

JOHN FREDERICK HALDON



John Haldon, the Shelby Cullom Davis '30 Professor of European History and professor of history and Hellenic studies, has focused on the history of the Byzantine Empire from the seventh to the 11th centuries. He also served as the director of the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies. After receiving his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Birmingham, he was an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Munich from 1976 to 1979. Thereafter, John joined the faculty of his alma mater, where he rose to become director of the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman, and Modern Greek Studies in 1996, followed by head of the School of Historical Studies in 2000. He joined the faculty of Princeton in 2005.

Early in his career, John published on the military aspects of Byzantine politics and culture. He was interested in this frequently besieged, yet long enduring, empire. How did its administrators manage to finance the army and navy? How did they deploy them and to what effect? How were units of the armed forces related to provincial and frontier elites? And how did the latter facilitate or inhibit the extraction of resources in emergencies? These questions have constituted a continuing thread in John's studies, even as he extended his chronological interest from the early to the central Byzantine period and beyond. Measures that worked for the sixth-century imperial administration were ill suited to the changed circumstances of the seventh and eighth centuries, let alone for the period from the 11th century onward, when Turkic peoples began to make extremely serious inroads into Anatolia. Armaments, too, attracted John's attention, and he is now universally regarded as the world's expert on the deadly weapon of medieval Mediterranean warfare, Greek fire.

Many of the phenomena John has studied can only be understood by paying attention to the material infrastructure—the stones and mortar—of Byzantine life. This inspired him to master the findings of marine archaeology in his investigation of Byzantine naval history and

of terrestrial archaeology in his investigations of fortresses, mountain redoubts, and supply roads, which sometimes coincided with and at other times differed from commercial routes. The Avkat Project was a major investigation in Turkey at which John taught a generation of American, British and continental European students how to excavate sites of logistical significance. He was also a pioneer in applying sophisticated computer technologies to aid in making sense of the textual and archeological findings.

Another factor that came into play and that required John to expand his vision was the movement of Normans and Franks into the central and eastern Mediterranean regions and the establishment of the Crusader States at the beginning of the 12th century. John became a comparativist, as he began to explore how Arabic, Turkish, and Frankish armies tried to outmaneuver one another and to extract the resources to try to overcome the Byzantines in the long and terrific struggles of the later Middle Ages.

Increasingly, John's attention in recent years has turned to the cultural dimensions of Byzantine life. He became fascinated in the 1990s and early 2000s by the impact of the religious conflict that we conventionally call iconoclasm (the struggle over the acceptability of images in religious devotional practices) and its possible role in the destabilization of Byzantine elite and popular cohesion. His book *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850: A History*, a true tome, co-authored with Leslie Brubaker and Robert Ousterhout, received enthusiastic reviews.

To address iconoclasm, it was necessary for John to exploit quite different sources from those he more commonly utilized. He had long had an interest in textual annotation and translation, writing an extended commentary and source-identification apparatus to the military textbook *Taktika*, attributed to Emperor Leo VI. In recent years, he has also looked at the saints' lives (hagiographies) that were such a central part of Byzantine monastic and, in their abbreviated forms, popular culture. He has translated some of these for a wider audience.

After completing the Avkat project, John began to devote himself to a major comprehensive study, drawing on all his previous work, a project that provides a magisterial assessment of why, all factors considered, the Byzantine Empire (the "empire that would not die") lived on as long as it did.

Many of the projects described above were finished or initially conceived and executed while John was at Princeton. A large cohort of brilliant young Princeton Ph.D.s constitutes a major part of his scholarly legacy. He made his mark as a scholar and teacher while also serving as the longtime director of graduate studies in history and directing the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies. John Frederick Haldon's presence at Princeton has been a towering one.