Upcoming Events

Byzantine Studies Public Lecture

"Imperial Radiance: Solar Imagery and Cosmic Order"

Ioli Kalavrezou, Dumbarton Oaks Professor of Byzantine Art, Harvard University

Thursday, November 15, 5:30—7:00pm

Dumbarton Oaks Music Room

This public lecture will explore, through texts and images, the place of the emperor within the Byzantine heliocentric world order. Appearance and self-presentation in literal as well as symbolic terms will be discussed, especially his association with light and its effects on perception.

Seating is limited. Please RSVP to attend.

Interview with Ioli Kalavrezou, Dumbarton Oaks Professor-in-Residence

Ioli, you have a long association with Dumbarton Oaks and an affection for the place. Can you talk perhaps about your first impression of Dumbarton Oaks? Is it a very different place now from when you arrived as a Junior Fellow in 1974–75?

I was a graduate student at Berkeley when I applied for a junior fellowship. Looking back at those years I can say that being at D.O. gave me a whole new perception of educational
institutions in the United States, but also the opportunity to do research at this extraordinary library. I came here at the beginning stages of my dissertation and I believe that having from the start of one's research such great resources gives one a better footing early on in academia. In addition the scholarly interchange that I encountered in my field --and it is true for all fellows--opened up new horizons in rethinking my own research.

You are an art historian, a practitioner in a discipline which has changed a great deal over that time as well.

Yes, but I started as a classicist/archaeologist. Soon I realized that art history at that time offered a wider scope for interpretation. For example, renaissance art historians were working on topics like patronage (which didn’t happen in Byzantine Studies until the 1980s). After my studies in Germany I went to Berkeley to work with David Wright. Byzantine art history then still focused on iconography and style and not many other tools. Reading what the Byzantines themselves wrote was not encouraged when I was a student. When I began teaching I realized that context was essential to an understanding of the art of a period. Of course we began increasingly to ask different questions, to look at types of objects that had not been given much attention before (steatites rather than ivories in my case). Things which had never been exhibited became part, for example, of the exhibition I organized at Harvard on Byzantine women. As soon as you begin to look outside that narrow visuality into contextual studies, interdisciplinarity makes a library like Dumbarton Oaks essential.

But this is a semester without teaching. How are you spending this precious time?

I have returned to an old interest of mine. My master’s thesis was on imperial art, and I published some of it in Dumbarton Oaks Papers. I have continued to work from time to time on the subject, on the imperial mosaics of Hagia Sophia, on relics at the court, and imperial psalters, and the role of personifications in suggesting imperial qualities. More recently I’ve been looking at assemblages of court art (the Khakouli triptych, the Pala Doro) and in them the figure of Alexander the Great. From another angle I’ve looked at pearls and the way they define empire.

You’re going to be talking about heliocentrism in your public lecture on November 15. Is this a continuous feature of Byzantine thinking about the emperor? We tend to think of it as a Hellenistic trait above all.

Well, it is very strong in Constantinian art and then again in the sixth and seventh centuries, with Corippus in particular, and then it becomes prominent again with the Macedonians, I suspect with Basil I at the end of the ninth century. In fact I would suggest that it is after Iconoclasm in the mid-ninth century that the emperor was seen again as a new Constantine and parallel to the sun. I shall trace the story into the twelfth century when we have a range of writings, (acclamations and panegyrics), which touch on the theme—and are visualized in the roundel in the Dumbarton Oaks museum.

Read the full interview with Professor Kalavrezou here.
The Making of an Exhibition

An interview with Dumbarton Oaks museum staff on the making of the *All Sides Considered* interactive exhibit

Gudrun Bühl, Museum Director

*Can you describe the concept behind the exhibit?*

Exhibition-making starts with an idea around selected objects rather than with a fixed display plan. In the case of *All Sides Considered*, which was developed with the intention to highlight and exemplify the research of objects in our *Maya collection*, we were interested in exploring the many layers of each selected object or case study – the material specifics and cultural signifiers studied by archaeologists, art historians, scientists, and anthropologists. To bring the scholarly and scientific analyses into the display, expansive label text was of the essence; yet, so as not to distract from the aesthetic value of the objects, a display setting had to be created that would be able to bring these two sides into play and keep them in balance.

The solution we came up with was this: approaching the gallery from the museum entrance, the visitor perceives mainly the colorful accentuated pedestals carrying the highlighted objects. Text and further interpretative material comes into sight only after the interested viewer has entered the area. In general, our interest in experimenting with settings is a crucial aspect of the museum’s exhibition program to activate the relationship between art, art scholarship, and visitors.

Hillary Olcott, Museum Exhibitions and Programs Coordinator

*What are some new elements that you incorporated into the display?*

One of the novel things about *All Sides Considered* is the interactive nature of the displays. Incorporating the interactive elements into the labels presented several challenges to the museum team. The most difficult elements to incorporate were the iPads. The challenge arose during the design phase of exhibition planning. We needed to come up with a way to incorporate seamlessly the iPads into the labels so that visitors would feel as though they were interacting with the exhibition itself, not with iPads. Although the iPads require some maintenance, they are an absolute success. They allow visitors to touch, hear, and explore the Dumbarton Oaks Collection like never before.
look forward to dreaming up new ways to use this exciting technology!

Miriam Doutriaux, Pre-Columbian Collection Exhibition Associate

*How does the exhibit reflect the current state of/trends in Maya scholarship?*

The exhibit showcases several exceptional Maya objects from the Dumbarton Oaks collection that were carefully reexamined by experts over the past three years. It focuses on the objects and the science behind the recent Dumbarton Oaks publication *Ancient Maya Art at Dumbarton Oaks*. Six case-studies outline recent findings about the Maya, and illustrate some of the epistemological underpinnings of current Maya research. For example, experts in the fields of geology, mineralogy, conchology, biology, and physical anthropology contributed scientific opinions and analyses - from radiocarbon dating to X-ray diffraction analysis - to the study of a *Maya mosaic mask*. New technologies are also helping scholars to better visualize and experience the objects they study. A 3-D digital model revealed subtly carved features on a *Maya stela*, and X-rays exposed the production process of a *rattle bowl* with a hollow base.

The exhibit is about the scholarly research process - the slow, painstaking work that underlies groundbreaking discoveries about the Maya. As museum visitors listen to a rattle bowl, flip through x-ray images, examine a 3-D digital model, and compare images or specimens, they are taking a scholar’s approach - and perhaps gaining a new appreciation of the thrills of Maya scholarship.

Chris Harrison, Senior Exhibitions Technician

*Watch this video, in which Chris describes the workstation designed to allow visitors to experiment with tool types used by ancient Maya carvers.*

To read the full interviews with each of our museum staff, visit our [website](#)!
Now on View

The Ancient Future: Mesoamerican and Andean Timekeeping

The Aztec, Maya, and Inca civilizations used complex and multiple timekeeping systems for purposes of agriculture, worship, and political authority. Because little of the material record of the pre-Conquest peoples of the Americas survived, scholars through the ages have had limited primary sources to study in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of timekeeping in the Americas.

The Library’s newest exhibit was prepared to coincide with the recent Pre-Columbian Studies symposium, "The Measure and Meaning of Time in the Americas." The online exhibit further explores these themes.

Image: Detail from an early representation of the Aztec Calendar Stone. León y Gama, Antonio de, 1735–1802. Descripción histórica y cronológica de las dos piedras.... México, Impr. del ciudadano Alejandro Valdés, 1832.

Recent Scholarly Events

Pre-Columbian Studies Symposium

The Measure and Meaning of Time in the Americas

Pre-Columbian Studies was both honored and delighted to host 130 scholars over the Columbus Day weekend for its annual symposium, "The Measure and Meaning of Time in the Americas." Organized by Anthony Aveni of Colgate University, the program brought together a group of scholars from diverse disciplines to address the ritual and calendrical representation of temporal existence in the Mesoamerican and Andean worlds. Speakers included Alfredo López Austin (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), William Barnes (University of St. Thomas, Minnesota), Harvey Bricker (Tulane University), Victoria Bricker (Tulane University), Linda Brown (George Washington University), Jahl Dulanto (DePauw University), Markus Eberl (Vanderbilt University), Richard Landes (Boston University), John Monaghan (University of Illinois at Chicago), Stella Nair (University of California, Los Angeles), Juan Ossio (Universidad Pontificia Católica del Peru), and Tristan Platt (University of St. Andrews). The meaning of time in the ancient Americas was compared with both conceptual and functional meanings among other cultures. Pre-Columbian Studies looks forward to the resulting publication.
Sign and Design Symposium

Script as Image in a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Organized by Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak (New York University) and Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Harvard University), the symposium placed the phenomenon of script as image (as opposed to text and image) in a cross-cultural perspective. Participants presented research on the medieval Latin West, the Byzantine East, the Islamic world, Jewish manuscript illumination, and both Pre-Columbian and post-colonial Latin America. Read more >>

Bliss Symposium Award Recipients

Dumbarton Oaks awarded five Bliss Symposium Awards to Harvard students to facilitate attendance of “Sign and Design.” The Bliss Awards are intended to enrich students’ academic experience through attendance at Dumbarton Oaks symposia that relate to their fields of studies.

Emma Langham Brown

Emma is a junior at Harvard University concentrating in Medieval History and Literature and pursuing a secondary field in French Language and Literature. She is particularly interested in medieval materiality, and in conjunction with her department is currently designing a course called Taking Place: Medieval/Material/Culture, a blog for which can be found at http://medievalplaces.blogspot.com. Emma writes:

I am honored to have had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C in mid-October for “Sign and Design.” I’m fairly certain I was the only undergraduate student there, and I felt a little nervous in the presence of such an array of scholars. But as it turned out, my questions were welcomed. All of the brilliant scholars I met at Dumbarton Oaks were more than happy to talk about medieval scholarship with me, despite my 20-year-old novice-ness. I came away from the conference with 12 pages full of notes, a head full of ideas, some wonderful new friends, and a
thesis idea. I was so inspired by the last segment of the conference, "Instrumental Images," in which Ghislain Brunel of the Archives Nationales in Paris and Beatrice Fraenkel of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales gave brilliant papers that both played on the idea of the signature or the logo in medieval texts, that I would like to consider medieval insignia in tandem with the modern logo for my thesis next year. I am thankful for such a mind-opening experience.

Erika Loic

Erika is a fourth-year PhD student in the History of Art and Architecture. Her dissertation research is on medieval manuscript illumination, monasticism, and bibles in medieval Spain. She says:

My participation in this symposium had almost immediate effects on my teaching and my own studies. Within a week, I was already incorporating some of the images and discussions from "Sign and Design" into the course I am teaching currently, “Picturing the Bible, 300–1300.” In particular, talks by Herbert Kessler and Katrin Kogman-Appel helped me to widen the scope of what I had been teaching. My one-on-one interactions with the symposium speakers during lunches and evening receptions were also wonderfully and unexpectedly beneficial. I will relate but one single example out of many: although Irene Winter is a Professor Emerita in my own department, I had never had the chance to speak to her until this symposium. Although I am not working in her specific field, she was amazingly generous with her time, offering me some very thoughtful advice on starting (and ultimately finishing!) a dissertation.

Read more about the experiences of the students who attended "Sign and Design" here.

Sandy's Aftermath

The Gardens at Dumbarton Oaks weathered Hurricane Sandy remarkably well, with the exception of a few broken branches. Below are two photos from the garden blog.
From the Archives

She Simply Had to Have It

A beautiful eighteenth-century writing desk by David Roentgen from the Dumbarton Oaks Museum’s House Collection is presently on loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the exhibition *Extravagant Inventions: The Princely Furniture of the Roentgens* (October 30, 2012 through January 27, 2013). This ingenious desk can be used either in a seated or standing position and with the top surface either flat or at a slant, as seen in the image to the left. The acquisition of the desk was somewhat unusual, and the correspondence documenting its purchase from the Munich dealer Julius Böhler is retained in the Dumbarton Oaks Archives. In 1962, then Director of Dumbarton Oaks John S. Thacher wanted to acquire the desk for his personal collection and had it sent to Dumbarton Oaks from Germany. However, on September 18 he wrote the following to Böhler: “Yesterday I returned from a brief trip to Ireland and to my great pleasure discovered that the Roentgen writing desk had arrived safely at Dumbarton Oaks. As you will notice, the enclosed check is from Dumbarton Oaks and not from me personally, because when I showed the desk to Mrs. Bliss she decided that she simply had to have it. Therefore it will be part of the permanent collections here. I shall of course miss not having it in my house, but I am happy to think that it has a permanent home.”

Digital Humanities Luncheon

On Thursday 18 October, the digital humanities group welcomed Bob Horton, the Associate Deputy Director at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (based here in Washington DC). Bob described some of the challenges he faced at the Minnesota Historical Society regarding archiving and curation of archives, and how that experience shaped his current set of responsibilities. There was also discussion of the Digital Public Library of America and the ILMS’s commitment to helping see that off the ground. Bob mentioned Europeana as a forerunner, and noted the crucial importance of shared standards. The visit was of great interest to a number of Dumbarton Oaks staff involved in ongoing and future digital projects.

Good Ink

The popular blog, The Ancient World Online (AWOL), ran a feature highlighting Dumbarton Oaks’s online publications, and various digital projects, on October 9. The blog post was written by Charles
E. Jones, head of the library at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University. The post provides links to some of our online publications from our three areas of study, as well as to blogs and online exhibits.

Dumbarton Oaks Jack-o-Lanterns

On October 31, this year’s fellows participated in the annual Fellows’ Pumpkin Carving event held by Director Jan Ziolkowski. They produced quite an impressive array of jack-o-lanterns!

Now on View