

Knowing bodies, passionate souls

Sense perceptions in Byzantium

Symposiarchs: Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Margaret Mullett

25-27 April 2014

Byzantine culture was notably attuned to a cosmos of multiple domains: material, immaterial; bodily, intellectual, physical, spiritual; human, divine. Despite a prevailing discourse to the contrary, the Byzantine world found its bridges between domains most often in sensory modes of awareness. These different domains were concretely perceptible; further, they were encountered daily amidst the mundane no less than the exalted. Icons, incense, music, sacred architecture, ritual activity; saints, imperial families, persons at prayer; hymnography, ascetical or mystical literature: in all of its cultural expressions, the Byzantines excelled in highlighting the intersections between human and divine realms through sensory engagement (whether positive or negative).

Byzantinists have been slow to look at the operations of the senses in Byzantium, especially those of seeing, its relation to the other senses, and phenomenological approaches in general. More recently work on smell and hearing has followed, and yet the areas of taste and touch—the most universal and the most necessary of the senses—are still largely uncharted. Nor has much been done to explore how Byzantines viewed the senses, or how they envisaged the sensory interactions with their world. A map of the connections between of sense-perceptions and other processes (of perception, memory, visualization) in the Byzantine brain has still to be sketched out. How did the Byzantines describe, narrate or represent the senses at work? It is hoped to further studies of the operations of individual senses in Byzantium in the context of all the senses, and their place in what the Byzantines thought about perception and cognition. Recent work on dreaming, on memory and on the emotions has made advances possible, and collaborative experiments between Byzantinists and neurological scientists open further approaches. The happy coincidence of a Dumbarton Oaks Garden and Landscape symposium on “Sound and Scent in the Garden” and of a forthcoming exhibition at the Walters Art Museum on the five senses enable some cross-cultural comparisons to be made involving gardens in Islamic Spain, Hebrew hymnography, Coptic cookery, Mediterranean ordure, and Romanesque and Gothic precious objects—that were not just looked at but also touched, smelled, heard. Architects, musicologists, art historians, archaeologists, philologists, all can contribute approaches to the revelation of the Byzantine sensorium.

Friday

8.30: Coffee on the Music Room Terrace

9.00: Welcomes: Jan Ziolkowski and Margaret Mullett

9.15: Introduction: Susan Ashbrook Harvey

I: SIGHT UNSEEN: *chair: Ioli Kalavrezou*

9.30: Glenn Peers (Austin Texas), *How Bodies Know, How We Know Bodies*

10.15: Coffee

10.45: Martina Bagnoli (Walters), *Sensing Beauty. Medieval Art, the Five Senses and the Art Museum*

11.30: Discussion

12.-2.00 Luncheon

II: SOUNDS AND SILENCES: *chair: Robert Ousterhout*

2.00: Amy Papalexandrou (Richard Stockton College of New Jersey): *The Byzantine Ear: Perceptions of Sound and Sonic Environments across the Byzantine Acoustic Horizon*

2.45: Kim Haines-Eitzen (Cornell): *Geographies of Silence in Late Antiquity*

3.30: Tea

4.15: Spiro Antonopoulos (City University, London): *The Phenomenon of Embellishment and Recomposition in the Music of Late Byzantium*

5.00 Discussion

5.30-7.30 Drinks on the Green Terrace

III: OLFACTORY LANDSCAPES: *chair: Susan Ashbrook Harvey*

9.30: Felipe Rojas Silva (Brown): *The Smells of Time: Olfactory Associations with the Past in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia*

10.15: Dede Fairchild Ruggles (Urbana-Champaign), *Finding Scents in Islamic Gardens*

11.00: Discussion and Coffee

IV: TASTES OF LIFE: *chair: Albrecht Berger*

11.45: Thomas Arentzen (Lund), *Struggling with Romanos's "Dagger of Taste"*

12.15-2.00: Luncheon

2.00: Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom (Wittenberg) *Baking Bread and Salting Fish: the Archaeology of Monastic Kitchens and Ascetic Taste*

2.45: Discussion and Tea

V: TOUCHING AND FEELING : *chair: Dimitar Angelov*

3.30: Stavroula Constantinou (Nicosia), *The Saint's Two Bodies: Sensibility under (Self-)Torture in Byzantine Hagiography*

4.15: Ingela Nilsson (Uppsala), *To Touch or not to Touch: Erotic Tactility in Byzantine Literature*

5.00: Discussion

7.00 for 7.30: Speakers' Dinner in the Orangery

Sunday

VI: CELEBRATING THE SENSES: *chair: John Duffy*

9.00: Coffee on the Music Room Terrace

9.30: Ruth Webb (Lille) on rhetoric: *Virtual Sensations and Inner Visions: Words and the Senses in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*

10.15: Laura Lieber (Duke) on ritual participation: *Dancing with the Angel of Death: The Adulterous Woman of Numbers 5 and the Senses*

11.00 Coffee

11.30: Marcus Plested (Marquette) *The Spiritual Senses, Monastic and Theological*

12.15: Discussion

12.45: Conclusion and Scent Lab Results: Margaret Mullett and Dede Fairchild Ruggles