exhibitionary complex: conflict between the Franks and (what is known today as) Byzantium. As explained in Chapter Two, at this time Byzantium did not exist as Byzantium and the citizens of Byzantium were calling themselves Romans (Byzantium is a name-construct; a convention made and accepted by modern historians in response to the issue of Byzantium's origins and identity; Byzantium in its time, was counted as the successor to Rome). Here, it is explained that the Franks wanted to ‘promote themselves as the rightful successors to Rome in the west’ (British museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750, 2016). It could be said that the text implies that although the Franks had accepted Byzantium as the successor of Rome, they wanted to be the rightful successors to Rome themselves. In support of my argument, I offer the following in my discussion.

The coins of Marcian, and of Theodebert I (Fig. 15 above) were made between AD 450 and AD 550. Later, in AD 1204, during the Fourth Crusade, the Franks finally sacked the Byzantine capital city of Constantinople (e.g. Phillips, 2005; Bartlett, 2000) and in this way, sealed the fate of the schism between Eastern and Western Christians (Michalopoulos, 2011). Michalopoulos (2011), looking back from the fourth Crusade explains that the fallout between the Franks and the Byzantines, arose from the greed for power that grew more intense with each passing year, and which had considerably hindered the potential success of the Christians during the crusades. In support of his opinion of how the relations between the Byzantines and Franks were troubled during the crusades and how this altered the Crusades’ outcome, he offers ‘the greatest evidence on any of the crusades from a Byzantine perspective’ (Michalopoulos, 2011). He brings evidence from Anna Comnena’s detailed history of
her father, the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus during the First Crusade, and offers the following as an example of mistrust between the Byzantines and the Franks: ‘if they [the Franks] were of one mind they could take Constantinople itself...apparently they were making an expedition to Jerusalem; in reality, however, they wanted to divest the Emperor of his kingdom and take Constantinople’ (Anna Comnena, cited in Michalopoulos, 2011). In other words, from as early as the first crusade (AD 1096-AD 1099), the conflict between the Byzantines and the Franks was well established. The above objects, apart from showing how influential Byzantium had been, may also serve as proof of earlier conflict between the Franks and the Byzantines; much earlier than the one of the first Crusade. The text entitled 5. Anglo-Saxon connections reads:

The Franks and Anglo-Saxons across the Chanel shared political, artistic and religious contacts. Marriages between Frankish and Anglo-Saxon royalty were also important. These links are revealed by similarities in dress and domestic items (The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750, The Franks, 5. Anglo-Saxon connections’, 2016).

Here, it is explained that the Franks and Anglo-Saxons shared political, artistic and religious contacts and presents them having similar cultural traditions (similarities in dress and domestic items). Also, it is explained that even ‘Marriages between Frankish and Anglo-Saxon royalty were important’. Royal marriages between Franks and Anglo-Saxons developed in part to serve particular political interests and to contribute to peaceful relations between the two (e.g. the marriage between the Æthelbert of Kent and the Christian princess Bertha, daughter of Charibert I, king of Franks) something, which is widely acknowledged in political and cultural history (e.g.
Wilson, 2016; Collins, 2010; Wemple, 1985). Hence, here, it is suggested that the Franks and Anglo-Saxons not only shared political, artistic and religious contacts, but also shared/had the same political interests.

As explained above, the Franks were not allies with the Byzantines. The Franks had two successor states, the French, who are named directly after the Franks, and the Holy Roman Empire, created by Charlemagne, the most famous Frankish king. Both states had issues with the Byzantines, as well as Charlemagne himself fighting the Byzantines at some point. For example, between AD 801 - AD 810, Charlemagne and the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I waged war on both land and sea for control of Venetia and the Dalmatian coast (Kohn, 1999). The war progressed well for the Franks. In 809, Nicephorus I was distracted by a new war with the Bulgars and the Byzantines began negotiations with the Franks. Then, Nicephorus I reached an agreement for peace with Charlemagne who gave up most of the Dalmatian coast (which he had conquered), in exchange for the Byzantine Emperor recognising him as Emperor of the West (Kohn, 1999; Davis 1900). After that, Charlemagne created the Holy Roman Empire with the Pope’s blessing (Criswell, 2005). This opened the way for Charlemagne to challenge and rival the power of the Orthodox Byzantine Empire with his own Catholic empire. After Charlemagne died, the Holy Roman Empire was not nearly as effective as its rival. It disintegrated after his death and would rise again amongst the German kingdoms as an elective monarchy. The Saxons however, were among Charlemagne’s conquests (Evans, 2014). As Evans (2014) explains, this group:

- had settled in Europe and on the British Isles, spoke the Teutonic language at the root of modern English [...] The Saxons on the European continent were still mostly pagans. Anglo-Saxon settlers in Britain had been converted to Christianity by the mission of
Augustine of Canterbury, sent from Rome by Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century (Evans, 2014).

Between AD 772 and AD 804 a series of Charlemagne’s campaigns waged over 18 major battles. These battles, known as ‘Saxon wars’ or ‘religious wars’ (Gelfand, 2003, p. 49) concluded with Saxony being incorporated into the Frankish Empire, and the pagan Saxons being forced to accept Christianity (Collins, 2010). A significant percentage of the Saxon population perished in the Frankish conquest of Saxony (Sass, 2016). However, Evans (2014) supports the idea that ‘It is hard to say whether the Saxon wars were really driven by the desire to convert the Saxon tribes’ (Evans, 2014). Dohmen’s (2010) view on the matter is that ‘Celtic practices had long been competing with the Roman Catholic practice, but by the time of Charlemagne, the latter was widely accepted, at least in Britain’ (Dohmen, 2010, p. 83). In any case, the Saxon wars evidence conflict between the Franks and the Saxons. According to the text, the Franks and Anglo-Saxons ‘shared political artistic and religious contacts’ (The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750, The Franks, 5. Anglo-Saxon connections, 2016). The above however, reveal that this sharing was a result of violent conquest and imposition. Through the presentation of the relationship between the Franks and Anglo-Saxons as harmonic, this interpretation is silenced within the exhibitionary complex. The information provided suggests political consensus and cultural exchanges.

In the 1940s Levinson (1940, cited in Story, 2015) would unilaterally focus on the contribution of the Anglo-Saxons to the cultural and political evolution of Charlemagne’s realm. As Story (2005) explains, his work shaped the understanding of
his contemporaries and influenced the understanding of future generations of historians on the matter of the relationship between the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons (here, she mostly refers to British scholars). However, she also explains that nowadays Levinson’s analysis of the cultural dynamics of the eighth century is thought to have been ‘coloured by his experiences in his final years as a Jewish exile from the Nazi regime of his homeland in Germany’ (Story, 2005, p. 195) Levinson had come to England as a refugee in 1939 and ‘in the dark days of world war, told the story of the eighth century in terms of the essential contribution which the ancestors of the English had made to the precursors of Germany and France’ (Story, 2005, p. 197). Contemporary scholars have come to realise that the contribution was not unilateral, and also, not a result of ever-peaceful relationships; for example, Charlemagne’s Francia had also had a considerable impact on Anglo-Saxon England (Story, 2005), as from 772 onwards, Charlemagne conquered and eventually defeated the Saxons to incorporate their realm into the Frankish kingdom. Following the above, I argue that the interpretation of Franks and Anglo-Saxons in a peaceful relationship arises from Levinson’s understanding of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon relationships. Therefore, the exhibitionary meaning is constructed after Levinson’s understanding of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon relationships; the exhibitionary complex presents harmony and seamless development, while contemporary historians see conflict and difference.

In the examples examined above, Byzantium is interpreted as a powerful empire, a powerful ‘eastern half’—powerful in relation to the conflicting ‘western half’. This interpretation, however, is almost hidden and opposite to/undermined by the interpretations of:
1. Byzantium as a subordinate empire (e.g. the feminising of Byzantium and the alien, complicated side plot of Byzantium presented in the museum construct)

2. the perfect and direct Roman continuity(ies) of the west through the western Kingdoms that the museum finally presents as responsible for the formation of Europe.

This shows that the exhibitionary complex is mythologically constructed. The beliefs, ideas and values reflected in the interpretation of Byzantium are compatible with the conception of Byzantium as different, ‘other’ to Europe.

Byzantium is used politically. It is used as the different, the other to (the dominant) British/English identity. It is placed within the narrative of European and British history, to serve the construction of British identity as English and European. Not only is its significance to the formation of Europe as explained by modern historians not present, but also, it is reduced to a subordinate empire -that is, as exotic, eastern, alien, strange, different, other to Europe and to Britain, and thus, to England.

**Conclusions**

By analysing the structure of the exhibitionary complex -the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships between its images and texts- I have revealed the conventions or 'rules of combination' underlying the production and interpretation of the exhibitionary complex. I have considered the existence of 'underlying' thematic paradigms and thus, the significance of the choices in exhibitionary content and meaning. I have shown that these choices are based on the interaction of a set of cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on its own identity and on Byzantium with curatorial practices. I have identified and explained
that the product of this interaction is the (re)presentation/(re)production of a particular British identity. British identity is (re)presented/(re)produced as European, but also, as primarily Anglo-Saxon and hence, English - through the use of Byzantium as the ‘different’, the ‘other’ to European, and to British and thus, to English. The identity of different ‘others’ that constitute a particular English identity being offered here are: Byzantium, the Continent (i.e. Europe, without the British Isles), Catholicism, and the Celts. I have argued that within the exhibitionary complex:

(a) Byzantium is presented as a continuity of the Roman Empire, in the east but different from the continuity(ies) of the Roman Empire in the west: as exotic, eastern, ‘other’, non-European, non-British, non-English.

(b) The Continent is presented as a continuity of the Roman Empire in the west: as Ostrogoth, Celtic, Frankish, and Catholic.

(c) Britain is presented as a continuity of the Roman Empire, in the west: Ostrogoth, Celtic, Frankish, Catholic, but also Anglo-Saxon and Anglican

(d) England is presented primarily as Anglo-Saxon, Anglican and dominant in relation to the Continent and to Britain, different from Celtic, different from Catholic.

Hence, I have argued that Byzantium at the British Museum Byzantine exhibitionary complex functions to explain the modern cultural identity of the British imagined community; however, it is not Britishness, in fact which is being explained - which would be more inclusive (i.e. a bigger concept than Englishness)- but ‘Englishness’; Englishness, as a shared sense of self, as the ‘same’. It is a cultural identity constructed by the dominant cultural group, which sees itself as a group bound together by the culture and the history that makes this Englishness. Also, I
have argued that this Englishness has a deep-seated sense of cultural superiority over all other cultures presented within the exhibitionary complex, which reflects the colonial and Imperial ideology of the past and which, therein suggests ‘Empire’.

Specifically, I have demonstrated that the role of Byzantium in the narrative sequence of the cultures as presented in rooms 41 and 40 serves as evidence of influences on all the involved cultures, apart from the Anglo-Saxons, and hence, as evidence of the other cultures’ ‘otherness’. Within the British Museum exhibitionary complex, Byzantium is (re)presented as a Roman continuity, but different from the western kingdoms, which are (re)presented as responsible for the formation of Europe. Byzantium is exotic, non-western, Christian in religion, but Orthodox, ‘different’, ‘other’. The western kingdoms are presented as continuities of the Roman Empire to the west –as Catholic, as the ancestors of Europe, as part of British identity, since British identity emerges from the Ostrogoth, the Franks, the Celts, the Anglo-Saxons. Catholicism is interpreted as Roman continuity, but the English identity is a new beginning, is Anglo-Saxon, is different from the British and is dominant, is non-Catholic, but Anglican. In Room 41, the choices in images and texts negotiate and document the development of the English identity through the ages: from Roman Britain to early middle ages (AD 1100). Simply, British history is narrated in relation to European history, and more particularly, in relation to the history of the formation of Europe and in relation to Byzantium, in order to explain the English history. The British nation is presented as primarily emerging from the Anglo-Saxons and secondarily from the Franks, who converted to Christianity following the Catholic doctrine. Europe emerges from all the kingdoms that are presented as continuations of the Roman Empire in the west. Byzantium is the continuation of the Roman Empire
in the east, but it is also explained as exotic, different, other. In room 40, the museum continues the narration/explanation of this English identity, by explaining the history of Europe from AD 1050 to AD 1500 and Byzantium is again explained as different, other. However, this time Byzantium is also used in the narrative to suggest that the Roman Catholic Church is also different, other to Byzantium, but also, different, other to the Church of England. Therefore, British cultural ideas, values and beliefs interact with curatorial practices and the product of this interaction is the (re)presentation/(re)production of British national identity, through Byzantium. British national identity is finally counted as European and English. Within the exhibitionary complex, no reference is made to the contribution of Byzantium to the formation of Europe, as it is thought of and seen by contemporary historians (e.g. Hughes, 2014a; James, 2012; Ahrweiler 2012 and so on). As explained in Chapter Two, today it is believed that Byzantium laid the foundations of modern Europe: it preserved and protected the very foundations of Western culture, it laid the foundations for the future nation-states of Europe. In contrast, despite the several attempts at demystification, the dominant (re)presentation of Byzantium within the exhibitionary complex is that of a powerless empire, subordinate to the rest of the medieval world, alien, bizarre, different, other. Nevertheless, as explained in the introduction of this case study, Byzantine material had been always exhibited along with medieval material, as Byzantium had been thought as a medieval empire, part of the 'Dark' ages, still, alien bizarre, different, other. Through the example of the British Museum it is shown that exhibitionary meaning is mythologically constructed: the beliefs, ideas and values reflected in the above explanations are compatible with the British imagined community’s interpretation of Byzantium as alien, bizarre, different, other,
and of the British nation as European, but predominantly, English, and English as dominant, reflecting the colonial and imperial ideas of the past.

Finally, through the British Museum example, it is shown that the representation of the past culture of Byzantium is the product of the interaction of cultural knowledge, of the knowledge of the British imagined community on its ‘own’ national identity, with the making of exhibitionary meaning- the end product and effect of the productive micro-powers and relations that make up the national museum institution. The British Museum example is providing an understanding of the constructive role of cultural knowledge in the making of exhibitionary meaning i.e. an understanding of the cultural function of the presuppositions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning. By this, the British Museum example demonstrates two things. First, that defining curation in relation to the theoretical cultural account of meaning performs an important function in the explanation and critical analysis of the exhibitionary complexes. Second, that the constructive role of knowledge in the making of exhibitionary meaning has cultural and political implications. The cultural implication is the non-demystified, non-democratised (re)presentation Byzantium. The political implication is that the culturally (re)constructed ideology within its exhibitionary complex is entangled with the image of the British imagined community that Britain in effect promotes. The British Museum, far from being democratised remains mystified and functions as an institution of power, instead of a democratic institution. This also explains why the power system of the exhibitionary complex is still in play although we are shifting into the era of the ‘Democratic’ museum.
Case Study 2. The Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens

**Introduction**

This section offers a critical reading of the interpretation of Byzantium as presented in the Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex. It understands and explains the ideological positions on Byzantium and on Greek identity that make themselves apparent within the exhibitionary complex of the Byzantine and Christian Museum. I argue that the exhibition myth or meaning is that there is a line of continuity between Ancient Greece, Byzantium and Modern Greek culture and identity. The identification and explanation of the culturally constructed signs and symbols within the images and texts of the exhibitionary complex will enable the analysis of this interpretation.

This museum is chosen because it is dedicated to Byzantine art and culture and because it has a special significance to the country and the city to which it belongs. The Byzantine and Christian museum was founded in Greece in early 1900 ‘when the study of medieval Hellenism and its monuments had begun’ (Konstantios, 2006, p.13); thus, when Greek national ideas and beliefs had become compatible with the integration of Byzantine history into the national history of the Modern Greek State.

In the early 19th century, the focus of the newly established museum was to support the ideology according to which Byzantium was a Greek empire, and a proof of Greek national unity throughout history (Lazaridou, 2006). The constructs of the
‘Great Idea’ and ‘Hellenic-Christianism’ were (re)constructed/(re)produced within its 19th century permanent exhibitionary complex, using the museum objects as the means to communicate it (Lazaridou, 2006). The museum’s purpose was to explain and document the origin of the national identity of modern Greeks but also, their national unity, in support of the territorial claims expressed in the ‘Great idea’.

It is worth mentioning that the use of museum objects as a means to communicate the ideology that a national museum exhibition aimed to (re)produce was a practice which started to be applied in Europe in the 19th century. And more particularly, by museums that were founded when modern nations were created and national consciousness grew, and hence ‘the need was felt to collect material evidence of their origin and development’ (Maroević, 1998, p.57). This was a time when museums incorporated the national ideological agenda into their exhibition practices and curation. Until then, curation meant mere scientific classification. The result is what today is called ‘Historiographic development’: ‘Historiographic development was based on written documents and traditions and museums collected objects that bore witness to the people and times and enhanced imagination about historic events’ (Maroević, 1998, p. 57).

The Byzantine and Christian Museum directors of the 19th century, Lampakis and Sotiriou, curated the museum’s first exhibitionary complex following the historiographic methods: their curatorial practices were informed by the ideas of 19th century Greek romantic nationalism (Lazaridou, 2006; Konstantios; 2006). As a consequence, the first museum exhibitionary complex was the (re)construction/(re)production of the specific interpretation of Byzantium, which at the time, as explained in Chapter Two, was established through the work of the
‘national historian’ of Greece, Konstantinos Paparigopoulos. At this point, it is also worth mentioning that today, the 19th century Byzantine and Christian Museum directors are considered by Greek curators as the rapporteurs of museology in Greece (Gkratziou, 2006; Konstantios, 2006), specifically because they treated curation as a practice of meaning making.

Nevertheless, the 19th century exhibitionary complex remained intact until the year 2000, when minor changes took place. In 2004, the exhibitionary complex was re-arranged following the directions of new museology. The former museum director who was responsible for the construction of the museum’s current, permanent exhibitionary complex explained that the museum was neither aiming at the (re)presentation of a ‘unified national narrative’, nor would it try to ‘present the entire [Byzantine] age with national time and its continuity in mind’ (Konstantios, 2008, p. 19). This was the aim of the museum in the past. As the museum’s museographer/curator Stefanou-Katsanika (2008) also explained, the current museum display aimed to present Byzantine culture and art in a way that was ‘free of nationalistic bias and charge and as objective as possible’ (Stefanou-Katsanika, 2008, p. 30).

Despite the application of the new museology and the contemporary curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification, which the above statements suggest, I argue that this interpretation makes itself apparent within the exhibitionary complex’s final visual outcome.

Konstantios re-arranged the exhibitionary complex because by the 21st century, the ideology/myth had ostensibly changed (I refer to the outcome of the practices of the 1980s historical revisionism, thoroughly explained in Chapter Two).
And I say ‘ostensibly’ because, as I will demonstrate in my analysis below, the ideology/myth motivating this interpretation has not actually changed.

Briefly, the Byzantine and Christian Museum was founded in order to serve a very particular remit: to support, maintain and enhance the interpretation of the continuity of Hellenism through Byzantium. Therefore, to explain:

(a) the Greek-Byzantine identity of Modern Greeks

(b) the Greek identity of Byzantium and

(c) the Greek identity of the ‘lost’ Greek territories, i.e. the territories annexed to the Ottoman Empire after the fall of Constantinople, which are still incorporated into Modern Turkey. This interpretation was constructed based on the basis of Greek cultural ideas, beliefs and values stemming out of:

(a) the ‘national’ historical narrative of the continuity of Greek national history and identity from antiquity to the present time through Byzantium, and

(b) the political construct of the Great Idea, that claimed back the lost Hellenic territories.

I argue that up until now, the (re)presentation of Byzantium within the museum’s exhibitionary complex is (re)constructed/(re)produced on the basis of the same set of cultural presuppositions. Particularly, I argue that despite the museum’s attempt at democratisation and demystification of the exhibitionary complex, the ideas on the continuity of the cultural identity of Modern Greeks from ancient Greek culture through the culture of Byzantium are (re)constructed/(re)produced within the museum’s current exhibitionary complex. Byzantium is interpreted as the continuation of Greek antiquity, as a Greek Empire and as responsible for the formation of the contemporary Greek culture and identity.
The exhibitionary complex in the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens consists of the permanent museum display, which is divided into four parts. Each part is divided into several themes and sub-themes, spread across the museum rooms. The themes and sub-themes are articulated in a ‘sequential thematic structure’ (Nicks, 2002, p. 361) based on chronology and carry the following titles:

I. From the ancient world to Byzantium
   I.1. Old forms-New symbols
   I.2. Secular life
   I.3. The temples of the new religion
   I.4. Christianization of the ancient temples
   I.5. Christian Egypt and Coptic art
   I.6. ‘In pastures green’: Christians in the face of death

II. The Byzantine World
   II.1. Authority and administration
   II.2. The age of crisis
   II.3. Worship and art
   II.4. The wall paintings of a Byzantine church: Episkopi in Evrytania
   II.5. Attica: a Byzantine province
   II.6. Franks and Latins in Byzantium
   II.7. Aspects of public and private life
   II.8. The Palaiologan period: The final flowering of Byzantium
   II.9. The fall of Constantinople
III. Intellectual and Artistic Activity in the 15th century

IV. From Byzantium to Modern Era.

IV.1. Venetian Rule and the Greeks

IV.1a. Society and art in Venetian Crete

IV.1b. Painting in Ionian Islands: a justifiable hybrid

IV.2. From anthibolon to icon

IV.3. The Ottoman Conquest and the "Genos"

IV.3a. The Communities of the Romioi (RUM)

IV.3b. Aspects of Everyday Life

IV.3c. Church: Place of worship/site of social cohesion

IV.3d. Monasteries: flowering and brilliance

IV.3e. The polymorphism of the 18th century

IV.4. The printed book and the New Hellenism

IV.5. Religious painting in the Hellenic State

In the themes I. From the Ancient world to Byzantium and II. The Byzantine World, Byzantium is (re)presented through the art, architecture, everyday utensils, burial customs and coins dating from the very first AD centuries to the decline of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Within these themes, I will identify and explain the following interpretations: (a) The Greek identity of Byzantium and (b) The Greek identity of lands once comprising the Greek territory, which have now been incorporated into Modern Turkey after conflicts and events during the post-Byzantine period (the period that begins after the fall of Constantinople and lasts until the mid
19th century) i.e. East Trace, Asia Minor coastline, including Pontus in its northern part.

In the themes III. Intellectual and Artistic Activity in the 15th century, and IV. From Byzantium to Modern era, through characteristic pieces of post-Byzantine art, architecture, garments, printed books, ecclesiastical and everyday utensils dating from the 15th century to the mid 19th century, I will identify and explain the following interpretations: (a) the continuation of Greek-Byzantine ideas after the fall of Byzantium, (b) The contribution of the Greek Byzantium to the Renaissance. The latter serves the explanation of the European nature of the Modern Greek identity.

The above interpretations enable the (re) construction of the identity of the ‘nation’ and the ‘culture’ of the country to which the exhibitionary complex belongs, i.e. the identity of the Greek nation and culture. As in the case of the British Museum, this meaning is presented as ‘natural’ and hence as the only ‘truth’. Byzantium here is presented as the continuation of the Greek classical antiquity and is placed within the narrative of Greek history.

However, what the museum presents is actually ‘a’ Greek history/identity, being presented as ‘the’ Greek history/identity. The next section will illustrate these issues and arguments through the images and texts of the thematic sections of the exhibitionary complex.
What is Byzantium? The interpretation of Byzantium as presented in the Byzantine and Christian Museum

1. Byzantium: The continuity of Greek identity from antiquity to the present

In this section I will identify and explain the main points that reveal the (re)presentation of Byzantium as a continuity of Greek antiquity. This will help me to further explain the (re)presentation of the continuity of Greek culture/identity from antiquity to the present day through Byzantium as (re)constructed/(re)produced in the museum’s exhibitionary complex, and demonstrate that the museum exhibitionary complex is based on the ideas values and beliefs of the Greek imagined community on its own identity.

I argue that the interpretation of Byzantium as a continuity of Greek antiquity is first revealed in the introductory text of the exhibitionary complex, where it is suggested that after the establishment of Christianity, the ‘multinational’ and ‘multireligious’ Byzantium started to change, started to evolve into something different.

Particularly, through the phrase ‘From the 3rd century but mainly after the capital was transferred from Rome to Constantinople, in 330, the Empire began progressively to change territorially and administratively and to mutate’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016), it is being suggested that Byzantium in the 4th century became a new Roman Empire, different from the Roman Empire before the 4th century, which progressively changed and transformed into something else, other than Roman. The opening sentence of the
introductory text informs the museum visitor that: “Byzantium” or “Byzantine Empire” was the name given in the 16th c. to describe the Roman Empire from the fourth century onwards’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016) and in this way, it is being suggested that it is this new Roman Empire that became known as Byzantium in the 16th century. Also, through the phrase ‘[Byzantium] had a decisive effect on the fortunes of the Ancient and Medieval world from the 4th century until 1453’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016), it is also being suggested that this new Empire was powerful and determinative of the Ancient and Medieval world. By calling Constantinople ‘“the Queen of all the cities”’, which ‘was to become the main centre of culture for all the Medieval world’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016), it is being suggested that Constantinople was the largest and wealthiest city in all the Medieval world, and was the dominant city of the then known world throughout the Middle Ages. In addition, by highlighting the origin of the name Byzantium, i.e. by saying that ‘The new capital, […] was actually the city named Byzantium, the ancient colony of the Greek city of Megara at the coast of Bosporos’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016) the cultural bridge between the ancient Greek culture and the culture of Byzantium -and hence, continuity- is being suggested; by placing the phrase ‘“the Queen of all cities”’ before the text saying ‘was actually […] the ancient colony of the Greek city of Megara’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016), the splendor of the new capital is actually connected to the glorious ancient Greek past, suggesting that Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity.
The introductory text also presents information concerning the Hellenic territories included in Byzantium's territory: the Aegean, Asia Minor, Bithynia (Nicaea), Epiros and Pontos (Trabizond). The text reads:

In the sixth century it [Byzantium] was a vast, multinational and still multireligious state. In eleventh and twelfth centuries, still multinational, it extended over the Hellenic, Aegean and Asia Minor territories. In the thirteenth century, in 1204, it ceased to exist, after being abolished by the Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade, and was substituted by small states, in Bithynia (Nicaea), Epiros and Pontos (Trebizond) (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016).

The reference to these territories triggers the commonly shared (among modern Greeks) background belief foundational to Greek identity in relation to these territories and consequently to Byzantium, and I argue that in this way it is being suggested that Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity. As explained in Chapter Two, these territories are referred as the ‘lost territories’ (the once Greek territories gradually annexed to the Ottoman Empire after the Battle of Mantzikert in 1071 and after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453) and are among the claims necessary to the political construct of the Great Idea. It could be said that, in addition to suggesting the Greek identity of Byzantium, and continuity with Greek antiquity, this reference is also suggesting these claims. However, the following paragraph hastens to inform the museum visitor that:

Byzantium was by no means immutable; it was characterized by endless changes in its structures, its function, its character. The barbaric raids (2nd-6th c.), the expansion of the Arabs (7th c.), the epidemic plague, the climatic changes and other factors were
leaving their traces on its citizens, its administration, its culture (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016).

I argue that this text is an illustration of an unsuccessful attempt at demystification: although the text refers to the Greek territories (which suggest both continuity and the Greek identity of Byzantium) it also says that Byzantium ‘was characterized by endless changes in its structures, its function, its character’. Hence, here, the text does not suggest that Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity (or of the Roman Empire), and it does not suggest Byzantium’s Greek identity. Below, I will demonstrate that through the images and texts of the exhibitionary complex it is being suggested that Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity and that Byzantium is a Greek Empire.

The following paragraph of the introductory text reads:

‘From the 4th to the 5th century Byzantium was Roman, mainly pagan, using the Latin Language […] As a result of the progressive changes after the establishment of Christianity (381) the loss of the lands (5th-7th century) and the iconoclasm (8th-9th century) only a few Roman characteristics survived in the 9th century. At the time, the Byzantine state was land-limited and multinational, but Christian and it had its own original culture: the language in use was Greek (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016).

Here, it is being suggested that Byzantium succeeded the 4th and 5th (still) pagan Roman Empire and that the 9th century Byzantium ‘was land limited and multinational, but Christian and it had its own original culture’. The spoken language,
i.e. ‘Greek’, is connected with the phrase ‘original culture’ to suggest that the
originality of Byzantine culture is a result of Greek influences. The selection of this
information instead of any other is where cultural presuppositions interact with the
making of exhibitionary meaning and where the museum’s (micro-) power relations
operate. The same applies to the following example.

The museum text reads:

The administrative structure and the economy changed […] Only the emperorship
remained immutable in time. It was shaped in the early centuries by incorporating the
spirit of Christianity into the Hellenistic and Roman political ideas about kingship. The
emperor, surrounded by a strictly structured government and ecclesiastical hierarchy,
acted as an ecumenical leader of the unique ecumenical Empire, as the representative
of God on earth, who looks after the citizens of the whole world and leads them to
the real faith (Byzantine and Christian Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory
text, 2016).

Here, it is explained that the institution of emperorship ‘remained immutable
in time. It was shaped in the early centuries by incorporating the spirit of Christianity
into Hellenistic and Roman political ideas of kingship’. (Byzantine and Christian
Museum: museum entrance hall, introductory text, 2016). I argue that the text refers
to Hellenistic political ideas, not in the sense of the democratic polis or city-states,
but to the institution of kingship that was formulated by the Macedonian Kingdom,
when the enormous territories conquered by Alexander the Great were organised as
monarchies. According to Bilde (1996) ‘this monarchical legacy was eventually taken
over by the Roman Empire, from where it was transferred to mediaeval Europe (Bilde,
1996, p. 11). I argue that the museum text (re)produces Bilde’s view, which is widely accepted within Modern Greek culture to suggest that the Romans used Hellenistic ideas and the result of the denatured Hellenistic ideas in Rome gave birth to the god-kings, the Byzantine emperors. In the same vein, Voegelin (cited in Moulakis, 1997) explains that ‘the polis had reached the phase of a metropolitan rabble while looking toward the future the spiritual anxiety of men in search of a new soul and a cosmion gave rise to the phenomenon of god-kings’ (Voegelin, cited in Moulakis, 1997, p. 102). The cosmion is a notion continuously created as the mode and condition of men’s self-realisation (Voegelin, cited in Moulakis, 1997, p. 132). In other words, the cosmion caused men to evolve the Hellenistic idea of kingship through the centuries and establish the institution of god-kings in Byzantium. Hence, here, it is actually being suggested that this very distinctive element of Byzantine culture, the institution of god-kings, derived from Hellenistic ideas. Therefore, it is being suggested that Byzantium is Greek culture evolved and transformed into the new religion of Christianity. This is part of the interpretation of Byzantium as a continuity of Greek antiquity; also, of the continuity of Greek culture/identity to the present day through Byzantium.

a. **Continuity of the ancient Greek world to the Byzantine world**

In this section I will explain the interpretation of continuity of the ancient Greek world to the Byzantine world, as presented within the images and texts of the museum’s exhibitionary complex. I will demonstrate that this interpretation is a product of the interaction of two things: Greek cultural knowledge on the continuity to the present day of Greek culture/identity, through Byzantium; and curatorial practices.
The idea of continuity of the ancient Greek world to the Byzantine world is introduced in the sub-theme I.1. *Old forms-New symbols*. The first visual image one sees on entering the room is an exhibit consisting of sculptures. The sculptures are named *The Sidamara sarcophagi* (Fig. 16 below).

![Fig. 16. Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. Old forms-New symbols, The Sidamara Sarcophagi, 2016](image)

The continuity of the ancient Greek world to the Byzantine world is suggested through the Sidamara sculptures. The form and style of these sculptures are functioning as signs of the transition from the pagan world of ancient Greece to the Christian world of Byzantium, as their resemblance to the form and style of ancient Greek statues is taken for granted. The selection of the particular sculptures at the beginning of the exhibitionary complex (instead of others) is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as
The so-called Sidamara sarcophagi (named after the city in Asia Minor, where they are thought to have originated) are characterised by the articulation of the long sides by columns surrounded by arches and pediments. The figures portrayed between the columns are carved almost fully in the round and usually, with the exception of the figure of the deceased, draw their inspiration from mythology - such as the Dioscuroi or the Muses. The figure of a young man holding a scroll, most likely a philosopher recalls the young Christ as he was depicted on early Christian Sarcophagy - yet, one further example of the connections of Christian art and the artistic prototypes of antiquity (Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. Old forms-New symbols, The Sidamara Sarcophagi, explanatory text, 2016).

The reference to Dioscuroi, ‘the most memorable figures in Greek mythology’, who are the ‘divine twins Castor and Polydeuces, the brothers of Helen, the youths of Zeus’ (Burkert, 1985, p. 212) and the Muses, ‘the daughters of Zeus and Mnemmosyne’ (Burkert, 1985, p. 147), as well as the phrase ‘most likely a philosopher’ suggest the relation of early Christian sculptures to ancient Greek sculptures and hence, the relation of early Christianity to Greek antiquity.

The explanation of the sculptures’ name, i.e. ‘named after the city in Asia Minor where they are thought to have originated’ suggests Greek presence in Asia Minor from ancient times. Hence, here, the claim of the continuity of the Greek culture/identity from the ancient Greek times to the Byzantine times, including the Hellenic population of the Asia Minor, is (re)produced/(re)constructed, through the image of the sculptures, which functions as a sign of continuity. The phrase: ‘[the
Sarcophagi is yet, one further example of the connections of Christian art and the artistic prototypes of antiquity', suggests continuity of the ancient Greek artistic traditions to Byzantium. However, as Elderkin (1939) explains ‘a consistent interpretation of the scenes on the sarcophagus of Sidamara has not been given. Even the figures on its front have not been considered a thoughtfully composed group’ (Elderkin, 1939, p.101). The interpretation presented within the museum’s exhibitionary complex is a (re)production of the belief (what Elderkin (1939) calls ‘guess’) that, probably ‘the sculptor had in mind not a large number of female relatives of the deceased but rather the nine Muses who weep for a departed warrior as once they wept for Achilles’ (Elderkin, 1939, p. 101), which is in agreement with the argument on Byzantium’s continuity with Greek antiquity.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that in 2011, the Turkish ministry of culture asked the Victoria and Albert Museum to return the 1,700-year-old life-sized marble carving of a child’s head, taken from the related fragments of Sidamara Sarcophagi sculptures, which today sit in Istanbul’s museum of archaeology (Sharp, 2011). The head is described as ‘bearing a likeness to Eros, the Greek god of love’ (Sharp, 2011). Tolga Tuyluoglu, the director of Turkey’s culture and tourism office in London, said: ‘The Turkish ministry of culture thinks this item belongs to Turkey. We believe if an item has been removed from a country then it should be returned to the original place’ (Tuyluoglu 2011, cited in Sharp, 2011).

However, through the images and texts of the Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex, it is being suggested that the original place which Tuyluoglu refers to is not Turkish, but Greek. (It is useful to reiterate here the territorial claims expressed in the ‘Great Idea’, which are (re)constructed/(re)produced
at this part of the exhibitionary complex: briefly, the claims are about the ‘lost’ Greek territories; the once Greek territories gradually annexed to the Ottoman Empire after the Battle of Mantzikert and after the fall of the Byzantine Empire; with the Asia Minor coastline being among them).

As the visitor of the Byzantine and Christian Museum is informed, other, perhaps related, fragments of the *Sidamara Sarcophagi* are found in the British Museum. The text reads:


Nevertheless, the relation of the British Museum pieces with the *Sidamara Sarcophagi* is questioned, through the addition of a question mark in parenthesis after the word ‘related’ (*Fig.17* below). However, the graphic reconstruction of the British Museum fragments is provided within the Byzantine and Christian Museum's exhibitionary complex. It has been actively selected and this selection is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as being a product of the museum’s (micro-) power relations.
The Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex opens with a crucial debate on cultural heritage and notions of belonging, as well as notions of cultural borders, national culture and national identity. This debate is embodied in the (re)presentation of the Sidamara Sarcophagi. Through the Sidamara Sarcophagi, it is being suggested that the lands of Byzantium had been Greek from Classical antiquity and had been Greek during the time of Byzantium; consequently, it is being suggested that there is a line of continuity between Greek antiquity and Byzantium.

The rest of the exhibits forming the first sub-theme are also illustrative of the (re)construction/(re)production of the Greek cultural belief on Byzantium’s continuity with antiquity, but also, of the Greek ethnicity of the ‘lost territories’. These exhibits are seven clay lamps dated from the 1st to the 7th century AD, two marble statuettes of the Good Shepherd, and the marble statuette of Orpheus from Aegina dated in the 4th century AD (Fig. 18 below).

Fig. 17. Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. *Old forms-New symbols, The Sidamara Sarcophagi*, graphic reconstruction of the British Museum fragments, 2016
Fig. 18. Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. *Old forms-New symbols*, Clay lamps 1\(^{st} - 7^{th}\) AD century, Marble Statuette of the Good Shepherd from Athens 4\(^{th}\) AD century, Marble Statuette of the Good Shepherd from Corinth 4\(^{th}\) AD century, Marble Statuette of Orpheus from Aegina 4\(^{th}\) AD century, 2016

These objects are selected as signs of the resemblance of Christian art to the Greco-Roman artistic style. For example, the accompanying text reads: ‘Christian art was born in the period of late antiquity (2\(^{nd} - 4^{th}\) centuries A.D.) [...] Christians borrowed familiar forms from the Greco-Roman world, and imbued them with new content’ (Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. *Old forms-New symbols*, introductory text, 2016). The term ‘early Christianity’ would be the most appropriate in the context of the 2\(^{nd} - 4^{th}\) centuries A.D. However, the term ‘late antiquity’ has been selected instead. In combination with the phrase ‘familiar forms from the Greco-Roman world’ this suggests continuity of antiquity in the early Christian years, through art. Jensen
(2000) explains that it is only after 550 AD that Christian art is classified as Byzantine art. This idea is (re)produced/(re)constructed within the exhibitionary complex, through these objects that come from the 4th century. Consequently, the early Byzantine years are placed in the 4th century, and this suggests continuity of antiquity in the early Byzantine years.

Furthermore, according to the text the 4th century statuettes of the Good Shepherd (two of which can be viewed within the room) ‘derived from the Greek statues of the calf-bearer (moschophoros) or kid-bearer (kriophoros)’, and also, ‘Christians considered that Orpheus could be understood allegorically as Christ’. (Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. Old forms-New symbols, introductory text, 2016). Hence, the interpretation here is narrowed to suggest that Byzantine art derives from Greek art.

What is interesting here, is the analysis of the allegory around the figure of Orpheus, by bringing up the significance it had within the context of the ancient Greek world and by explaining among other things Orpheus’ origin: from Thrace. The text reads:

Another suitable figure [to portray the idea of Christ as the Good Shepherd] was Orpheus, the mythical lyre-player from Thrace who worked his musical spell over wild animals that were shown gathered round him in late antique art. Christians considered that Orpheus could be understood allegorically as Christ, who with his words tames the hearts of even the fiercest of men. Likewise, the philosopher, among the most popular figures in art of the late antique period, also became one of the prototypes for the representation of Christ as a young man (Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. Old forms-New symbols, introductory text, 2016).
Early Christian art is used here as a sign of the continuity of Greek culture as well as of Greek traditions in Thrace. This is illustrative of the (re)construction of the belief of the 'Greek ethnicity' of the territory of Eastern Thrace, which today is annexed in Modern Turkey. By linking Orpheus' figure in its Christian context with the late antiquity philosophers' figures, the text strengthens the interpretation of continuity.

The *Portrait bust of the priestess Isvardia (Fig. 19 below)* in the sub-theme I.2. *Secular life*, is also chosen as an illustration of the argument on Byzantium’s continuity with Greek antiquity. The female bust resembles the style of classical sculpture, and it is used in order to (re)construct the Greek ethnicity of Smyrna (annexed today in Modern Turkey).
The introductory text of this sub-theme reads: ‘During the early Byzantine period, public and private life retained their defining characteristics more or less unchanged from Greco-Roman times’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: I.2. *Secular life*, introductory text, 2016). Although continuity of Greco-Roman traditions is referred to in the text, the style of the portrait bust, which is placed in a prominent position within the museum room, strengthens and stresses Byzantium’s continuity with Greek antiquity.
The next example found in the sub-theme I.3. *The temples of the new religion*, does the same. The image of an early Christian church *The Ilissos Basilica* (Fig. 20 below) is reconstructed within the museum room.


The syntagm in which the museum objects are placed (i.e. marble columns, capitals, and mosaics) makes the representation of *The Ilissos Basilica* look like an ancient Greek temple. The image of this particular early Christian church demonstrates the resemblance of the architecture of early Christian Churches to the architecture (style and form) of ancient Greek temples. I argue that this is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as a product of the museum’s (micro-) power relations.
The syntagmatic relationships of the objects signify continuity of ancient Greek architecture to Byzantium and this suggests Byzantium's continuity with Greek antiquity. The capitals here resemble the Corinthian style and order: the last of the three principal classical orders of ancient Greek architecture. Ancient Greek architecture is best known from its temples. According to Georgopoulos and Telioni, (2008) the Greek temple:

- consisted of a rectangular room (the cella) with projecting walls framing a porch (pronaos) at one end. The building stood on top of a stepped platform -the crepidoma- consisting of the euthynteria, the 1 and 2 steps and the stylobate, upon which the columns are erected. The fluted columns consisted of three parts: the base, the shaft and the capital, and they supported an entablature. The entablature consisted of the architrave and the frieze, composed of alternating metopes and triglyphs. Above the entablature was a low roof decorated with moulded ends (Georgopoulos and Telioni, 2008, p. 2).

The frieze is an important element of Greek architecture and usually carries a sculptured relief. In the case of Corinthian architecture, the relief decoration runs in a continuous band as shown in Fig. 21 below.
The representation/image of the early Christian church within the museum space is following these rules. Although the image is not a copy of the Corinthian style temples, the symbolic meaning of the elements that compose it is that of a Corinthian style temple.

The architectural form of a Greek temple is recognisable by Modern Greeks, but also by people from around the world. Modern Greeks are very familiar with the image of ancient Greek temples as they are able to see it in the remains of Greek architecture around the Modern Greek territory (e.g. The temple of Olympian Zeus in
Athens, with the Acropolis in its background; the temple of Apollo in Corinth). People from around the world are very familiar with this architectural form too. It can be said that this architectural form has become a ‘trademark’ of Greece, since it is widely reproduced in the media, for example, for the promotion and advertising of tourism in Greece and in the form of company logos (e.g. restaurants); also, publicly displayed images of ancient Greek temples may be found in public buildings and schools from around the world.

Here, continuity between the ancient Greek world with the Early Christian world and hence, with Byzantium is suggested through the most recognisable symbol of Greek antiquity: the ancient Greek temple. The columns and capitals in this particular structure function as a symbol of the ancient Greek architecture. Although there are mosaics on the floor in front of the columns (typical symbol of Roman and Byzantine architecture), and also, designs on the wall behind the columns, which are representing the front view and plan view of the Ilissos Basilica, to which the fragments used here belong the columns and their structure compose a much stronger image, which relates to Greek antiquity, and allows little doubt as to this in its view.

The introductory text of the theme I.3. The Temples of New Religion reads: ‘the predominant architecture for churches at the time was the Basilica, inspired by the type of Roman assembly’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: I.3. The Temples of New Religion, introductory text, 2016). This also shows Roman influence. However, the title The temples of the new religion, and the syntagmatic structure of the exhibits in this room carry connotations of the continuity of Greek antiquity in
Byzantium and also, connotations of the conversion of ancient Greek temples to Early Christian Churches, which is the key message in the next sub-theme.

The introductory text of the next sub-theme, I.4. *Christianization of the ancient temples*, reads:

[...] many ancient temples and monuments were converted to Christian churches. This reuse of ancient structures for new purposes was a phenomenon that appeared across the Empire in the course of the sixth century, a period when most of the temples had anyway been abandoned by their former dedicants [...] (Byzantine and Christian Museum: I.4. *The Christianisation of the ancient Greek temples*, introductory text, 2016).

Once again, the exhibitionary complex suggests continuity with the ancient Greek world through the explanation given on the ‘reuse of ancient structures for new purposes’, which ‘appeared across the Empire in the course of the sixth century’. Also, the phrase ‘most of the temples had anyway been abandoned by their former dedicants’ suggests that Byzantium is a continuity of the ancient Greek world. The most important exhibit, which (re)constructs this continuity, is placed at the centre of the museum room (*Fig. 22 below*).
This exhibit is a (re)presentation of the ‘Christian Parthenon’. Again, this representation, suggests continuity of Byzantium from Greek antiquity; but this time, not only through the structure of the exhibit in the museum room, but also by using as a symbol the Parthenon: ‘the preeminent symbol of the Greek ancient world’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: I.4. The Christianisation of the ancient Greek temples, Fragments of the Christian Parthenon, explanatory text, 2016).

The ‘Christian Parthenon’ is reconstructed using the wall marble closure slab with relief cross, coming from the pulpit of the ‘Christian Parthenon’. This is placed in front of the parts of the marble architrave with relief themes. As the explanatory text reads these parts are not from the Parthenon; they are ‘inspired from classical antiquity:

Marble closure slab with relief cross, coming from the pulpit of the Christian Parthenon, BXM 393, 5th- 6th century. Parts of marble architrave with relief themes
These parts are from Athens, and ‘probably part of a Christian Church apse decoration on the Acropolis’. Put it simply, parts of the marble architrave function as a reference to the classic Greek architecture. The assemblage of the reconstructed fragments of what is called ‘Christian Parthenon’ is the strongest visual element in this part of the exhibitionary complex. With the representation of the ‘Christian Parthenon’, once again Byzantium’s continuity from the ancient Greek world is being suggested.

The introductory text of the sub-theme I.5. *Christian Egypt and Coptic art*, reads:

The Christians of Egypt are called Copts, a term derived from a corruption of the Greek word “Aigyptios” in the Arabic language. Coptic art can be traced back to the first Christian centuries and continued after the Islamic conquest of Egypt in 642. Two artistic traditions are married in Coptic art: 1) ancient Greek art with its naturalistic rendering of human forms and the physical environment, and 2) oriental art which, along with the Pharaonic artistic influences, adhered to a rigid, hieratic approach with a linear and ornamental tendency (Byzantine and Christian Museum: I.5. *Christian Egypt and Coptic art*, introductory text, 2016).

I will extract three elements from this text. First the information that the term ‘Copts’ is ‘derived from a corruption of the Greek word “Aigyptios’ suggests a relation...
between Greeks and Copts. Second, the information that ‘Coptic art can be traced back to the first Christian centuries and continued after the Islamic conquest of Egypt’ suggests that Coptic art has been unchanged despite the Islamic invasion: that it resisted Islamisation and remained Christian. Third, the explanation of the nature and origins of Coptic art, i.e. Greek and oriental traditions, existing along with the Pharaonic artistic influences, actually suggests that Greek influence never stopped, despite its ‘marriage’ with oriental traditions and Pharaonic artistic influences. This interpretation is (re)presented through the Coptic, Corinthian style column capitals and the Coptic Icon depicting an archangel, whose form resembles the Byzantine iconographic style (*Fig. 23 below*).

*Fig. 23.* Byzantine and Christian Museum: I. 5. *Christian Egypt: Coptic Art.* Corinthian column capitals, Coptic Icon, 2016

The image-text relation, i.e. the column capitals together with the icon combined with the text ‘Coptic art can be traced back to the first Christian centuries’ actually suggests a relation of Coptic art with the art/culture and Christian traditions of the Greek Byzantium. Here, the capitals and the Icon are functioning as signs; what
is taken for granted is that Byzantium is a continuity of the ancient Greek culture (art, traditions and so on), and even more strongly, that Byzantium is a Greek empire. Coptic Egypt of the fourth to the seventh century AD in history literature is counted as Byzantine Egypt. As Bagnall (2007) explains, the Byzantine period in Coptic Egypt formally begins at the end of the fourth century in 395 AD, the year of the division of the Roman Empire to the East and the West. The Byzantine period in Coptic Egypt ends with the final Arab takeover in 646 AD (Bagnall, 2007). Hence, what is called Greek here is also suggested as Byzantine and vice versa.

Finally, the introductory text of the sub-theme I.6. ‘In pastures green’: Christians in the face of death, reads:

During the first three centuries AD, Christians usually buried their dead in the pre-existing cemeteries that were used by the pagans. The first, exclusively Christian cemeteries come into use toward the end of the second century. Types of Christian tombs- vaulted, cist-graves or simple pits- did not differ from earlier Hellenistic or Roman forms (Byzantine and Christian Museum: I.6. ‘In pastures green’: Christians in the face of death, introductory text, 2016).

Here, by bringing up the resemblance of Christian tombs to earlier Hellenistic or Roman forms, continuity of the ancient Greek, but also, Roman traditions is suggested. However, the information that the types of Christian tombs did not differ from earlier Hellenistic or Roman forms suggests that the Roman element is different from the Greek (and hence, different from the Byzantine). In the introductory text of the exhibitionary complex examined earlier, it is mentioned that Byzantium’ or ‘Byzantine Empire’ was the name used in the 16th c. to describe the Roman Empire
from the fourth century onwards, but (as revealed later, by the syntagmatic and paradigmatic structure of the introductory text), this information has been selected only in support of the interpretation that at the beginning of what today is called Byzantium, i.e. at the 4th century (before the actual formation of the Greek Byzantium) several parallel ideas existed (i.e. Roman and Greek); however, in all of the exhibits so far, it is shown that Greek influence was prominent. Nevertheless, the Greek Byzantium was yet to come. What has been argued above is that in the first part of the exhibitionary complex (Theme I. From the ancient world to Byzantium), Byzantium is interpreted as a continuity of Greek antiquity, through the use of the particular museum objects and texts analysed and explained above.

To sum up, the above examples support the idea of continuity, and form the first part of the interpretation of the continuity of Greek culture/identity to the present day through Byzantium. Although the museum did not aim to present a unified national narrative (Konstantios, 2008) and despite the demystification attempt identified and explained above, the cultural Greek ideas and beliefs on Greek identity as explained in Chapter Two are still (re)produced within the museum’s exhibitionary complex: here, the interpretation is that although at the beginning of the formation of Byzantium, Roman and Greek ideas coexisted, Greek ideas prevailed and Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity.

In the section that follows I will explain the next part of the museum’s argument on the continuity of Greek culture/identity to the present day through the exhibitionary complex, where it is explained that Byzantium’s official language is Greek from the 7th century, and by this it is suggested that from the 7th century,
Byzantium became/is a Greek Empire. Below, I will identify and explain the interpretation of Byzantium as a Greek Empire.

b. Byzantium: a Greek Empire

I argue that an illustration of the interpretation of Byzantium as a Greek empire is the selection of the following object right next to the introductory text and before the entrance of the first museum room. This object is the copy of the mosaic of the Chapel in San Vitale in Ravenna where Emperor Justinian I is represented (Fig. 24 below).

![Fig. 24. Byzantine and Christian Museum: Museum entrance hall, Copy of the mosaic representation of Emperor Justinian I, 2016](image-url)
It is through the position of this object within the syntagm of the exhibitionary complex that continuity is suggested. This image functions as a visual statement, which suggests that Byzantium after Justinian became a different, new state, which has its cultural roots back to ancient Greek culture and which was a Greek Empire.

The last lawful Roman Emperor could be said to have been Romulus Augustus (e.g. Edwell et al., 2015, p. 216). However, Emperor Justinian is thought to have been ‘the last Roman emperor to speak Latin as a first language’ (Wickham, 2009, p.90), and his reign is thought to have been marked by the restoration of the Empire (Haldon, 2003, pp.17-19). Because of his restoration activities, which include his administration system and laws (Watson, 1985), Emperor Justinian has also been called the last Roman (e.g. Baker, 2002). According to this interpretation, Justinian’s successors should not be counted as Roman. They should be accounted as something else. The introduction of the exhibitionary complex by this mosaic (re)produces this idea. This suggests that Byzantium, or the Byzantine Empire, which is presented within the rooms that follow, is not a continuation of the Roman Empire. This suggests that it is something else. Particularly, this places the beginning of this new Empire after the reign of Justinian, which is when Greek became the official language of the Empire. Hence, it is being suggested that this new Empire is a continuation of Greek antiquity and a Greek Empire. The position of this mosaic at the beginning of the exhibitionary complex demonstrates that the exhibitionary complex, which is unfolded within the following museum rooms, will present this Empire.
The idea that Byzantium becomes a Greek Empire after Justinian's reign, is (re)produced/(re)constructed in the following parts of the exhibitionary complex.

Initially, it is (re)produced/(re)constructed in the introductory text of the theme I. From the Ancient World to Byzantium. The museum text reads: ‘The transition from the ancient world to the Byzantine was gradual [...] A milestone in this transition was the legalization of the Christian religion in 313 by the emperor Constantine the Great’ [...] (Byzantine and Christian museum: I. From the Ancient World to Byzantium, introductory text, 2016). The key message here is that Byzantium’s difference from the ancient world is Christianity. The text further reads:

In parallel, the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople in 330 represented a decisive shift in the empire’s centre of gravity from the Latin West to the Hellenized East. The division into a western and eastern empire in 395 and the dissolution of the western half in 476 were significant stages along the way to the end of antiquity, which can be said to have breathed its last with the closure of the philosophical schools in 529, the onset of the barbarian invasions, and the decline of the great urban centres after the sixth century (Byzantine and Christian museum: I. From the Ancient World to Byzantium, introductory text, 2016).

The key message here is that Byzantium is Greek. The West is characterised as Latin, but the East as Hellenized. The end of antiquity is placed between 529 AD, when Justinian closed down the Academy of Athens and the Arab invasions and the decline of the great urban centres after the sixth century. In this way, it is being suggested that the actual birth of Byzantium is between the 6th and 7th century. As explained in Chapter Two, it is then, when the Greek language becomes the Empire’s
official language (e.g. Ostrogorsky, 1969; Ahrweiler, cited in Bakounakis, 2010). In the introductory text of the exhibitionary complex examined above, the beginning of Byzantium is placed in the 4th century. Also, the debate of Byzantium as a name-construct comes to play.

The information on the name-construct suggests that at the beginning, i.e. the 4th century, there are several parallel ideas, before the actual formation of Byzantium, and that the actual birth of Byzantium is between the 6th and 7th century, when Greek becomes Byzantium’s official language. As explained in the previous section, the parallel ideas are referred to the museum text, but the images of the exhibitionary complex (re)construct the idea that Greek influence was prominent. Here it is being suggested that Byzantium is a Greek Empire from the moment that Greek becomes its official language. I argue that Ahrweiler’s (cited in Bakounakis, 2010) interpretation, expresses precisely the ideology on Byzantium as presented within the exhibitionary complex:

Byzantium is the Greek language and orthodoxy, the two main components of Hellenism. Certainly, Byzantium was a multinational empire, but it was a Greek-speaking Empire. The fact that Byzantium was Greek-speaking saved across the Greek culture. When the great French historian Fernand Braudel wrote that there are no French, there are only francophones, and anyone who speaks French is French, he meant that the French language is the amalgamation of the entire civilization and traditions. And Byzantium is Greek-speaking from the 7th century (Ahrweiler, cited in Bakounakis, 2010).
According to Ahrweiler (cited in Bakounakis, 2010) although Byzantium had been a multinational state, its peoples speak the Greek language; and just as Braudel (1990) explained that the French language is the amalgamation of the entire civilization and traditions, so is the Greek language for Byzantium. Hence, the underlying idea in this part of the exhibitionary complex is that since Greek is Byzantium's official language, Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity, and also, a Greek Empire.

This is repeated in sub-theme II.2. The age of crisis, where the beginning of Byzantium as the Greek Empire is placed in the 7th century. The text reads:

The administrative and military reorganization that had begun to be implemented in the seventh century contributed decisively to the survival and gradual revival of the state [...] the seventh and eighth centuries are often called the “dark ages”. During this time the Roman Empire of the East was gradually transformed into the medieval state we today call Byzantium (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II.2. The age of crisis, introductory text, 2016).

As explained above, it is being suggested that the Greek Byzantium was formulated in the 7th century, when Greek became the official state language. By saying that during the age of crisis, i.e the 7th and 8th centuries (hence, the Byzantine iconoclastic period), the Roman Empire of the East was gradually transformed into the medieval state we today call Byzantium, the text suggests that the Byzantine state survived the iconoclastic period, and revived under a different, new form. By this formulation, the text actually suggests that Byzantium transformed into a Greek
empire and places the beginning of Byzantium as the Greek Empire is in the 7th century.

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

2. The Greek Byzantine World

In this section I will explain the next part of the interpretation of the continuity of Greek culture/identity to the present day through Byzantium. For this, I will identify and analyse the parts of the exhibitionary complex where:

(a) the elements that composed the identity of Byzantium are (re)constructed/(re)produced.

(b) the idea of Byzantium as a Greek Empire is (re)constructed/(re)produced, and

(c) the ideas of the (still) dominant position of the Greek Empire in the rest of the medieval world (eastern and western) after the fourth crusade in 1204 and also, after its fall in 1453 are (re)constructed/(re)produced.

I argue that the (re)construction/(re)production of these ideas within the exhibitionary complex establishes the continuity of Greek culture/identity to the present day through Byzantium.

The theme II. The Byzantine World, opens by providing the information that Byzantium became a Greek empire from the end of 6th century onwards, and uses
this explanation to introduce the elements that compose the Greek Empire’s identity. Specifically, the introductory text of the theme reads:

The end of the dynasty founded by Emperor Justinian (6th c. AD) in effect marked the end of antiquity, and signalled the beginning of medieval Byzantine society. Slav and Arab incursions and the Iconoclastic Controversy led to a loss of territories, although this contributed to the Empire’s homogeneity, since it now embraced primarily Greek-speaking populations (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II. *The Byzantine World*, the museum, introductory text, 2016).

Here, the end of antiquity and the beginning of medieval Byzantine society are placed at the end of the dynasty founded by Emperor Justinian (6th c. AD). This suggests that the actual beginning of Byzantium starts after the 6th c. As explained in the previous theme, it is being suggested that at the beginning of the formation of Byzantium, i.e. at the 4th century, there are several parallel ideas, but early Byzantium is significantly Hellenised. In this theme the actual formation of Byzantium is clearly placed after the 6th century. According to the text, it was then when Byzantium ‘embraced primarily Greek-speaking populations’. This actually suggests that Byzantium became a Greek empire from the end of 6th century onwards. The elements that compose the Greek Empire’s identity are presented in the following text:

The structure of Byzantine society rested on three main foundations: a flexible but powerful administration, headed by the Emperor; the Christian religion, with the Patriarch at the head of the Church; and the Greco-Roman tradition and Greek language. All three left their mark on both the daily life of the Empire and its cultural
and artistic modes of expression (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II. The Byzantine World, the museum, introductory text, 2016).

According to the text these elements are: Administration/Emperorship, Christian religion/Church, Greco Roman tradition/Greek language. In the previous section I argued that the institution of emperorship is interpreted as a continuation of Greek ideas and institutions. I also argued that Christianity is interpreted as the element that changed the Greek pagan past, but not Greek ideas and institutions. Accordingly, the reference to the Greco-Roman tradition has been used only to explain that Greek ideas prevailed over Roman ideas. Finally, the use of the Greek language as Byzantium’s official language from the 7th century onwards functioned as indisputable proof of Byzantium’s Greek identity. The above is a (re)construction of the idea that Byzantium is a Greek Empire.

The text that follows introduces the interpretation of the continuation of Greek culture and identity during the several transformations of the Empire after the fourth crusade, but also, after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, by simultaneously showing to the rest of the medieval world the (still) dominant role of Greek Byzantium. The text reads:

The sack of Constantinople by the Frankish and Latin crusaders in 1204 delivered a crippling blow to the Empire, but also led to new relations and channels of contact (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II. The Byzantine World, introductory text, 2016).
The fourth Crusade that took place in 1204 is an event that divides modern historians; to some it signifies the beginning of the Latin restructuring of the Roman Empire (e.g. Tricht 2011). To others it is the point in history when Byzantine-Greek identity resists change, and remains intact despite the transformations (e.g. Bartusis, 1997). In other words, this point in history is used by some as proof of continuity of Greek-Byzantine identity, despite the several changes that took place when Latins and Franks sacked the city and established their kingdoms in Byzantium (the continuation of what Paparigopoulos called Hellenism). In other words, they use it to establish the formation of Modern Greece and Modern Greek identity, through a break in continuity, which however, is bridged by the interpretation of Byzantium’s (a) resistance to change and (b) revival.

I argue that this second interpretation is (re)constructed within the museum exhibitionary complex, through the phrase ‘the Frankish and Latin crusaders in 1204 delivered a crippling blow to the Empire, but also led to new relations and channels of contact’. The way that information is combined in this phrase silences the decisive effect that the crusade had on Byzantium: the city was completely destroyed, and along with the city the 1000 years Empire of Byzantium (e.g. Phillips, 2005). It immediately balances the ‘crippling blow’, by referring to the positive aspects of it: those of the new relations and contacts. The reference to the relations and contacts triggers the following background knowledge: the accumulation of capital in the West, which allowed the development of industrial capitalism some centuries later, was opened by the first modern colonial empire, Venice, which was created after plundering the Greek territories, following the sack of Constantinople. The most important centres of this colonial empire were in the Ionian, the Peloponnese, Crete,
Euboea, Cyprus, the Cyclades Thessaloniki, and Aegina. These centres remained parts of this newest colonial formation for many years or even centuries after 1204. At the same time, the Byzantine Empire shrank into the Greek successor states of Nicaea, Epirus and Trabizond. The triggering of this knowledge, is actually functions to establish the continuity of the Greek-Byzantine identity through a break in what could be counted as continuity. This actually suggests that the first ‘nation-state’, or states of modern Greece were established in the late Byzantine era, through the formation of the first colonial empire, Venice. In addition to this, the exhibitionary complex attempts to show, that what had remained from the Byzantine Empire was still dominating the Eastern and Western world. This makes itself apparent in the text that follows the sentence explained above:

Despite their persistent efforts, the Palaiologan emperors could do nothing to halt the political decline of the Empire following their restoration to the Byzantine throne in Constantinople in 1261. Nonetheless, the Palaiologian revival in the arts and letters was a vitally important cultural event that was to have a stimulating effect on both East and West (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II. The Byzantine World, the museum, introductory text, 2016).

Here, it is explained that the Palaiologan emperors who returned to the Byzantine throne in 1261 made efforts to bring back the lost political stability in Byzantium (or what was left of it). The text explains that their efforts were ineffective, but presents the history of the late Byzantium, from 1261 to 1453, as a rather gloomy story, which is exactly what Modern Greek historians do (e.g. Bartusis, 1997). The text highlights the Palaiologan revival in the arts and letters, which it regards as a ‘vitally
important cultural event that was to have a stimulating effect on both East and West’. Through this contention, it is being suggested that Byzantium, despite the political instability, and despite its shrinkage, was still dominant –dominant because Greek ideas and values were still prevailing and influencing the then known world. By saying that the Palaiologan revival in the arts and letters had a stimulating effect on both East and West’ the text actually suggests the contribution of Byzantium, of the Greek Empire, to the Renaissance. The Palaiologan period is frequently referred to as the ‘Palaiologan Renaissance’ and is linked to the migration of Byzantine scholars and artists to the West, who are thought to have triggered the Italian Renaissance (e.g. Genakopoulos, 1958).

I argue that the rest of the exhibitionary complex is constructed based on the basis of the above interpretations, i.e. the elements that constitute the identity of Greek Byzantium and the continuity of Greek ideas and values throughout history from the Latin and Frankish invasions in 1204 to the fall of the Empire in 1453 and onwards. Below, I will show the relevant objects and texts and I will demonstrate that these interpretations finally contribute to the interpretation of the development of the Modern Greek identity through Byzantium that is presented within the museums exhibitionary complex.

a. The identity of Greek Byzantium and the Modern Greek-Byzantine identity

Earlier I argued that Christianity is interpreted by the museum as the element that changed the Greek pagan past, but not Greek ideas and institutions. Here, I argue that Christianity (i.e. Orthodoxy) is used to represent the continuity of Byzantine traditions/values to the Modern Greek state.
The relationship between the Church and the State in Byzantium is (re)presented in The subtheme II.1. Authority and administration. This (re)presentation suggests continuity of Byzantine traditions/values to the Modern Greek state. According to the introductory text of the theme, the most powerful element of the Byzantine state was ‘the crown emperor, God’s elect, His representative on earth’, from whom all authority proceeded, from the army to the church. The text further reads:

While the patriarch of Constantinople was the head of the Church, there too the emperor played a supervisory role and enjoyed special privileges. Church and State sought jointly to unite all peoples under the aegis of Christ and, consequently, the Byzantine emperor, his earthly viceroy (Byzantine and Christian Museum II.1. Authority and Administration. Introductory text, 2016).

The phrase ‘The Church and the State sought jointly to unite all peoples under the aegis of Christ’ is not there by accident. It refers to Byzantium; however, it is also a contemporary belief of modern Greeks about their own ‘national’ identity. Although the Modern Greek nation is not run by an emperor, the Orthodox church has a constitutionally guaranteed role as the prevailing religion in Greece, and people in Greece believe that the relationship between the Church and the State is what makes the modern Greek nation. This phrase triggers the following background knowledge: in the past, State and Church in Greece were seen as inseparable, and to a certain extent they still are. A proof of this, is that today, priests and people who work for the Orthodox Greek church are on the state pay-roll, Orthodox Greek prayers and confessional instruction are part of the quotidian life of all pupils at state schools,
and Orthodox Greek religious institutions subject to tax exemptions. This suggests the continuity of Byzantine traditions/values to the Modern Greek state.

Accordingly, in sub-theme II.3. *Worship and art*, the Byzantine past is linked to the Greek present, based on the underlying belief of Modern Greeks on the state/church element that is thought to signify their national and cultural identity.

The text reads:

The centre of public worship in Byzantium was the church. There the faithful gathered to celebrate the most important events from the life of Christ and the Virgin, to honour the memory of the saints, to listen to homilies and to pray [...] This conception left its imprint on the architectural configuration and adornment of the church: art became the handmaiden of worship (Byzantine and Christian Museum, II.3. *Worship and art* Introductory text, 2016).

As explained above, the centre of public worship in modern Greece is the church. Here it is suggested that this was the practice of Byzantium; at the same time, the idea that this is also a contemporary Greek practice is (re)produced through the visual elements of the exhibitionary complex. The exhibition space at this part of the complex is turned into the inner space of a Byzantine church (*Fig. 25 below*). This is done to emphasise the greatness of the architectural configuration and adornment of the church in terms of both size and importance. According to the introductory text ‘the church was not only the House of God writ small; it was “whole universe” in miniature’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum, II.3. *Worship and art* Introductory text, 2016).
The sub-theme II.3 Worship and Art works as a ‘floating chain of signifieds’ (Barthes 1977, p. 39). The icons, the marble parts of old temples and the photographic banners placed together formulate symbols of Greek Orthodoxy – symbols in the sense that Barthes (1977, p. 51) uses the word, broadly speaking, to explain the paradigmatic condensation at the level of connotators. The objects are signs and the display, made up of all the objects, is also a sign - the type of sign is symbolic. Here, the connotation is that the most important element of Byzantine identity was religion, Orthodoxy, and religious traditions – as is exactly the case for modern Greeks. Following Barthes’ (1977) account of meaning, I argue that the connotations in this part of the exhibitionary complex do the ideological/mythological work of establishing continuity between Byzantium and modern Greece. Byzantine temples (and mostly post-Byzantine temples which however, retain many architectural features
from their predecessors) are still part of the everyday experiences of Greek people through religion. The icons are placed in that particular structure that we can see in the photograph, so that visitors get the feeling that they are in a Byzantine church. The representation of the Byzantine church is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as a product of the museum’s (micro-) power relations. The messages of the (re)presentation of the Byzantine church are produced on the basis of the Greek cultural knowledge on the importance of the church to the quotidian and the everyday visual experience in Greece. This representation suggests continuity between modern Greece and Byzantium.

The installation in the room where the sub-theme II.4. *The wall paintings of a Byzantine church. Episkopi in Evrytania* is constructed follows the same curatorial rationale of the sub-theme examined above. The museum room is again turned into a Byzantine church (*Fig. 26 below*).
The introductory text presents the timeline of the wall-paintings discovery but equally suggests their importance, as it sets selected events in a meaningful interpretive context and excludes those that it does not see as crucial. I argue that this suggests that Byzantium was not a brief moment in Greek history. The text reads:

these wall-paintings were discovered before the building of the temple was deluged, and while work was going on to record it, two earlier levels of painting from the ninth and the mid-eleventh centuries were discovered and removed from beneath the later thirteenth century painting. Much later, perhaps after a period when the church was allowed to fall into ruin, a stone-built templon was constructed, probably in the seventeenth century (Byzantine and Christian museum: II. 4. The wall paintings of a Byzantine church. Episkopi in Evrytania. Introductory text, 2016).

The text provides the information that this temple had wall paintings dating back to the 9th century. Then it explains that another layer was added in the mid-eleventh century and another in the thirteenth century. The latest intervention was made in the 17th century, something which means that the temple was functioning from the Byzantine times (at least from the 9th century) until the post-Byzantine times (at least until the 17th century). The evolution of the art is shown in the museum exhibitionary complex through the wall paintings, which came from several different layers, and hence periods. Here, it is being suggested that the culture of Byzantium in Greece was evolving despite all the changes it was subjected to, from the period
of iconoclasm to the fall of Constantinople and beyond, i.e. the years that Greece was under the Ottoman rule. Hence again this is a (re)presentation of the continuity of Hellenism to the modern time through Byzantium.

The sub-theme II.5. *Attica, a Byzantine province* demonstrates the direct link of Byzantium to the ancient Greek past. The introductory text of the sub-theme reads:

Attica was an important province of the Byzantine Empire on account of its agricultural and industrial productivity, but also for its cultural contribution – the city of Athens, indissolubly associated with its ancient past, remained a centre of learning (Byzantine and Christian museum: II.5. *Attica, a Byzantine province*. introductory text, 2016).

Here, the references on the cultural contribution of Attica, and more particularly on the city of Athens, which is ‘indissolubly associated with its ancient past’ and ‘remained a centre of learning’ in combination with the visual images of the reconstructed marble parts (*Fig. 27 below*), symbolise and suggest continuity. Also, they function as an illustration of the above account on the evolution of the culture of Byzantium in Greece despite all the changes it was subjected to.
The representation of the Church follows the same curatorial rationale as the previous sections (analysed above): the particular structure of the column and capital refers to the ancient Greek classic architecture, and through this, continuity between the ancient Greek world and the Early Christian world is suggested through the most recognisable symbol of Greek antiquity: the ancient Greek temple. In support of this, the text reads:

The many-layered architectural tradition and a lasting taste for innovation were stamped on the dozens of new churches built at this time across Athens’ extensive urban fabric, with the result that a new type of church came into being, that known as Athenian (Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens: II.5. Attica, a Byzantine province, introductory text, 2016).
Following the statement on the ‘many-layered architectural tradition’, the text also explains that ‘many aspects of the everyday life in Byzantium continued in one form or another into modern Greek society’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens: II. 7. *Aspects of public and private life* introductory text, 2016). In combination with the above, once again, the continuity of Hellenism through Byzantium is suggested throughout time.

With regards to Byzantium’s last period, the Palaiologan period, it is explained that Byzantium reaches its artistic zenith, especially in painting. Saturated in the classical tradition, this great artistic culmination went on to serve as the foundation for yet another glorious phase, in post-Byzantine painting (Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens II.8. *The Palaiologan period, the final flowering of Byzantium*, introductory text, 2016).

Through this formulation, the text is suggesting that the Palaiologan period has contributed not only to the preservation of the classical tradition, but also to the period after the fall of Constantinople, i.e. to the post-Byzantine period. Icons that are representative of the Palaiologan period, such as the icon of Virgin Mary Hodegetria, which we may see in *Fig. 28 below*, are used as proof of this. This is a characteristic icon that has been reproduced in the post-Byzantine period slightly modified (e.g. *The Theotokos of the Pathos*, 17th century, BXM 01562, *Fig. 29 below*) and is still used in the present day as a prototype for the making of icons.
Fig. 28. Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens: II.8. *The Palaiologan period, the final flowering of Byzantium*, 2016

Fig. 29. *The Theotokos of the Pathos*, 17th century, BXM 01562

In agreement with the above, the following text says that after Constantinople fell in 1453:
Byzantine civilization adapted to its new circumstances and continued to thrive. Rallying around the Orthodox Church, it remained the focal point of the Orthodox world and saw the Greeks and their culture through to the establishment of the modern Greek state (Byzantine and Christian Museum: II.9. *The fall of Constantinople*, introductory text, 2016).

This text reproduces the Greek cultural beliefs, ideas and values on the formation of Modern Greek identity. As explained in Chapter Two, modern Greeks believe that the Orthodox Church has played a crucial role in the preservation and continuation of Byzantine culture. Also, they believe that this contributed to the preservation of Greek-Byzantine identity from the fall of Constantinople to the establishment of the Modern Greek state and hence, to the formation of the Greek-Byzantine identity of Modern Greeks. This text suggests that although Byzantium fell in 1453, its culture survived and continued throughout history due to the Orthodox Church. In Chapter Two, it was noted that Paparigopoulos (1871) explained this under his term ‘Hellenic Christianism’.

These beliefs, ideas and values are also reproduced in the theme IV. *From Byzantium to Modern Era*, which (re)presents the contribution of the Orthodox Church as crucial to the preservation of Byzantine culture and to its continuation through the so-called age of ‘darkness’ (the period of Turkish sovereignty in Greece after the fall of Constantinople and for the following 400 years). The church is explained ‘as a point of reference for the Christians: a nexus preserving Byzantine tradition, Greek Orthodox instruction and the Greek language, which would go on to contribute to the creation of a Greek national identity’ (Byzantine and Christian
Museum: IV. From Byzantium to Modern Era, introductory text, 2016). This summarises the main points of the interpretation of Modern Greek identity as a continuation of Byzantium. Previously, Byzantium was (re)presented as the continuation of Greek antiquity and Byzantium itself as a Greek Empire. This part of the complex serves as proof of the continuity of Byzantine culture (and hence Greek culture) throughout the years of Turkish sovereignty and hence, of the continuity of Greek identity from the ancient past to the present through Byzantium.

Therefore, the exhibitionary complex actually represents the idea of the ‘united and continuous Hellenism’, which as the former museum director explained was not the museum’s objective (Konstantios, 2008, p. 19). Although this was not the museum’s objective, I have shown that these ideas, values and beliefs make themselves apparent within the exhibitionary complex. I argue that this unsuccessful attempt of demystification is illustrative of how power functions: the ‘general politics’ and ‘regimes of truth’, i.e. the result of scientific discourse and institutions of Greek society/culture, which are reinforced through the education system, the media, and the flux of political ideologies and which are made to function as true. As power is productive, these regimes of truth are (re)constructed/(re)produced within the images and texts of the exhibitionary complex and the exhibitionary meaning remains mystified. In support of my argument I will bring into my analysis the following text, with which I choose to close the identification and explanation of the museum’s reproduction/reconstruction of the Modern Greek identity as Greek-Byzantine. The text, which refers to the notion of ‘Genos’ reads:

The notion of “Genos” (Greek ethnicity) is tied up with the identity of New Hellenism, as it emerged in the period of Ottoman rule. It does not relate to all the “Rum”, i.e. all
the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, only those who shared both the Orthodox faith and the Greek-Byzantine tradition (Byzantine and Christian Museum: IV.3. The Ottoman Conquest and the “Genos”; introductory text, 2016).

Here the text reproduces the narrative-construct of the ‘united and continuous Hellenism’ according to which Greek culture resisted Ottomisation/Islamisation during the years of the Ottoman conquest and remained ‘intact’ (of relevance here is the historical/political construct ‘Kryfo Scholeio’ from Chapter Two, which was used in support of this argument. The ‘Kryfo Scholeio’ was supposed to be an underground school for teaching, and thus, for preserving Greek culture, language and Greek Orthodox religion, provided by the Greek Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule in Greece. Until very recently, this was taught in Greek schools as part of Greek history). The text says that ‘the notion of Genos (Greek ethnicity) is tied up with the identity of Greek Hellenism’ which however, ‘does not relate to all “Rum”’, but ‘only to those who shared the Orthodox faith and Greek-Byzantine tradition’. The museum negotiates Greek identity: the underlying idea/belief, (i.e. what is taken for granted here), is the commonly shared knowledge that Modern Greek identity is Orthodoxy and Greek-Byzantine tradition. The museum text reads:

It [the “Genos” (Greek ethnicity)] is not concerned with one particular section of the population but many different groups, spread throughout all levels of society. It refers to the self-governing communities on Greek soil, to the Phanariots and to those who were producing intellectual or artistic works in Moldavia, Wallachia and Istanbul. It means also the Arvanites from Souli. And finally it means all those who, centuries later, embraced the ground-breaking ideas of the Philiki Etaireia (Greek revolutionary society) and the Enlightenment and demanded their freedom in the Greek War of
Independence in 1821. The notion of “Genos” has connotations of a political and cultural nature. It is a way of differentiating between “ourselves” and “others”. And it is this “identity” which, whether operating autonomously or in conditions of utter subjugation, can produce social benefits and high-quality works of art, architecture and icons, wall-paintings and objects of minor arts, textiles or printed publications (Byzantine and Christian Museum: IV.3. The Ottoman Conquest and the “Genos”, introductory text, 2016).

I argue that this is testament to the beliefs, ideas and values of modern Greeks on the continuation of Hellenism from the post-Byzantine period to the present time. For example, the text explains that the “Genos” refers to ‘the self-governing communities on Greek soil, to the Phanariots’, i.e. to the remnants of the Byzantine aristocracy (Pavlowitch, 2014, p. 16), to a distinct social class, the so-called Greek aristocracy of Constantinople (Pallis, 1951), which gradually emerged after the fall of Constantinople. The Phanariots were members of the society of the Greeks of Byzantium, and of the Orthodox Church. The Phanariots were a ‘closed’ group, which today could be compared to the bourgeoisie. Their interests focused on economic growth, social status and political action; however, these were all based on ideas around the preservation of their/the Greek origin and identity as well as Orthodoxy (through, for example, education, traditions, beliefs, but also, common blood). Even more, the Phanariots attempted to ‘combine the nationalistic forces of Hellenism in a passionate if illogical alliance with the ecumenical traditions of Byzantium and the Orthodox Church’ (Ranciman, 1986, cited in Roudometof, 2001, p. 55). Although Roudometof (2001) supports that Phanariots’ ‘ideological orientation should not be
viewed as a precursor of modern Greek nationalism’ (Roudometof, 2001, p. 55), the idea that Phanariots contributed to the preservation of Greek-Byzantine identity through their actions, is well established and commonly shared within Greek culture: this was taught in the Greek school from the establishment of the modern Greek state until the recent years. The text reproduces this idea. It also brings into the discussion Moldavia and Wallachia: the parts of the Balkans managed by Greek Phanariots in the 18th century (East, 1929, p. 4). It says that the “Genos” refers to ‘those who were producing intellectual or artistic works in Moldavia, Wallachia and Istanbul’ – the suggestion here is that it was Greek intellectuals and artists who were brought to Moldavia and Wallachia by the Phanariots, and Greek intellectuals and artists who lived in Constantinople (today, Istanbul).

The use of the name Istanbul in the text is indicative of the attempt at demystification. Modern Greeks would avoid using the name ‘Istanbul’ for Constantinople, as it is the Turkish name given to Constantinople after its fall to the Ottoman Turks. If a reference to the name ‘Istanbul’ was to be made, then usually, an explanation on the significance of the modern name would follow, i.e. that the name Istanbul comes from the Greek ες την Πόλιν, (pronounced as: es tin polin) meaning ‘in the city’, which is based on the common Greek usage of referring to Constantinople simply as ‘The City’. This shows the ideological opposition of Modern Greeks to the renaming of Constantinople to ‘Istanbul’. The name ‘Istanbul’, which is a corruption of the phrase es tin polin, connotes the Greek ethnicity of the city, once capital of the Byzantine Empire, and has extensions on the explanation of the Modern Greek cultural identity. However, Modern Greeks would avoid using the name Istanbul and explain that it means ‘in the City’ for the following reason: the
city’s name was officially changed from Constantinople to Istanbul after the formation of the Turkish Republic under Kemal Ataturk in the early 1920’s. Modern Turks explain the name ‘Istanbul’ as a corruption of the word ‘Islambul’, which means ‘city of Islam’. This appellation has been attributed to Sultan Mehmet II. The first use of the word ‘Islambul’ on coinage took place between 1703 and 1730 during the reign of Sultan Ahmad III (Krause et. al, 1987, p. 660). Modern Greece is not secular. As explained in Chapter Two, Orthodoxy, which was the state religion of Byzantium, represents the majority of the Modern Greek population and constitutes the state religion of Modern Greece. According to the U.S. International Religious Freedom Report (2007), an estimated 97 percent of Greek citizens identified themselves as Greek Orthodox Christians. To this day, for the above reasons most Greeks would not call the city Istanbul and most official documents would still list it as ‘Constantinople’. A proof on this would be that until recently, the Arrivals/Departures board at the Athens International Airport would mention it as ‘Constantinople’. However, its use is not avoided here.

Nevertheless, this attempt is followed by ‘mystified’ messages. The text suggests that the notion of “Genos” also refers to those who were producing intellectual or artistic works in Moldavia, Wallachia’. Wallachia is part of the geographical area of today’s Romania, for example, the Romanian capital Bucharest is in Wallachia. Nowadays, 80 per cent of the Romanian population is Orthodox Christian, although Romania is a secular state (Negruty, 2014; U.S. International Religious Freedom Report, 2007). Orthodoxy in contemporary Romania is seen either as a consequence of the Phanariots’ regime (e.g. Kokosalakis, 1998, p. 60) or as a consequence of the Russian invasion in 1828 and the treaty signed between Russia
and Turkey in 1829, which allowed Russian armies to occupy Moldavia and Wallachia (Kerns, 1993, p. 25). After the fall of Constantinople and the capture of Byzantium’s lands by the Ottoman Turks, Russia was the only part of the Orthodox communion, which remained outside the control of the Ottoman Empire. Until today, Orthodoxy remains the largest single religious faith in Russia, as well as Greece and Romania. The text here actually suggests that Orthodoxy in contemporary Romania is a consequence of the Phanariots’ regime.

Also, the text says that the notion of “Genos” refers to Arvanites from Souli, and to the Philiki Etaireia. Arvanites from Souli or Souliotes were Orthodox Christian and were living in Epirus, in the area called Souli. They contributed to the Phanariots’ cause in the Greek War of Independence initiated by the Philiki Etaireia in 1821, but this had little to do with defending their/the ‘Greek ethnicity’, the ‘Genos’. Philiki Etaireia was a secret 19th-century organisation run by Phanariots, with the aim of overthrowing the Ottoman rule of Greece and establishing an independent Greek state. The Souliotes, because of the inaccessibility of their mountain villages, had lived without domination by the Ottomans until 1803, when Ali Pasha attempted to capture them (Thomopoulos, 2012). Ali Pasha’s Muslim Albanian troops killed most of the Souliotes men. In order to avoid being captured their women committed group suicide: ‘they held their young children in their arms and one by one, while dancing a traditional line dance, threw themselves over a cliff of the Zalongo mountain’ (Thomopoulos, 2012, pp. 55-56). The surviving Souliotes were forced by the Ottomans to move to the rest of Greece (Russell and Cohn, 2012). Today, modern Greeks, in admiration of Souliotes’ courage, use the so-called ‘Dance of Zalongo’ as a metaphor to explain the lack of choice in a difficult situation. But on the other hand,
they consider Souliotes as of Albanian origin and they do not accept them as Greeks. In the 14th century, Albanians migrated in the Greek territory and settled in Epirus, central Greece, and later Euboea (Setton, 1976). However, the Greeks did not accept them. An explanation for this could be that in 1382, the King of Aragon -Attica and Boeotia, after the Catalan conquest in the fourth Crusade were ruled by the Catalans-ordered Albanians’ exemption from taxes (Miller, 1908, p. 317), which led to hostility between the Greek and Albanian populations. Until today, Albanians are not welcome by Greeks. In Modern Greek culture, the word Albanian is used pejoratively to describe someone who is considered unpolished, ignorant, a hypocrite.

“Genos” in Greek language means the generation, the origin, the race, the nation. The museum explains that the Genos is a way of differentiating between “ourselves” and “others”.

But, who are ‘we’, “ourselves”, here, and who are the “others”? “Ourselves”, the ‘we’ is the construction of the Greek imagined community’s ideas, values and beliefs on its own identity. The ‘ourselves’ then, refers to the ones who have the Greek-Byzantine identity. The ‘ourselves’ in this context, refers to the Greek generation, origin, race and nation. The integration of Souliotes into the narrative is again an attempt to demystify the exhibitionary meaning. However, in the explanation of “Genos”, the ideas, values and beliefs on the continuity of Hellenism (through the Philiki Etaireia, Orthodoxy and so on) prevail. But, as Derrida (1992) explains, no identity is closed and pure; it is always affected by what it excludes, hence identity is in part constituted by what it opposes in the sense that identity is only what it is because of its relation to that which it is not; identity is constituted by the presence inside of what is different and which is supposedly forced outside that identity. In this
example, the identity of the people referred to as ‘Genos’, as the ‘ourselves’ is constituted by what it opposes: it is constituted in relation to who they are not, to the others, the Souliotes, Moldavia and Wallachia, the Ottomans.

b. The contribution of the *Greek* Byzantium to the Renaissance: The European nature of the Modern Greek identity

Through the exhibitionary complex, it is also being suggested that Byzantium contributed to the Renaissance. I argue that this idea is (re)constructed here and functions as another proof of the continuation of Greek-Byzantine ideas, values and beliefs after the fall of Byzantium. Specifically, here it is suggested that before the fall of Constantinople, Byzantine ideas travelled across the west through scholarly clerics and laymen who immigrated to the west. The museum text reads:

> From as early as the 14th c. and above all in the 15th c., just when everything seemed to be leading to the collapse of the Byzantine Empire and the Fall of Constantinople, there was a remarkable upsurge in activity in intellectual and artistic circles. Scholarly clerics and laymen, chiefly pursuing the theological questions of the age, produced noteworthy philosophical and theological treatises. Many of them become extremely active in the West. They familiarize the Western world with basic works of classical and Byzantine literature, thus contributing to the European Renaissance (Byzantine and Christian museum: III. Intellectual and Artistic Activity in the 15th century, introductory text, 2016)

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

Another text also says that ‘Byzantine tradition and the Greek language encounter, sometimes with glorious results, the beginnings of the European Renaissance’ (Byzantine and Christian Museum: IV. From Byzantium to Modern Era, introductory text, 2016). The icons shown in the sub-theme IV.1a. Society and Art in Venetian Crete, are used in support of this. In Venetian Crete, the Byzantine artistic tradition came into contact with the western, whose influence was absorbed into elements of Byzantine art. For example, the style of the icons with the theme ‘The Virgin nursing the Child and Saints’ shown in Fig. 30 below is not typical Byzantine; it
is post-Byzantine and specifically, of the Cretan school. Half-length paintings of Virgin Mary are common in Byzantine iconography, but the background and other stylistic features of the icons shown (e.g. white headscarf) resemble the Madonna and Child paintings that are common in Italian Renaissance painting, particularly in Venice.

![Icons of Virgin Mary](image)

**Fig. 30.** Byzantine and Christian Museum: IV.1a. *Society and Art in Venetian Crete*, 2016

This is not surprising however, as Crete was under Venetian rule between 1205 and 1669 (the period of Venetocracy in Greece). The post-Byzantine style that developed there was under increasing western influence. It is worth mentioning that the painter Domenicos Theotocopoulos, known as El Greco, was born in Crete in 1541 and received training in the Cretan School before leaving for Venice and later for Rome and Spain (Panagiotakes, 2009). This is why his early work is very
reminiscent of Byzantine art. For modern Greeks, El Greco is a symbol of Greek-Byzantine continuity in the Renaissance. As Rice (1937) explains, ‘the belief that El Greco was indebted to the Byzantine world, not only for his Byzantine blood, but also to a considerable degree for the nature and character of his art is now hardly to be disputed’ (Rice, 1937, p. 34). Nevertheless, there is no reference to El Greco’s work in the exhibitionary complex. I argue that this could be thought of as an attempt at demystification and democratisation of the exhibition. Today, El Greco is remembered as ‘the painter who raised the name of his country in the whole world: the El Greco, the Greek’ (Labraki-Plaka, 2000). Greek nationalist political discourse is firmly anchored to El Greco’s work. El Greco’s example, as the Greek painter whose work originated from post-Byzantine art and who triggered the Renaissance, is frequently used to underline the general culture, values and identity of the contemporary Greek ‘nationals’. The museum, perhaps in an attempt to present an ideology-free exhibitionary complex chose not to include such relevant information. However, demystification in the context of the museum exhibitionary complex, would not mean not presenting a topic which carries connotations of an ideological nature, but avoiding the (re)construction/(re)production of information of an ideological nature in the (re)presentation of the topic. Also, democratisation in this context would mean providing access to information and making information available to all audiences. If this would be taken as an attempt at demystification and democratisation, then it would and should be seen as an unsuccessful attempt as it does not cover the principles of either democratisation or demystification.
Conclusions

I have argued that Byzantium in the Byzantine and Christian museum exhibitionary complex is interpreted as:

(a) a continuity of Greek antiquity
(b) a Greek Empire
(c) responsible for the continuation of Greek culture and identity (Hellenism) from antiquity to the establishment of the Modern Greek State.

Continuity with Greek antiquity is suggested in terms of language, artistic and architectural traditions, ideas and beliefs, and for the same reasons Byzantium is seen as a Greek Empire. It is also suggested that these elements were strong enough to survive throughout history. The Church is seen as key to the continuity of the Greek language and Orthodox traditions during the years of the Ottoman conquest. In addition, the Greek-Byzantine influences on the Renaissance are interpreted as part of the idea of continuity, but also of the Modern Greek identity's European-ness.

Through the above, I have demonstrated that the exhibitionary complex (re)presents/(re)produces the Greek cultural ideas, values and beliefs on Greek-Byzantine identity. More specifically, I have demonstrated that this particular representation and interpretation of Byzantium is stemming from the cultural knowledge of Greeks on their ‘own’ national identity: the Greek, the Byzantine, the Orthodox, the European elements, all of which make the modern Greek national identity. And this also shows that the structure/institutions (culture) surrounding the museum defines the making of exhibitionary meaning and that curators (human agents) are not making intentionally this (re) construction of identity within the exhibitionary complex. Simply, they (re) produce themselves in interaction with others.
through culture/society, which always pre-exists them. The others are the non-Greek, the non-Byzantine, the non-Orthodox, the non-European.

The cultural ideas, values and beliefs on Greek-Byzantine identity are formulated through cultural conventions constructed and reproduced in Greece within the years from the formation of the Modern Greek state in the 19th century to the present day, which have been thoroughly explained in Chapter Two. The particular cultural conventions were initially constructed in the 19th century, after political intervention on the interpretation of history in the attempt to define the Greek national identity. The purpose of it was to empower the newly formulated state and most importantly, to claim back the ‘lost’ Hellenic territories. This approach was considered necessary at a time that Greece was re-defining its borders.

In the introduction of this case study, it has been explained that the museum has always followed the politics of its time, and that the political ideology of each period represents a source that informs its curatorial practices and the making of exhibitionary meaning. As shown in the formative history of the museum, the collecting of Byzantine art and the foundation of the Byzantine museum was of national significance to Greece. At the beginning of the 19th century, when the museum was established, Byzantium was not only recognised as part of the history of the Greek nation, but also seen as a continuation of Greek culture from the antiquity to the Modern Greek State. Byzantine culture and hence the Byzantine museum has been seen and used as an official ‘channel’ that would develop and promote nationalistic ideas such as the ‘Great Idea’. The ‘Great Idea’ was the axis of the internal and foreign policy of Greece until the third decade of the 20th century. The inset of the ‘Great Idea’ was to broaden the Greek borders to include areas with
Greek populations that were under foreign domination. More Particularly, the Great idea, the ideological expression of Greek nationalism, had as its goal ‘the liberation of all Greeks who were under Turkish sovereignty and their integration into a nation-state with its capital in Constantinople’ (Veremis, 1999, p. 31), the once capital of the past Byzantine Empire. In the past, these were the ideas (re)constructed within the images and texts of the museum’s exhibitionary complex. However, over the years and with the development of revisionist history and new museology, the past nationalistic ideas were thought to have no place in the museum. After the museum had acquired a wide variety of objects, a new approach was not only seen as necessary, but also possible. The museum’s purpose in the making of the current exhibitionary complex was to remove the national/cultural myths and bring the exhibition content close to every potential visitor, i.e. to apply the concepts/practices of democratisation and demystification to its exhibitionary complex.

I have shown that the function of cultural presuppositions in the making of exhibitionary meaning is in a position of exteriority in relation to the revised ideology on Byzantium and the current curatorial concepts/practices of demystification and democratisation. The museum has actually incorporated the contemporary curatorial concepts into its practices, but the above analysis shows how the new concepts have not worked, due to the cultural implications of the presuppositions on the making of exhibitionary meaning. Demystification and democratisation of the exhibition have been unsuccessful, because of the way that power/cultural knowledge functions. The current, permanent exhibitionary complex remains mystified and within this context, democratisation and demystification function as another form of mystification.
I have analysed and explained that the nationalistic ideology of the past, (as expressed in the Great Idea) is making itself apparent within the images and texts of the Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex -for example, through the (re)construction/(re)production of the territorial claims on the ‘lost’ Hellenic territories. Also, through the (re)construction/(re)production of ideas, beliefs and values of the Greek imagined community on its ‘own’ ‘national’ identity through Byzantium.

Finally, the exhibitionary complex of the Byzantine and Christian Museum, is not free from myths: the culturally (re)constructed/(re)produced ideology within the exhibitionary complex is entangled with the image of the Greek imagined community on its national identity, which Greece in effect promotes: the ancient Greek, the Byzantine, the Orthodox, the European elements, all of which make the Modern Greek national identity. The Byzantine and Christian Museum, far from being democratised remains mystified and functions as an institution of power, instead of a democratic institution.

The Byzantine and Christian Museum example (as the British Museum example) demonstrates that the constructive role of knowledge in the making of exhibitionary meaning has cultural and political implications: the non-demystified, non-democratised (re)presentation of the past culture of Byzantium is the cultural implication of the interaction of cultural knowledge (of the knowledge of the Greek imagined community on its ‘own’ identity) with the making of exhibitionary meaning-the end product and effect of the productive micro-powers and relations that make up the national museum institution. This interaction is the reason why the power system of the exhibitionary complex is still in play although we are shifting into the era of the ‘Democratic’ museum. Also, the reason why the culturally (re)constructed
ideology within its exhibitionary complex is entangled with the image of the Greek imagined community that Greece in effect promotes, which is the political implication of the cultural function of the presuppositions involved in the museum's curatorial practices.
Case Study 3. The Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki

Introduction

The Byzantine exhibitionary complex in the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki might be considered redundant, since it belongs to a Greek national museum dedicated to Byzantine Culture, just like the exhibitionary complex of the Byzantine Museum in Athens. However, it is a different construction with different interpretations, different meanings and a unique and different history.

First of all, it is located in Thessaloniki, which is promoted by the Museum as ‘the most Byzantine city of the modern Greek state’ (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2015). The official opening of the museum in 1994 marked the end of a story that had begun after the liberation of Thessaloniki in 1912 during the First Balkan War. In 1913, Dragoumis, the Governor General of Macedonia issued a decree for the establishment of a Central Byzantine Museum in Thessaloniki, and the then Metropolitan priest of the city, suggested that the building of Acheiropoietos Church would be the most suitable to house the museum. Finally, in 1914 it was decided that the Byzantine museum should be built in the Greek capital. Indeed, the same year, the Christian and Byzantine Museum was founded in Athens. In the meantime, large numbers of Christian sculptures were collected in the building of the Rotonda church in Thessaloniki, which had been issued as the new Macedonian Byzantine museum, after a government’s decision, which however, was never realised. In 1916 it was decided that the antiquities should be transferred from Thessaloniki to Athens ‘for
their own protection’ as it is ironically explained by the museum in its official website (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2015a). These antiquities were incorporated into the collection of the Byzantine Museum in Athens. The demand for the establishment of a Byzantine museum in Thessaloniki appeared again after the change of regime in 1974. The museum was finally founded in October 1993. The antiquities that were kept in the Athens museum from 1916 returned to Thessaloniki in June 1994, after many years of debate between the two museums and the Greek Ministry of Culture, as documents from the Historical and Photographic Archive of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens reveal. Some of the so-called ‘Thessaloniki antiquities’ were displayed in the temporary exhibition of the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Byzantine Treasures of Thessaloniki: The Return Journey, which opened the museum on the 11th of September 1994.

The political history surrounding the museum informs the interpretation of Byzantium that appears in its current, permanent exhibitionary complex. For this reason, I consider it important to explain this history in detail. As explained above, the idea of establishing a Byzantine museum in Thessaloniki had been an aspiration since 1912 after the city of Thessaloniki was released from the Bulgarians, following its capture in the First Balkan War. The first Balkan War was fought mainly in the territory of Macedonia, where ‘rival Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian irregulars fought against the Ottoman authorities as well as against each other’ (Hall, 2011). Specifically, Greece declared war on the Ottoman Empire claiming back its territories, which were still under Ottoman rule. At the same time, Bulgaria, in an effort to meet its national aspirations wanted to capture Thessaloniki: Macedonia was and is the crossroads of the Balkan peninsula; for example, the trader would always travel
through Macedonia to avoid the Balkan Mountains and as a result, it has been thought that those who would control the valley of the river Vardar are the masters of the Balkans (Glenny, 2000, p. 156). This is why Macedonia has been wanted so much by the Balkan countries. For the Bulgarians, Thessaloniki was key to the conquest of Macedonia. On 26 October 1912, after negotiations of the commander of the Ottoman army with both Greece and Bulgaria, the Greek army accepted the surrender of the city and of the Ottoman army (Russell, 2010). Thessaloniki functioned as Greece’s bulwark against the Ottoman and Balkan invaders and at the same time, patroness of the Greek-Byzantine culture.

It is worth mentioning that the 26 October is the feast day of the city’s patron saint, Saint Demetrios; a tradition that dates back to Byzantine times and is still alive nowadays. This is why both Saint Demetrios and this date are considered symbolic for modern Thessaloniki. It is important to explain that in 2001, this date was considered as a compulsory public holiday for the city of Thessaloniki (Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, Issue B, Bulletin Number 1558, 15.11.2001). This is an example of the way that Thessaloniki reflects its Byzantine past to the present. It is believed that Saint Demetrios was the Patron Saint who protected the city and allowed its reunion with the rest of the Greek territory in 1912 (Holly Metropolis of Piraeus, 2015). For this reason, Saint Demetrios and the date of the feast day are thought to symbolise the Byzantine-Greek identity of the city of Thessaloniki. This is the reason why, after the first Balkan war, it was suggested that a Byzantine museum should be established in Thessaloniki.

After the release of Thessaloniki in 1912, the Great Idea was rekindled and immediately after Thessaloniki’s reunion with the rest of the Greek territory,
Adamantios Adamantiou (who served as the first museum director of the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens from 1914 to 1923) was elected Professor of Byzantine art and archaeology in Athens University (Lazaridou, 2006; Chalkia, 2006). Adamantiou, after becoming a Professor, went to the city of Thessaloniki, aiming to study its monuments. Two years after this study he published his book *Byzantine Thessaloniki* (*New Hellenosemon*, 1912, cited in Chalkia 2006, p. 56), and he also sent a letter to the General Commander of Thessaloniki, Stefanos Dragoumis, entitled: ‘For the establishment and arrangement of a Central Byzantine Museum in Macedonia’ (Chalkia, 2006). In his letter, Adamantiou explains that Greece is under an obligation to establish a Byzantine Museum, and he observes that the Divine Providence reserved Thessaloniki as the place for its establishment, which is not only a crucial Byzantine centre, but also ‘the city which symbolises the national ideals on the re-establishment of the Great Greek Empire […] The Byzantine Museum would primarily be the temple of art and history of the Medieval Greece’ (Chalkia, 2006, p. 56). Of course, in this context, the reference to the Divine Providence suggests Saint Demetrious’ protection and help in regaining the city in the first Balkan war, and the ‘Great Greek Empire’ is no other than Byzantium. On the 21st of August 1913, Dragoumis signed a decree in which the establishment of a ‘Central Byzantine Museum in Macedonia’ is decided (Chalkia, 2006). Also, on the 23rd of August 1913, Dragoumis, declared the Byzantine temples of Thessaloniki as national monuments of Greece following the Law 2646 voted on in 1899 (cited in Chalkia, 2006). However, the plan for the establishment of the museum was never implemented. As Chalkia (2006) explains, ‘Political expendience, imposed the establishment of the ‘Central Byzantine Museum’ in the capital’; this was established by the Law 401/ 1914
(Chalkia, 2006, p. 57), after which, the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens was founded.

Finally, the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki opened to the public gradually between 1994 and early 2004. The Museum was awarded the Council of Europe Museum Prize for 2005, following the recommendation of the Council’s Committee for Culture, Science and Education (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2016; Parliamentary Assembly website, 2016).

The exhibitionary complex of the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki is important to this study, not only because it is another source of data concerning the way that Byzantine history, art and culture are thought of and seen by Greeks nowadays, but also because of its recognised contribution to a greater understanding of culture, as demonstrated by the award of the Prize, and because it reveals how the relics of Byzantine Culture were managed by the Greek state from the moment that Byzantine history was regarded as part of Greek national history.

In this case study, I argue that the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki has the same remit as the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens: to explain Modern Greek identity through Byzantium. More specifically, I argue that the (re)construction/(re)production of Greek cultural ideas, values and beliefs in relation to Modern Greek identity and on Byzantium is effected by the selection of specific museum objects and texts. This selection has the effect of the (re)presentation of the continuity of Greek identity from antiquity to the present day. I argue that in the exhibitionary complex of the Thessaloniki museum, (like in the exhibitionary complex of the Athens Museum), Byzantium is interpreted as a Greek Empire, and is placed within the narrative of national unity. However, I also argue that in this construct,
Thessaloniki is interpreted as representative of Byzantium, i.e. as the place where Byzantine culture and hence, Greek-Byzantine identity flourished during the years that Thessaloniki was part of Byzantium; also, the place where Greek-Byzantine identity had been preserved during the years of the Ottoman conquest. Hence, I argue that Thessaloniki is interpreted as the place where Greek-Byzantine identity was born and remained alive throughout history.

Thessaloniki was the second largest city of the Byzantine Empire, after Constantinople and the most important Byzantine centre in the Greek territory (Geymonat, 2012, p. 47; Boinodiris, 2004 p. 197; Bredenkamp, 1996, p. 65). Also, Thessaloniki is the capital city of the county of Macedonia. This is why local people have long regarded Thessaloniki as the major centre of Greek and Byzantine culture in the Greek territory. Hence, it is not surprising that the city of Thessaloniki is (re)presented as the centre of preservation of the Greek-Byzantine identity. The former museum director explains that:

The fact that most of the material exhibited originates from Thessaloniki - one of the major centres of the Byzantine empire - has enabled us to present Byzantine culture in the most coherent and integrated way possible, which could set a more general example (Tourta, 2015).

This reveals that the museum’s interpretation of Byzantium is thought of and seen as crucial, not only to Thessaloniki, where most of the exhibited material comes from, but also to the whole (where ‘the whole’ is used to indicate Greece and/or the rest of the world).

I argue that the museum’s specific position in the Greek territory, i.e. in Thessaloniki, and hence, in Macedonia, and also, its significance to Byzantium, (as the
second largest city), have played a crucial role in the interpretation of Thessaloniki as representative of Byzantium and as the place where Greek identity flourished, was preserved and also survived throughout history. In my analysis, I will explain that this interpretation is compatible with the construction of (a) Thessaloniki’s vital importance to Greece, culturally and nationally, and (b) of the Greek identity of Macedonia. The latter, aims to contradict the claims made by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), on the name Macedonia. It is important to mention that today FYROM is also called Republic of Macedonia. In other words, I will explain that the continuity of Hellenism through Byzantium in the Thessaloniki museum is also used in support of concerns arising out of the dispute over the name of Macedonia - an issue in Yugoslav-Greek relations since World War II, which was made explicit after the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991 and which still continues today.

According to its former museum director Tourta (2015) the museum’s contemporary curatorial practices were developed following the directions of new museology, with the visitor rather than the exhibits being the centre of the museum’s curatorial, i.e. the thinking behind the act of curating. In this way, Tourta (2015) suggests that the museum has adopted and adapted the concepts of democratisation and demystification to its own practices. I argue that despite the attempt to present the exhibitionary content as free of ideologically constructed reality(ies) the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex is mythologically constructed.

Above, I have described the local and historical context, which explains the museum-specific presuppositions for the making of exhibitionary meaning. In summary, Thessaloniki is thought of and seen as:
(a) the bulwark against Balkan and Ottoman invaders

(b) representative of Byzantium

(c) the place where Byzantine culture and hence Greek-Byzantine identity have been preserved throughout history

(d) in a position of superiority in relation to Athens

Also, it is believed that the Thessaloniki museum’s representation of Byzantium may cover the whole range of the history and culture of Byzantium. In my analysis below, I will identify and explain the visual and textual museum constructions where the local presuppositions, along with the wider Greek cultural and political presuppositions interact with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as the museum’s (micro-) power relations, to have the effect of (re)constructing/(re)producing a particular interpretation. For this I will look at the museum’s exhibitionary complex, which consists of the following rooms:

Room 1. *The Early Christian Church*

Room 2. *Early Christian City and Dwelling*

Room 3. *From the Elysian Fields to the Christian Paradise*

Room 4. *From Iconoclasm to the splendor of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties*

Room 5. *The dynasties of Byzantine emperors*

Room 6. *The Byzantine Castle*

Room 7. *The twilight of Byzantium (1204-1453)*

Room 8. *Dori Papastratos Collection*

Room 9. *The Demetrios Ekonomopoulos collection*
Room 10. ‘Byzantium after Byzantium’: the Byzantine legacy in the years after the Fall, 1453-19th c.

Room 11. Discovering the past

This will enable me to explain the museum-specific, local conditions for what I present as an unsuccessful attempt at the demystification and democratisation of the museum’s exhibitionary complex, and also outline some possibilities for the successful implementation of these concepts, which form part of the further suggestions I make in my thesis for ways in which contemporary museum practice could not only be inclusive of these concepts, but could also apply them in a successful manner.

What is Byzantium? The interpretation of Byzantium as presented in the Museum of Byzantine Culture

1. Byzantium: a continuity of Greek antiquity, a Greek Empire

The first three rooms of the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex resemble the first part of the Athens museum exhibitionary complex (i.e. themes 1.1. - 1.60. The interpretations of Byzantium which appear in both exhibitionary complexes are similar and so is the narrative sequence. Also, the visual images of the two exhibitionary complexes resemble each other. Briefly, in the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex, the transition from the ancient to the Byzantine world is achieved through the representation of: (a) early Christian Churches, (b) the early Christian city and (c) Christian burial traditions. Also, issues which engage with
political disputes over the name Macedonia -and which point out the non-Greek, non-Macedonian identity of FYROM (today, also called Republic of Macedonia)- are brought up, for example, through the exhibitionary complex’s introductory text, which will be analysed below.

As mentioned earlier the resemblances are not unexpected - not only because the histories and political geographies surrounding the two museums are the same, but also because both exhibitionary complexes were designed and installed by the same person. As a result, the curatorial of the Thessaloniki museum resembles the curatorial of the Athens museum in that it shares common curatorial ideas/practices. This is revealed in the following text, which illustrates the so-called ‘archaeological objectivity’ in its interpretation:

[the museum] uses both archaeological material as well as digital media, to illustrate the journey made by an ancient object from the excavation where it is discovered to the museum where it is displayed, via the intervening stages of its documentation, study, and conservation (Museum of Byzantine Culture, room 11: Discovering the past, 2016).

By framing the account like this, it is suggesting that the objects themselves are evidence of a true story, and tell a true story, which has been brought to light through the exhibiting of these objects. This further suggests that the interpretation of these objects is a result of archaeological, scientific and curatorial work, hence ideology-free, and thus, demystified and democratised. I argue, that the archaeological material in the Thessaloniki exhibitionary complex, as well as in the Athens exhibitionary complex is used to present a ‘truth’ - far from being democratised and demystified, however, the exhibitionary complex is purely mystified:
it is a (re)production/(re)construction of the ideas, values and beliefs of the Greek imagined community in relation to its Greek-Byzantine identity, which are entangled with Byzantium’s continuity with antiquity. In the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex the (re)presentation of modern Greek identity through Byzantium is not only serving as evidence of the Greek national unity, it is also serving as evidence of the Greek identity of Macedonia; and it reveals ideas, values and beliefs of the local Thessaloniki community which in practice constitute the Greek political agenda. Below, I will identify and explain the specific selections of objects and texts which enable the interpretation of Byzantium’s continuity with antiquity, and which here demonstrate the Greek identity of Macedonia - and hence the non-Greek, non-Macedonian identity of FYROM.

I will begin my analysis by explaining the resemblances of the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex to the Athens museum exhibitionary complex, starting with the reconstruction of the early Christian temple within the museum room (room 1, Fig. 31 below). Again, the temple has been reconstructed here in line with the ancient Greek architecture. The structure of the columns, (i.e. the column’s syntagm), represents the most recognisable symbol of Greek antiquity, (i.e. the ancient Greek temple). The mosaics that appear on the floor in front of the columns (typical symbol of Roman and Byzantine architecture) and the designs on the walls which are representing the front view and inner space of an early Christian temple, are also part of this syntagm. Together with the columns, they compose an image which relates to Greek antiquity, and which allows little doubt about this in its presentation. These symbols work together to suggest Byzantium’s continuity with antiquity.
The introductory text of the exhibitionary complex reads:

The Byzantine Empire was the continuation of the Eastern Roman Empire. The defining moment from which it may be said to have acquired its own distinctive identity was when the capital was moved from the West to the Hellenistic east, when Constantine the Great founded Constantinople in 330. The determining factors in the development of Byzantium were ancient Greek civilization, the Roman heritage and Christianity.

In the early transitional period (4th - 7th cent.) the Empire spread out over three continents and was organised according to the Roman administrative system. The official language was Latin. The new element was Christianity, which became the official religion of the state and profoundly influenced the spiritual life of Byzantium.

In the Middle Byzantine period (8th-12th century) because Slav tribes had spread into its northern and Arabs into its eastern territories the Empire was essentially confined
to the southern Balkans and Asia Minor, where Hellenistic influence remained strong. This and the fact that the Greek now became the official language helped to consolidate the Empire's Greek identity, while the new administrative and military organisation provided more effective defences against its foes. In this period, under the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties Byzantium reached its spiritual, intellectual and artistic zenith and exerted a powerful cultural and political influence, on the then known world, especially on the Balkan peoples.

During the Late Byzantine period, the Palaiologan era (13th cent- 1453), the now clearly Orthodox Greek Empire gradually dwindled as its economy became increasingly dependent on the Italian cities and it endured the assaults of the Latins, the Slavs, and the Ottomans. The latter overthrew the Empire and captured Constantinople in 1453 (Museum of Byzantine Culture: The Byzantine Empire (330-1453), introductory text, 2016).

I argue that the most powerful message transmitted through the introductory text is that Byzantium is a Greek Empire.

First, it is mentioned that the Empire ‘acquired its own distinctive identity when the capital was moved from the West to the Hellenistic east’ and Greek civilization is placed as the first determining factor in the development of Byzantium. In this way, it is suggested that the transition from the pagan past to Christianity was gradual, while at the same time the idea that the elements of the early Byzantium are mainly Greek is imposed. The term ‘Greek civilization’ stands out much more strongly in relation to the term ‘Roman heritage’, used to describe the determining factors in Byzantium’s development. Also, the term ‘civilization’ is much broader than the term ‘heritage’. ‘Civilization’ is used to describe the culture, social development, and
traditions, while ‘heritage’ is usually used to describe tangible objects, and less often, intangible notions such as the way of life. Hence, the museum sees the early Byzantine period as a period of transition, in which the Greek element is dominant.

Second, it is mentioned that in the middle Byzantine period, ‘the Empire was essentially confined to the southern Balkans and Asia Minor, where Hellenistic influence remained strong’. This, and the fact that ‘Greek now became the official language’ are identified as the factors that ‘helped to consolidate the Empire's Greek identity’. This suggests that Byzantium’s identity is Greek. At the same time this raises the issue of the Macedonian ‘naming dispute’: the reference to the southern Balkans triggers knowledge of the cause of the first Balkan war. By mentioning that, in the southern Balkans, the Hellenistic influence remained strong, it is actually suggested that Greek influences on what today is called Bulgaria, Serbia, FYROM (nowadays also called Republic of Macedonia) and Albania, ‘all of which have historical claims on Macedonia’ (Larrabee, 1998, p. 186), still remain strong. These claims eased conflicts between Bulgaria Serbia and Greece during the first Balkan war. Although they were all fighting against the Ottoman Empire, they ended up fighting against each other for the acquisition of Macedonia. This links to my argument on the documentation of the Greek identity of Macedonia, and especially, the non-Greek identity of FYROM/Republic of Macedonia within the images and texts of the exhibitionary complex. By triggering this particular knowledge, and by providing information on the Macedonian and Komnenian Dynasties immediately after the reference to the Southern Balkans, it is actually suggested that:
1. historically, the area was under Greek influence. (Since Byzantium is (re)presented as a Greek Empire, then it is taken for granted that this area had been and remained under Greek influence)

2. what today would be called ‘national borders’ started to formulate and evolve from as early as the (late) middle Byzantine period.

This not only suggests Greek influence on this area, but also highlights the reigning period of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties (Emperors of the Macedonia dynasty originate from Macedonia, as its name suggests, and emperors of the Komnenian Dynasty originate from Macedonia and Thrace). By mentioning that during this period, ‘Byzantium reached its spiritual, intellectual and artistic zenith and exerted a powerful cultural and political influence on the then known world, especially on the Balkan peoples’, it is suggested that the Balkan peoples were under Greek influence in the Macedonian and Komnenian periods, but also that during these periods, the borders between the Balkan states were gradually developing. The Macedonian period began with Basil I the Macedonian (the first Macedonian to become an Emperor) in 867 AD. Before this period, the Byzantine Empire had lost most of its territory to Slavs, Bulgars and Muslims and it consisted only of Asia Minor, some lands in the Balkans and the Southern coast of Italy (Duiker and Spielvogel, 2010, p. 372). In the 9th century, under the Macedonian Dynasty, it managed to recover and expand; in the 10th century it reached its high point ‘which some historians have called the Golden age of Byzantine civilization’ (Duiker and Spielvogel, 2010, p. 372).

The Komnenian period that began in 1081 and ended in 1185 is characterised by ‘complicated interstate relations’ (Birkenmeier, 2002 p. xii). After the successful
period of the Macedonian dynasty, Byzantium experienced a period of decline and stagnation, which resulted in the battle of Mantzikert in 1071, the loss of Asia Minor to Seljuk Turks and the destabilisation of the military system.

Emperor Alexios I Komnenos strengthened the army by appointing ‘native Byzantine soldiery, albeit always with several mercenary contingents. The native soldiers came from Thrace, Macedonia and Thessaly, which replaced the empire’s Asia Minor recruiting grounds’ (Birkenmeier, 2002, p. xii). However, the goals of the Komnenian Emperors ‘did include the re-conquest of central Asia Minor’ (Birkenmeier, p. 2002, xii). By 1265 (Palaiologan period), the territory of the Byzantine Empire had been formulated and the borders of the Balkan states had started to be developed.

Here, there is no place for doubt as to whether the name Macedonia belongs to the Greek territory of Byzantium: in the Late Byzantine period, i.e. the Palaiologan era (13th cent- 1453), it is stated that Byzantium was a ‘clearly Orthodox Greek Empire’.

It is notable however, that Asia Minor is also used in support of the position of ‘Greek influence, but not Greek land’. This is made under the guise of the exhibitionary complex’s demystification, but actually, it is used only as a way to strengthen the argument on FYROM’s non-Greek and non-Macedonian identity. Hence, demystification here functions as/in favour of another mystification.

Therefore, in the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex, as in the Athens museum exhibitionary complex, it is suggested that Byzantium is a continuity of ancient Greece and a Greek Empire. What is added to the interpretation of Byzantium as presented within the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex is local/national concerns over issues that arise out of a Greek political agenda. I consider it important
to mention here that the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs currently publicly displays on its website its official position on the ‘FYROM name issue’ (Hellenic Republic: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016). Among other things, it supports the idea that the name dispute has to do with territorial claims of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia over the Greek territory, and presents, as an example, historical continuity from ancient Greek times:

The name issue is thus a problem with regional and international dimensions, consisting in the promotion of irredentist and territorial ambitions on the part of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, mainly through the counterfeiting of history and usurpation of Greece’s national, historical and cultural heritage.

Geographically, the term “Macedonia” refers to a wider region extending into the current territory of various Balkan countries, with the largest part of the region being in Greece and smaller sections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Albania. The core of what was ancient Macedonia lies within contemporary Greek borders, comprises the northern portion of the Greek state, and is called Macedonia. Some 2.5 million Greeks reside in this region today and they and their forebears have considered and called themselves Macedonians through the centuries (Hellenic Republic: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

This demonstrates that continuity with Greek antiquity employs Greek diplomacy and is used politically in a series of complex matters. Hence, the Greek-Byzantine origin of the Modern Greek identity is not only a cultural issue. It is about the Greek political past and present, but also, it is very much about the Greek political future. It is worth mentioning that the official Greek position above signifies a formal return to the earliest Greek positions on the so-called Macedonian issue e.g. in the 1960s the Greek position was based on claims of the abandonment of
irredentism and the renunciation of minority claims from the part of Skopje, as well as the prevention of FYROM from monopolising the name ‘Macedonia’ (Kalpadakis, 2012). In 1974, after the period of dictatorship, the position in relation to the Macedonian issue was more muted and discussed issues such as the Greek origin of ancient Macedonia and the Macedonian Struggle. This more muted approach was mainly due to sensitivities associated with the Greek civil war in 1940s (Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were supporting the Greek Democratic Army - the military band of the Greek Communist party - which fought against the Greek government army which had the support of the UK and the US). As explained earlier, the exhibitionary complexes (re)construct an imagined/constructed present by using the ideas, values and beliefs of an imagined/constructed past and may thus provide insights into the conditions for the possibility of a (re)imagined/(re)constructed future. This serves as an example of how cultural presuppositions/power (the museum’s (micro-) power relations) function in the exhibitionary meaning-making process; it also provides insights into the conditions for the possibility of a (re)imagined/(re)constructed future in Greece.

In the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex, like in the Athens museum exhibitionary complex, the idea of continuity is illustrated through the representation of the early Christian everyday habits. For example, the introductory text of room 2 reads:

In the early Christian period (4th - 7th cent.) life in the old cities of the Roman Empire continued much as before. Relatively few new cities were founded.

To begin with, the early Christian city remained much the same [...] The Agora was the focal point of public life, there was usually a theatre and the larger cities had an hippodrome too. [...] The most important change that gradually came about as
Christianity took hold was the construction of large basilican complexes and a bishop's palace (Museum of Byzantine Culture: room 2. Early Christian City and Dwelling, 2016)

This text suggests continuity. It says that the early Christian city ‘remained much the same’ as the old cities of the Roman Empire and it offers as an example the Agora (with a capital ‘A’), the theatre and the hippodrome. As both the introductory text and this text are parts of the exhibitionary complex’s narrative sequence (here, I refer to the texts’ syntagmatic relations) I argue that the words ‘Agora’ and ‘theatre’ suggest Greek antiquity and the word ‘hippodrome’ suggests Roman heritage. As Dinsmoor (1950) explains, the Agora is characteristic of the architecture of the ancient Greek city and is placed at the city centre. But the Agora with a capital ‘A’ as presented in the museum text, suggests the philosophical debates, which were taking place in ancient Athens. Nails (1995) explains that in ancient Athens, philosophers would come to debate in the Agora. Further, the Greek word for speaking in public is \( \text{αγορεω} \) (pronounced: agorevo), which comes from the word ‘Agora’. Also, the word theatre that is placed immediately after the word Agora in the museum text suggests the Greek theatre, which was ‘a major part of the democratic and civic process in classical Athens’; just like the Agora, but with the difference that ‘it was talking issues of the day and matters of immediate concern, all through the flexible parables of myth’ (Walton, 2010, p.38).

The idea of continuity is also illustrated through the reconstruction of various types of early Christian tombs found in the outskirts of the city of Thessaloniki (room 3 Fig. 32 below). The accompanying text reads:
Tomb painting: In the earliest Christian graves nascent Christian iconography co-exists with the ancient tradition. [...] The ancient perception of the material delights of the Elysian Fields lived on in the depiction of abundant food and drink on the tomb walls. [...] Various types of burial structure ranging from expensive sarcophagi to humble tile graves are commonly found in close proximity. The ancient practice of jar burial was still used for infants and young children. [...] The typology of the tombs in the Thessaloniki necropolis did not change in the first few hundred years of the Christian era. The variety of their forms reflects the social and economic stratification of the city’s inhabitants (Museum of Byzantine Culture: room 3. From the Elysian Fields to the Christian Paradise, 2016).

![Museum of Byzantine Culture: room 3. From the Elysian Fields to the Christian Paradise, 2016](image)

This text suggests that the early Christian burial traditions are a continuation of the ancient Greek burial traditions. First it says that ‘Christian iconography co-exists with the ancient tradition’ Then, that ‘The ancient perception of the material
delights of the Elysian Fields lived on’ as well as that ‘The ancient practice of jar
burial was still used for infants and young children’. It ends by saying that ‘The
typology of the tombs in the Thessaloniki necropolis did not change in the first few
hundred years of the Christian era’. All these phrases are making references to
ancient Greek traditions and customs. The last phrase, i.e. that the tombs did not
change in the first few hundred years, suggests that the evidence of the continuity of
Byzantium from ancient Greece is the typology of the tombs. I argue that the
typology (arched tombs) and the explanation given on social hierarchy, suggest a
very specific continuity of Greek antiquity: continuity of the Mycenaeans and the
Thracians. The (re)production/(re)construction of ideas values and beliefs in relation
to the continuity of Byzantium from ancient Greece is apparent within the images of
the arched tombs, and the references to the burial customs.

The text suggests that social hierarchy can be identified through differences in
the form of the tombs, which also suggests that the early Christians belonged to a
class system. Most importantly, this links to the burial traditions of the Mycenaeans:
the Greeks of the Late Bronze Age, whose stories have been immortalised by Homer
in his Iliad and Odyssey (Odysseus, Agamemnon, Menelaus and Helen of Troy among
them). The Mycenaeans were burying the highest nobility in the tholos-tomb, an
arched-shaped tomb like the ones reconstructed by the museum in room 3. Usually,
the tholos tomb was placed ‘near the fortress and preferably with a view over the
surrounding territory’ (Stakenborg- Hoogeveen, 1989, p. 186). The common
Mycenaean people were buried in chamber graves (Stakenborg- Hoogeveen, 1989, p.
186).
One may reasonably wonder what could possibly be the relation between the Mycenaens and Thessaloniki. Stakenborg-Hoogeveen (1989) supports the popular argument that the Thracian tholos tombs have derived from the Mycenaean ones (Stakenborg-Hoogeveen, 1989, p. 186). The historical region of Thrace is neighbouring eastern Macedonia, and Thessaloniki had been and remains the capital of Macedonia (or what today is referred to as Greek Macedonia).

Homer described the Thracians as allies of the Trojans in the Trojan War. They had been living in Thrace, which however at the time ‘was a much larger, but seemingly a far more nebulous and incohesive entity than Mycenaean Greece’, as its population was ‘an Early Bronze Age mix of the descendants of intrusive stockbreeding peoples and of survivors of the autochthonous Chalcolithic culture that he newcomers had destroyed’ (Hoddinott, p. 52).

In Greece today, Thracians are called the Greek inhabitants of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, which is neighbouring the region of Central Macedonia. Through the early Christian arched-shaped tombs found in Thessaloniki (the capital of the region of central Macedonia, it is suggested that the neighbouring regions of the past i.e. Central Macedonia and Thrace had common traditions and customs, and hence, a line of continuity is suggested between Thessaloniki and the Thracians, as well as the Mycenaean. This is how the continuity of Byzantium with the ancient past makes itself apparent within the specific images of the tombs and the specific texts about the burial traditions. The images of these arched-shaped tombs and the information provided in the accompanying text are not randomly selected. Their selection is a product of the interaction of cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as a product of the museum’s
(micro-) power relations. The specific selections are illustrative of Greek cultural ideas, values and beliefs on the continuity of Greek identity from antiquity to the present through Byzantium.

2. Thessaloniki: representative of Byzantine culture

Byzantium is represented by the Museum of Byzantine Culture as a Greek Empire, but with the view that the Byzantine centre of Thessaloniki has contributed greatly to the preservation, continuation and spread of Byzantine-Greek culture. The (re)production/(re)construction of ideas values and beliefs on the Christianisation of the Slavs from the Thessaloniki brothers Constantine (Cyril and Methodius), which appear in the texts in room 4, is characteristic of this ‘continuationist’ view. Cyril and Methodius are (re)presented as the ‘Apostles of the Slavs’ (Museum of Byzantine Culture, room 4: From Iconoclasm to the Splendour of Macedonian and Komnenian Dynasties, Cyril and Methodius: Apostles of the Slavs, 2016). It is explained that they were:

brothers, born in Thessaloniki in the 9th century [...] they converted the Slavs in central Eastern Europe to Christianity, under the command of Emperor Michael III and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Photios [...] The Slavonic world is indebted to Cyril and Methodius for bringing it the Christian faith, creating the first Slavonic (Glagolitic) alphabet and laying the foundations for the further development of its spiritual and intellectual life (Museum of Byzantine Culture, Room 4: From Iconoclasm to the Splendour of Macedonian and Komnenian Dynasties, Cyril and Methodius: Apostles of the Slavs, accompanying text, 2016)
The 9th century was a period of reestablishment for Byzantium of its dominance in the eastern and southern Balkans: the Golden age of Byzantium. Room 4 is devoted to the (re)presentation of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties and their contribution to the preservation and spread of Greek-Byzantine culture to the Balkans. The title given to the room is: *From Iconoclasm to the Splendour of Macedonian and Komnenian Dynasties.* An account of what characterised this period appears in the following text:

the revival of letters and art, the Greek education, the Byzantine humanism and the ecumenical idea of Byzantium at the time, had a crucial cultural and political impact on the then known world and especially on the Balkans (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2016a).

What is emphasised here is the Greek influence on the Balkans. This, along with the presentation of the information about Cyril and Methodius, and particularly of the information about their origin, i.e. from Thessaloniki, suggests Thessaloniki’s importance to Greece culturally and nationally (in the sense of being the centre of preservation and continuation of the Greek-Byzantine identity). It also suggests that Thessaloniki has contributed greatly to the spread of Byzantine-Greek culture. In light of the competition between the Thessaloniki and the Athens museums, it could be said that this further suggests that Thessaloniki’s contribution to the making of the Modern Greek nation has been the greatest amongst the rest of the Greek centres; and, as an extension, that Athens did not have such an important contribution - at least not as important as Thessaloniki.

Again, in this room, the exhibitionary complex functions as an illustration of Byzantium’s continuity from antiquity through the image of the Byzantine Church,
which resembles the image of the ancient Greek temple (Fig. 33 below). Two things are suggested here. First, continuity of Byzantium from Greek antiquity; and second, the special contribution of Thessaloniki to this continuity. Thessaloniki is regarded as the place where Byzantine culture - and hence, Greek-Byzantine identity - have not only been revived and spread in the Macedonian and Komnenian periods, but also preserved throughout history. Thessaloniki is suggested to be in a position of superiority in relation to Athens, and particularly in relation to Athens’ contribution to the spread and preservation of Greek-Byzantine identity.

Fig. 33. Museum of Byzantine Culture. Room 4. From Iconoclasm to the splendor of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties, 2016

Room 5: The Dynasties of Byzantine Emperors presents the Byzantine dynasties from the times of Heraclius (610-641) until the Fall of Constantinople in
The Macedonian and Komnenian Dynasties are mentioned for a second time within the exhibitonary complex. I argue that, through this repetition, it is being suggested that the Macedonian and Komnenian Dynasties were the most important of all.

First, through evidence on Thessaloniki’s important position to Byzantium, Thessaloniki is (re)presented as the most Byzantine city. For example, in room 6, where the Byzantine castle is (re)presented through objects that come from various castles in Macedonia, the text reads:

The 6th, 9th, 10th, 14th centuries were the periods that saw the most intensive construction of fortifications. A dense network of castles spread out between Constantinople and Thessaloniki, most of them on the sites of stopping places on the Roman via Egnatia (Museum of Byzantine Culture, room 6: The Byzantine Castle, 2016, accompanying text).

Through this text, it is being suggested that Thessaloniki in the Byzantine period was connected directly to the capital of Byzantium, Constantinople - and this highlights Thessaloniki’s important role to Byzantium. Via Egnatia had been constructed in the Roman times. It provided an important link through the province of Macedonia, connecting the main urban centres of the southern Balkans to Asia Minor (Gill, 1994, p. 409). However, after long periods of Roman wars, Via Egnatia began to fall apart. In Byzantine times, it was rebuilt and since then had been used as one of the main roads to and from the west (Rosser, 2012, p. 491). Today, the modern Egnatia Boulevard crosses the Thessaloniki city centre and runs in parallel with the old Via Egnatia. Thessaloniki’s residents take pride in the modern Egnatia Boulevard. Its name links to the old road and to Byzantium and it is thought of as
‘living proof’ of the relation and importance of Thessaloniki to Byzantium. Also, as ‘living proof’ of the native Thessaloniki residents’ Greek-Byzantine origin. The reference to the construction of the Byzantine castles on the sites of stopping places between Constantinople and Thessaloniki suggests the strategic importance of the road, as well as Thessaloniki’s key location in the Balkan area, both in the past and in the present. The interpretation of Thessaloniki as representative of Byzantine culture makes itself apparent within the (re)presentations explained above i.e. Cyril and Methodius; the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties; Thessaloniki’s’ contribution to the spread and preservation of Greek-Byzantine identity (and its superiority in relation to Athens); The Byzantine castle/Via Egnatia. This interpretation is a product of the interaction of the specific set of local/cultural presuppositions with the making of exhibitionary meaning as well as a product of the museum’s (micro-) power relations.

3. Thessaloniki: its role in the emergence of Modern Greek national consciousness

In room 7: The twilight of Byzantium (1204-1453), the narration of Byzantine history begins in the period after the fourth Crusade - roughly, in the Palaiologan period. This room contains the following museum objects/exhibits: icons of the Palaiologan period, the mint of Thessaloniki and its glass industry, as well as examples of trading glass vases and ceramic workshops discovered in Macedonia and Thrace. The introductory text of the room reads:

The last phase of the Empire is bracketed by the two conquests of Constantinople, the first in 1204, by the members of the Fourth Crusade, and the second in 1453, by the Ottoman Turks. The Latin conquest had disastrous consequences for the Empire,
mainly because it shattered its cohesion and broke it up into little states. However, centres of resistance were established at Nicaea in Asia Minor and in Epiros, and this led to the liberation of large Greek areas, the recovery of Constantinople in 1261 by Michael VIII Palaiologos, and the emergence of modern Greek national consciousness, which evolved further during the Ottoman period.

Under the Palaiologan dynasty (1261-1453) the Empire constantly diminished in size and was torn by civil wars. Nonetheless, literature and the arts enjoyed a new flowering, the main centres of which were Constantinople and Thessaloniki (Museum of Byzantine Culture, room 7: The twilight of Byzantium (1204-1453), introductory text, 2016).

Here it is suggested that in Constantinople and Thessaloniki, the Palaiologan period is a period of spiritual and artistic progress, which (in spite of the civil wars, which resulted in Byzantium’s territorial reduction) led to the emergence of Modern Greek national consciousness. It is also suggested that the literature and arts, which flowered in Constantinople and Thessaloniki during this period, had great impact on Greek people in the aftermath of the fall of the Byzantine Empire; so much so that it allowed the Greek national consciousness to develop and evolve further during the Ottoman period. This approach is not different from the approach that appears in the Athens museum exhibitionary complex on the matter of continuity and preservation of the Greek-Byzantine identity during the Greek ‘dark ages’. There is no need to repeat here the Greek cultural ideas, values and beliefs around the continuity and preservation of Greek identity during the Palaiologan period outlined in Chapter Two (Section 3.2.2.a.). However, it is important to point out the significant local beliefs, ideas and values around this matter which manifest themselves in this part of the
complex i.e. that Thessaloniki (since Constantinople’s decline and fall) played the most important role in this matter.

First, I will discuss the representation of the continuity and preservation of the Greek-Byzantine identity during the Greek ‘dark ages’. In Room 9 one can see ‘representative works’ (Museum of Byzantine Culture, 2016b) of the period dated between the late 14th and the early 19th century. Most of the exhibits here are icons - among them, icons that are representative of the schools of post-Byzantine art, the Cretan school, for example (Fig. 34 below). I argue that the selection of the particular works here is a function of the interaction between cultural presuppositions, the making of exhibitionary meaning and the museum’s (micro-) power relations. Specifically, they function as an illustration of the continuity of Byzantine culture and art throughout the time of the Ottoman conquest: Greek national unity is suggested through these works. In Case Study Two, I extensively examined the beliefs on the contribution of the Cretan school to the continuity of Greek-Byzantine identity, including its influence on the Renaissance, presenting this as evidence to support my argument (see Chapter Two, Section 3.2.2.b.). The representation of the continuity of Greek-Byzantine identity here is based on the same beliefs as in Case Study Two, (so that it is not necessary to repeat them here). But, the reproduction of this idea is explicitly achieved through the representation of the Palaiologan period.
Accordingly, the Byzantine legacy to the Ottomans in the years after the Fall, is (re)presented in Room 10: ‘Byzantium after Byzantium: the Byzantine legacy in the years after the Fall, 1453-19th c. The works presented here are icons, embroidery and liturgical objects, as well as objects of pilgrimage. The selected icons represent the various schools of painting in the Greek areas under Ottoman and Venetian rule. This material is used in exactly the same way as in the Athens museum. Through this material it is suggested that Byzantine culture and traditions survived during the times of Venetian rule despite the incorporation of western elements in Byzantine art. The icons, liturgical objects and personal objects of worship are used as evidence of Greek-Byzantine continuity in art, private worship and everyday life, exactly as in the Athens museum exhibitionary complex.
Conclusions

To sum up, I have argued that the interpretation of Byzantium which makes itself apparent in the images and texts of the Thessaloniki museum is that Byzantium is a continuity of Greek antiquity, a Greek Empire, and responsible for the continuation of modern day Greek culture and identity (Hellenism).

Byzantium here is used not only in support of an explanation of the Modern Greek identity but also as an explanation for the modern Greek identity of Macedonia. This contradicts the claims made by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to the name Macedonia.

In my analysis, I have identified and explained that the Thessaloniki museum’s exhibitionary complex is informed by the wider Greek, and also local, cultural ideas, values and beliefs about Greek-Byzantine identity, and that it functions as an illustration of another unsuccessful attempt to democratise and demystify the exhibitionary complex. This is not unexpected. The Museum of Byzantine Culture, like the Byzantine and Christian museum, is in Greece. It is surrounded by the same structures/institutions and hence, its practices are informed by the same cultural and political presuppositions as the practices of the Byzantine and Christian Museum.

Apart from the similarities in the interpretive content, I also identified and explained that the narrative sequence and final visual outcome of the two Greek exhibitionary complexes resemble each other. This can be explained not only in terms of the commonly shared presuppositions, but also because the architect/curator who was responsible for the design and installation of the exhibitionary complexes in both museums is the same person.
The museum professionals of both museums share the same curatorial ideas and practices. Again, this is not unexpected. As explained earlier in the thesis, the ‘curatorial bricolage’, like all forms of human thought and activity is based on underlying structures that are made up of interrelated elements. The underlying structure here is Greek culture.

As curatorial action is based on underlying structures/institutions whilst the curators are ‘always already’ within a system of social/cultural and institutional relationships that define them and also define the opportunities they deal with, it is expected that curators in museums who belong to the same country, are subject the same policies and negotiate the same topic, would have common curatorial concepts and practices. The former Thessaloniki museum director explains that:

The museological approach which we implemented took us in a difficult - and for Greek museums of the 1990s, fairly novel – direction, with the visitor rather than the exhibits taking centre stage. Starting from the cultural-anthropological notion that all cultural records are important, archaeological objects were treated as a means of interpreting the culture from where they came, to be used in the exhibition not merely as works of art, but as products of a culture. Hence the display of an object did not constitute an end in itself; instead, we took advantage of that object’s potential to tell us about the historical process, which created it, and the society, which made use of it (Tourta, 2015).

The way that the Tourta (2015) thinks about the use of archaeological objects, as evidence and proof of some ‘truth’ is not far away from the way that the architect/curator of both museums has explained the function of archaeological artifacts as objective evidence of a ‘truth’. Tourta (2015) on the one hand says that
the archaeological objects are used as a means of interpreting the culture from whence they came (which does not exclude ideology-specific interpretations) but on the other hand, says that the museum took advantage of the object’s potential to tell us about the historical process, which created an object, and the society which made use of it. The latter is in agreement with the museum’s statement about its work in room 11, (which I explained earlier), and in claiming that the object tells a true story, suggests objectivity. Again, it could be said that Tourta’s (2015) statement transmits an earlier belief in ‘archaeological objectivity in interpretation’ (Hodder, 1989, p. x) – a belief which was also revealed in the Byzantine and Christian Museum exhibitionary complex, and the British Museum exhibitionary complex. As explained earlier in the thesis, the very essence of the function of myth is to empty reality of the appearance of history and of social construction, and this is what all three museums are doing.

I have argued that Byzantium in the Thessaloniki museum exhibitionary complex is interpreted on the basis of a set of cultural ideas, values and beliefs in the continuity of Greek identity from ancient Greece through Byzantium. Further, I have analysed and explained that the museum’s specific context (e.g. location, local history, local beliefs) also contributes to the exhibitionary meaning making process (in the sense of determining meaning).

In conclusion, the interpretation of Byzantium here is informed by the local beliefs on Thessaloniki’s role in the preservation of Greek-Byzantine culture, which results in an image of Thessaloniki as historically superior in relation to the rest of the Greek cities, (and primarily, in relation to Athens, the Greek capital city). I have identified and explained the signs and symbols within the exhibitionary complex through which the museum reproduces these ideas values and beliefs. This
demonstrates that the exhibitionary complex of the Museum of Byzantine Culture is not free from myths: the culturally (re)constructed/(re)produced ideology within the exhibitionary complex is entangled with the image of the Greek imagined community on its ‘own’ identity, which Greece in effect promotes: the ancient Greek, the Byzantine, the Orthodox, the European elements, all of which make the Modern Greek national identity. The Museum of Byzantine Culture far from being democratised remains mystified and functions as an institution of power, instead of a democratic institution. As the British Museum example and the Byzantine and Christian Museum example, the Museum of Byzantine Culture example, demonstrates that the non-demystified, non-democratised (re)presentation of the past culture of Byzantium is an implication of the interaction of cultural knowledge (of the knowledge of the Greek imagined community on its ‘own’ identity, including the local, beliefs) with the making of exhibitionary meaning -the end product and effect of the productive micro-powers and relations that make up the national museum institution. This interaction is also the reason why the power system of the exhibitionary complex is still in play although we are shifting into the era of the ‘Democratic’ museum.
Conclusions

This research developed and evolved from a desire for a deeper understanding of how cultural presuppositions work in the process of making exhibitionary meaning. The question of the constructive role of cultural knowledge on issues relating to the representation of the past in relation to ‘national’ identity was triggered by the realisation that the nature of curatorship in national museums is contingent and not free from cultural presuppositions, and that the cultural presuppositions have immediate symbolic and practical implications in the national museum exhibitionary complexes. As curator in national museums and archaeological sites in Greece I kept noticing that cultural knowledge is still present in each attempt of cultural heritage professionals to reconstruct the past, although the curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification are now widely accepted within national museums’ curatorial discourse.

I began to suspect that the same historical phenomenon, i.e. Byzantium would be understood and explained differently within exhibitionary complexes of different cultural backgrounds, depending on the cultural presuppositions, i.e. the cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the dominant cultural group of the country to which each museum belongs. This led to the formulation of my main research question: ‘How do the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices explain the different representations of Byzantine culture in the European national museums under study and what are the cultural and political implications of those presuppositions?’.
My thesis central focus has been on the ideological nature and cultural function of the presuppositions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning. Throughout this research I argued that the representation of Byzantine culture in each case study is a cultural-ideological or ‘mythical’ construct – product of the ideological nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in each museum’s curatorial practices. I argued that the presuppositions are specific to one culture and that they have a constructive role to the making of exhibitionary meaning.

Specifically, I argued that the presuppositions act to construct the representation of Byzantium within each exhibitionary complex: they provide the basis on which museums/curators both understand and transform (in the productive sense of power) the rules around them through culture, and produce the exhibitionary meaning. This is how curatorial work is made possible: by the structures of power and the structures of power are transformed as the museum works in them. This is why the representation of Byzantium in each museum is actually the (re)construction and (re)production of each imagined community’s identity/Byzantium (seeing the museums/curators or group of curators as part of the imagined community of each country). As there are different elements combined within an identity, identity is a combination of identity and difference characterised by a concurrent repeatability and differentiality - hence the use of the prefix (re) as in (re)presentation, as well as (re)construction/(re)production- the imagined community in each country (re)constructs/(re)produces its identity, through the combination of the different elements combined within its identity. It actually (re)constructs/(re)produces its identity in relation to the different, the ‘other’. All the
identities communicated through the three exhibitionary complexes are established in relation to Byzantium, i.e. in relation to that which the imagined communities are: either Byzantium the different, invited in identity, invited in the ‘same’ as in the British Museum or Byzantium the identity, the ‘same’ as in the Greek museums.

Hence, the (re)presentations of Byzantium in the European national museums under study are different because each imagined community’s ‘national’ identity/Byzantium is different. The cultural function of the presuppositions however, is the same in each case: The (re)presentation of Byzantium in each European national museum under study is the product of the interaction of each imagined community’s values, ideas and beliefs on its ‘own’ identity as well as that of Byzantium and each museum’s (micro-) power relations with curatorial practice. This is how the ideological nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in each national museum’s curatorial practices explain the different (re)presentations of Byzantine culture in the European national museums under study.

I also argued that each national museum’s discursive practices (the historically and culturally specific set of national museum rules for organising and producing knowledge), presuppose a certain ‘truth’ to which the contemporary curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification stand in opposition. The opposition of democratisation and demystification to this ‘truth’ is accounted as a cultural implication of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices. In all three exhibitionary complexes I argued that this ‘truth’ is a culturally constructed ‘reality’ of Byzantium—a culturally (re)constructed ‘reality’. This culturally (re)constructed ‘reality’ is the product of the interaction of the cultural presuppositions/power with the making of exhibitionary meaning. Therefore, each different (re)presentation of
Byzantium is a different, culturally constructed reality. While I recognised the limits of curatorial agency as well as the constructive role of cultural knowledge in the exhibitionary meaning making process, I argued that all three exhibitionary complexes negotiate matters of each imagined community’s ‘own’ identity through Byzantium: simply, Byzantium provides an explanation of the identity of the ‘nation’ and the (dominant) culture of the country to which each museum belongs, and act to promote a desired image of the corresponding ‘nation’. In effect, the museums under study come to (re)construct a narrative of ‘national’ identity within their Byzantine exhibitionary complexes. This is accounted as a political implication of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices.

As I thoroughly explained in Chapter One and demonstrated in Chapter Three, the (re)construction/(re)production and (re)presentation of ‘national’ identity within the images and texts of the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes is a product of difference (identity, i.e the ‘same’ and other), as a structure of differences always pre-exists the national museums/curators, who are inseparable and in constant and mutual interaction with the culture/society (structures) which always pre-exists them. The (re)presentation of Byzantium within the final visual outcome of each exhibitionary complex is a product of difference (same and other).

Specifically, in Chapter Three, I analysed and explained that the (re)presentation of Byzantium in the British museum is a product of the interaction of the ideas, values and beliefs of the British imagined community on same and other with curatorial practices: Byzantium is (re)presented as the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east, as the other to British identity (invited in the British identity, and hence constitutive part of the British identity). British identity is (re) presented as a
continuation of the Roman Empire in the west, and hence, European, but different from the Roman Catholic Church – thus, Anglican and primarily Anglo-Saxon – thus, English. Byzantium serves the exhibitionary complex’s narrative as the other to the British national identity: the other to the European-English national identity. The (re)presentation of Byzantium in the Greek museums is also a product of the interaction of the ideas, values and beliefs of the Greek imagined community on identity and other with curatorial practices: Byzantium is (re)presented as a continuation of the Greek antiquity, as a Greek empire, and as responsible for the continuation of Greek culture and identity (Hellenism) from antiquity to the establishment of the Modern Greek State. Byzantium serves the exhibitionary complexes’ narratives as the same; the same to the Modern Greek national identity, as opposed to the other, the non-Byzantine, the non-Christian, the non-Orthodox, the non-Greek (invited in the Greek identity and hence constitutive part of the Greek identity). The Thessaloniki Museum exhibitionary complex, is also informed by the local cultural ideas, values and beliefs on Greek-Byzantine identity, and this shows how powerful the constructive role of cultural knowledge is in the process of the making of exhibitionary meaning.

This analysis allowed me to show that curating is a process of meaning making by looking at exhibitionary meaning as necessarily situated in and mediated by culture. Particularly, I demonstrated that the interaction between each imagined community’s cultural knowledge on its ‘own’ identity/Byzantium and curatorial practices is responsible for the (re)production/(re)construction of each imagined community’s ‘national’ identity within the visual and verbal representations of each Byzantine exhibitionary complex. I demonstrated that the
(re)production/(re)construction of each imagined community’s ‘national’ identity is the product of the interaction of cultural knowledge with curatorial practices – and thus, this is how the cultural functions of the presuppositions, i.e. their interaction with curatorial practices, as well as their ideological nature explain the different representations of Byzantium in the three, national museum exhibitionary complexes.

By demonstrating this, I was also allowed to account for the cultural and political implications of those presuppositions in the exhibitionary meaning making process. In answering my research question I also examined the process of the making of a narrative of ‘national’ identity within the Byzantine exhibitionary complexes, which allowed me to account for the political implications. In addition, I examined the reasons why, despite the efforts of national museums’ to democratise their offerings, curating still (re)constructs the ideology or ‘myth’ (Barthes, 1972) of the ‘national’, (which in itself is inclusive of a dominant identity, i.e. the ‘same’ and exclusive of the ‘other’ and hence, is incompatible with the rhetoric of the ‘democratic’) which allowed me to account for the cultural implications.

In Chapter One, I responded to my research question by explaining that the exhibitionary complex, as well as being a product of culture/power (a cultural-ideological, or ‘mythical’ construct) is also a product of curatorial research and is informed by the latest curatorial ‘currents’. By also examining the curatorial concepts of democratisation and demystification, I explained the way in which the discourse/practices of democratisation and demystification are products of ‘curatorial bricolage’ i.e. a curatorial (re)construction of concepts and practices into which ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ fit and serve a specific function. Particularly, I explained that the discourse/practices of democratisation and demystification, which
are products of curatorial ‘bricolage’, function as acts of resistance towards the powerful structures. By this, I explained why the outcome of the attempt at applying these practices is unsuccessful. As resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power, power is the condition for the reproduction of identity: it attaches the agency to its own identity. Consequently, the application of democratisation and demystification, are unsuccessful and the exhibitionary complexes remain mystified. Within this context, democratisation and demystification function as another form of mystification. The national museum exhibitionary complexes are products of the interaction between curating (curatorial thought-work, practices) and culture -what has been explained as the ‘curatorial’. The national museum exhibitionary complexes are the product of the ‘curatorial’: the end product and effect of the productive micro-powers and relations that make up the national museum institution and the positions of the curators within the national museum institution. The final visual outcome of the national museum exhibitionary complexes (images and texts) is a (re)construction/(re)production and (re)presentation of the ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined community on Byzantium and on its ‘own’ ‘identity’. These ideas values and beliefs are making themselves apparent within the exhibitionary complexes’ final visual outcome, just like ideology does. As a result, the ‘national’ identity of each imagined community, as seen by each imagined community is established within the exhibitionary complexes’ final visual outcome in relation to Byzantium.

In Chapter Two I responded to the research question by explaining the way that Byzantium is historically perceived and culturally understood and interpreted by the different imagined communities involved in the present study: I have explained
which is the ‘truth’ of Byzantium that is taken for granted by each imagined community: which are the cultural ideas, beliefs and values of each imagined community on Byzantium.

And in Chapter three, I responded to the research question by showing how the background cultural beliefs that form the only ‘truth’ of Byzantium in each imagined community make themselves apparent in the images and texts of the exhibitionary complexes and shape each museum’s curatorial discursive formations. By analysing the structure of each exhibitionary complex, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships between each exhibitionary complex’s images and texts, I have revealed the cultural conventions or ‘rules of combination’ underlying the production and interpretation of each exhibitionary complex. I have considered the existence of ‘underlying’ thematic paradigms and thus, the significance of the choices in exhibitionary content and meaning. However, I have shown that these choices are based on the interaction of the set of cultural ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined community on its own identity and on Byzantium with curatorial practices.

The explanation offered in Chapter One, of the function of ‘curatorial bricolage’ within the exhibitionary meaning-making process illuminated an understanding of the conditions that allow the (re)production/(re)construction of a specific, ‘unitary’ and therefore ‘undemocratic’ national identity within the final visual outcome (i.e. images and texts) of the national museum exhibitionary complex. In my analysis of the exhibitionary complexes in Chapter Three, I have shown that the exhibitionary meaning is mythologically constructed. All the three exhibitionary complexes, are not free from myths: the culturally (re)constructed ideology within their exhibitionary complexes is entangled with the image of each imagined
community that each country in effect promotes. The (re)construction of ‘national’ identity is the product of the interaction of cultural knowledge with curatorial practices and the implication of the cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices.

Through the above I answered my research question. First I explained that the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices around the representation of Byzantine culture in the European national museums under study are the cultural ideas, values and beliefs of each imagined community on its own identity/Byzantium. Second, I explained that the representation of Byzantium in the different cultural context and institutional framework of each national museum is the (re)construction of ‘national’ identity/Byzantium based on ideas of ‘same’ and ‘other’. Third, I explained that the (re)construction of ‘national’ identity, is based on the different ideas, values and beliefs of the imagined community that each museum belongs to: on who each imagined community thinks it is and who it thinks it is not. Fourth, I explained that for this reason, the exhibitionary complexes (re)construct and (re)produce cultural values, ideas and beliefs on national identity and Byzantium through their visual and verbal representations, despite the several attempts at demystification and democratisation. This has answered the first part of my research question: ‘How do the nature and cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices explain the different representations of Byzantine culture in the European national museums under study?’.

The second part of my main research question ‘What are the cultural and political implications of those presuppositions?’ has been answered by explaining that in the national museums’ context the process of making exhibitionary meaning, far
from being ‘democratised’ and ‘demystified’ is in fact ideological or ‘mythical’. First, I have explained that national museums present the cultural constructions of the imagined community of the country to which they belong as a ‘work of nature’, and not of culture. Second, I have explained that by this, they are doing the opposite of what the contemporary curatorial concepts of ‘democratisation’ and ‘demystification’ suggest. On the one hand, instead of ‘democratising’ their exhibitionary complexes, the national museums are ‘naturalising’ their imagined community, i.e. their ‘nation’ through their exhibitionary complexes. This is a cultural implication of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices. On the other hand, the presented ideology within their exhibitionary complexes is entangled with the image of the imagined community that each country in effect promotes. This is the political implication of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices.

**Contribution to knowledge**

The contribution of this thesis is twofold:

First, this thesis has provided a cross-cultural perspective of current understandings of the past culture of Byzantium. Although Byzantium’s origin and continuity (whether it is Roman or Greek, or both) in each exhibitionary complex is explained differently, the literature reviews in Chapter Two and in the Introduction, has shown that it is now widely acknowledged that Byzantium (a) had developed a distinctive society (b) is not part of the ‘dark middle ages’ (c) has contributed to the formation of Europe.

Second this thesis has provided a cultural account of meaning and has explained that the interaction of the characteristics and socio-cultural norms of each
imagined community with the making of exhibitionary meaning have a decisive effect on the construction of the exhibitionary meaning.

The cultural account of meaning provided in this thesis has achieved two things: First, it has supplied explanations that were missing from existing accounts of curating and also, it has corrected the deficiencies of existing accounts of curating. Second, it has led to the identification and explanation of the reasons why the national museums’ contemporary turn from institutions of power to democratic institutions has not yet been achieved. Specifically:

1. Current accounts of curating and its relation to the production of meaning were not providing a satisfactory account of meaning. In Chapter One, I explained why the current accounts are not sufficient. I also explained the deficiencies of existing a-cultural accounts of meaning: It is believed by some curators that the museum objects are telling a ‘true’ story by themselves and that connotational meaning is ultimately controllable. I have argued that this is not possible. I explained that connotations can’t be controlled or simply communicated and that there isn’t a historical reality ‘out there’. I demonstrated this by explaining in Chapter One that the understanding of the signs and symbols in the exhibitionary complex depends on the viewers’ cultural knowledge. Also, by showing in Chapter Three that curating is ‘prejudiced’, through the identification of the presuppositions involved in the making of exhibitionary meaning and the analysis and explanation of the cultural functions of those presuppositions in the exhibitionary complexes.

2. In Chapter One, I explained that the curatorial of each museum is formed following the concepts/practices of democratisation and demystification, which are today widely accepted within curatorial discourse as a method of defining and
representing a curatorial position. At the same time, I explained that the curatorial implies that the concepts/practices of democratisation and demystification are secondary to the material 'infrastructure' of the exhibitionary complexes (connotations are thought to be controllable and the selected objects that are part of the exhibitionary complexes' syntagm(s) are thought to be telling a 'true' story). This however, contradicts the ideological, democratic and meaningful accounts encountered in the exhibitionary complexes in Chapter Three. This controversy has been understood and explained as the reason that the attempt at the making of a 'democratic' exhibition, free of 'myths', which is the aim of contemporary national museums around the world has not yet been achieved. Simply, the a-cultural accounts of the making of exhibitionary meaning, result to the ‘institutionalisation’ of the concepts of democratisation and demystification. The institutionalisation of these concepts i.e. their incorporation into the national museums’ curatorial policies and practices, which ignore the cultural function of the presuppositions involved in the representation of the past, and which do not account of curating as cultural production, has actually turned their fundamental ideas (of inclusiveness, of the transmission of ideology-free messages and so on) into masked mechanisms of power, which produce the type of knowledge that would collate the specific, ‘mythical’ information that is (re)produced/(re)constructed within the images and texts of the museums’ exhibitionary complexes, and imposed on people’s activities and existence.

The (re)production/(re)construction of ‘national’ identity, within the exhibitionary complexes’ visual and verbal representations will continue as long as national museum curating will not be accounted as a work of culture: the curatorial
meaning-making practices, are specific to each museum/country as they are subject to each country’s structure/institutions and curatorial meaning-making practices link to each country’s structure/institutions. This means that the product of the interaction of cultural knowledge with curatorial practices, is and will be the (re)production/(re)construction of the imagined community’s identity. The question then is: How might a national museum operate in an informed and responsible democratic manner? My thesis begins the task of showing how the making and operation of the Democratic museum might be achieved.

**Suggestions for further research**

The outcome of this research i.e. the understanding of the decisive role of this interaction to the making of exhibitionary meaning, points out the need for further research on the condition(s) for the possibility of national museums to become open communication platforms, which would offer diverse audiences equal opportunities to access information free of national bias and charge, free of prejudices, free of ‘national-specific’ ideology, free of ‘myths’ (driven by the cultural ideas, values and beliefs of the ‘ruling elite’ of each country).

A suggestion for further research on the making and operation of the Democratic museum could be to search for ways of making of the governing bodies of the national museums representative of the diverse world community, seeing it as a solution to current universal issues (e.g. the rise of nationalism, xenophobia) and their future implications (e.g. polarisation, conflict).

Another suggestion that may contribute practically to the making and operation of the Democratic museum is the further development of the
concepts/practices of democratisation and demystification, which I argue are the foundations of the making of the ‘Democratic’ museum.

One way that the practice of democratisation could be developed further so as to ensure that the museums’ interpretation of history will be informed, responsible and ‘democratic’, could be the re-evaluation and re-consideration of the presented ‘histories’ around museum objects and their many meanings, taking into account the cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curating. And one way that the practice of demystification could be developed further so as to allow audiences to access exhibitions which would offer not a narrowly national, culturally-specific perspective of world history, constructed around the cultural artifacts/museum objects, as still happens in national museums today, but a diversity/range of perspectives about the (re)presented historical events and world cultures, would be to offer pluralistic (re)presentations of historical events and world cultures, which will happily co-exist under the national museum institution.

Surely, contemporary museums have made attempts at communicating their offerings in a ‘democratic’ way, at an effort to avoid the culprits of curatorial ‘failure’. For example, some museums are experimenting with ways of engaging their publics. As Kreps (2003a) indicates, some museums are working within local decision-making structures using participatory approaches and methods:

Fundamentally based on democratic principles, participatory approaches aim to "bridge the gap" between outside professionals and experts and local community members. The idea of democratization suggests that the knowledge, experiences, and skills of local people hold as much value as those of experts. (Kreps, 2003a, p. 115).
This approach, as Kreps (2003a) explains, aims at helping the creation of the kind of community involvement that sustains the museum and its cultural work in the long run. However, this approach, does not account for the cultural functions of the presuppositions involved in curatorial practices and their implications to the making of exhibitionary meaning that this thesis identified, analysed and explained. On the same vein, other museums have incorporated interactive visitor-focused participatory strategies, by encompassing in their practices a range of new technologies –by creating Instagram accounts, and using Instagram and other digital applications for example (e.g. MoMA, TATE, Gagosian, Smithsonian). It can be thought that new technologies may support museums in the process of becoming more open and therefore more democratic. However, not everyone is able to use, or have access to new technologies. Simply, for this reason, interactive participatory strategies designed around the use of new technologies may be thought of and seen as a way of excluding certain audiences. This is the main reason that new technologies do not necessarily contribute to the enhancement of democratic practices, although, to a certain extent, they do contribute to the enhancement of visitor engagement and participation –at least to the engagement/experience of those audiences/visitors that are technologically literate and can afford the purchase of or access to associated devices and assorted technology. The later, grants some validity in exploring the problematic of the use of online and virtual environments in relation to participatory methods and their contribution to the democratisation of the contemporary museum.

However, what may offer the potential of opening up and challenging the current museum settings –within which the narrow, culturally specific representations of historical events are reproduced and reconstructed, as the present study revealed-
is the hope offered by the opportunities that the practice of ‘curatorial bricolage’ may open.

In that respect, I see the incorporation of the practices of artist-curators into museum meaning-making practices as key to the further development of the contemporary democratisation and demystification practices in museums. I will articulate my suggestion by using the currently running Documenta 14 in Athens to exemplify my discussion. Perhaps, it is not an exaggeration to say that Documenta 14 does not reproduce national ‘myths’. Instead, it ‘documents’ evidence and manifestations of the current social and political conditions, contradictions and transformations. In Greece, it presents the current situation of the crisis as it develops at the very moment, and it offers the necessary space, but also allows the necessary time for ‘in-situ’ interventions and transformations – for example, in one of the events curated in Kotzia square at the heart of Athens, the Pakistani artist-curator Rasheed Araeen presents an open structure that:

- considers the environmental dynamics of the square and revitalizes its activities through a gesture of hospitality. Under canopies inspired by the shamiana (a Pakistani traditional wedding tent) he invites people to sit together and enjoy a meal while reflecting on possible scenarios for social change (Documenta14, 2017).

Rasheed Araeen’s response (a bold one, if one thinks of the current populist manifestations in Greece, and their implications for those who are thought of as the ‘demonized other’, Pakistani people among them), as well as the responses of the rest of the Documenta 14 artist-curators are responses of the democratic, of the inclusive curatorial: the Documenta 14 artist-curators are actively taking part to the democratisation of culture through their practices. I see the borrowing/incorporation
of such practice(s) of artist-curators, into the museum’s curatorial practices as beneficiary to the museums attempts at infrastructural change. The bringing together of ideas of those who work outside of the closed framework of museums and art institutions with the ideas of those who work within this framework may generate new curatorial ideas and practices that would radicalize the contemporary museum curatorial, meaning making practices. Taking everything into account, I argue that this research, by providing an understanding of the cultural functions of the presuppositions and their implications to the making of exhibitionary meaning, may open new channels for advancing the contemporary national museums.
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List of museum texts

The British Museum

The British Museum (2016) Room 41, The Byzantine Empire AD 330-650, introductory text

*Ostrogothic Italy*, accompanying text.


The British Museum (2016) Room 41, *Central and eastern Europe*, introductory text

The British Museum (2016) Room 41, *Central and eastern Europe: The Martynivka Hoard*, accompanying text

The British Museum (2016) Room 41, *Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions*, accompanying text


*Ostrogothic Italy*, accompanying text


*Roman Continuities: Signet rings and brooch*, accompanying text


The British Museum (2016) Room 41, *Celtic Britain and Ireland AD 300-1100: Celtic culture*, introductory text


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The British Museum (2016) room 40, *Icon and Image*, introductory text

The British Museum (2016) room 41, *The Crusades: Icon of St George and the youth of Mytilene*, accompanying text


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Byzantine and Christian Museum

Byzantine and Christian Museum (2016) museum entrance hall, introductory text

Byzantine and Christian museum (2016) I. *From the Ancient World to Byzantium*, introductory text


Byzantine and Christian Museum (2016) I.6. ‘*In pastures green*: Christians in the face of death', introductory text

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Museum of Byzantine Culture (2016) Room 11: Discovering the past, accompanying text

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Museum of Byzantine Culture (2016) Room 3. From the Elysian Fields to the Christian Paradise, accompanying text


Museum of Byzantine Culture (2016) Room 7: *The twilight of Byzantium (1204-1453)*, introductory text
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Fig. 4. The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations: Gothic peoples, 2. The Domagnano Treasure*, 2016
Fig. 5. The British Museum: room 41, *Central and eastern Europe: The Martynivka Hoard, Ukraine, about AD 550-650*, 2016
Fig. 6. The British Museum: room 41, Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions, buckle showing a lion hunt, 2016
Fig. 7. The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations AD 400-750. The Franks, 3. Roman Continuities: Signet rings and brooch*, 2016
Fig. 8. The British museum: room 41, Anglo-Saxon ship Burial: Mediterranean silver, 2016
Fig. 9. The British Museum: room 41, *Great Migrations AD 400-750: The Vandals, Jewellery fashions, Disc Brooches* 2016.
Fig. 10. The British museum: room 41, The Byzantine Empire AD 330-650: Body Chain, 2016

Fig. 11. Golden Solidus of Emperor Tiberius II Constantine (reign AD 574 to AD 582)

Fig. 12. Golden Solidus of Emperor Phocas (reign AD 602 to AD 610)
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Fig. 14. Golden solidus with Romanos II and his father, Constantine VII
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Fig. 16. Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. *Old forms-New symbols, The Sidamara Sarcophagi*, 2016

Graphic reconstruction of three sides of the sarcophagus, on the basis of related (?) fragments on display in the British Museum, as proposed by Hans Wiegart. Graphics: Demetrios Nikolianos.

Fig. 17. Byzantine and Christian museum: I.1. *Old forms-New symbols, The Sidamara Sarcophagi*, graphic reconstruction of the British Museum fragments, 2016
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Fig. 27. Byzantine and Christian Museum: Attica, a Byzantine province, 2016.
Fig. 28. Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens: II.8. *The Palaiologan period, the final flowering of Byzantium*, 2016
Fig. 29. The Theotokos of the Pathos, 17th century, BXM 01562
Fig. 30. Byzantine and Christian Museum: IV.1a. Society and Art in Venetian Crete, 2016
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Fig. 32. Museum of Byzantine Culture: room 3. From the Elysian Fields to the Christian Paradise, 2016
Fig. 33: Museum of Byzantine Culture. Room 4. *From Iconoclasm to the splendor of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties*, 2016
Fig. 34. Museum of Byzantine Culture: room 9: *Saint Athanasios*, The Demetrios Ekonomopoulos collection, 2016