

# The Oaks News

A monthly bulletin from Dumbarton Oaks

## Now on View



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## Coming Soon

All Sides Considered: New Research on the Maya Collection

Miriam Doutriaux



## All Sides Considered

New Research on the Maya Collection

Opens September 8, 2012

*All Sides Considered* presents ancient Maya art in a new light. Objects on display illustrate the skill and ingenuity of ancient Maya artists, as well as the remarkable discoveries of modern-day scientists. A mask of the Sun God incorporates gemstones acquired from Guatemala to the Southwestern United States. Etchings on a three-thousand-year-old greenstone pendant indicate that a Maya lord treasured it as an heirloom. A narrow slit through several hollow spheres suggests that they may be the world's oldest bone bells. The artifacts on display illustrate the beauty and ingenuity of Maya art, its remarkable production techniques, and the value placed on quality materials.

Years of painstaking research inform our knowledge of the Maya and their possessions. The exhibit presents six case studies that illustrate how recent research has begun to demystify Maya art—and conversely, how Maya art has spurred archaeologists, art historians, epigraphers, geologists, biologists and other experts to expand the limits of scientific inquiry. It coincides with the publication of a comprehensive [catalogue](#) of the Dumbarton Oaks Maya collection. Visitors are invited to flip through x-ray images, manipulate 3-D electronic models, compare artifact forms, and see objects move. They may use an ancient Maya toolkit to carve jade or limestone, as scholars do in order to interpret ancient tool marks. Engaging in the scientific process provides insight into how scholars have built a solid understanding of ancient Maya culture and craftsmanship.



### Special Exhibition Opening

Thursday, September 13, 4:30 pm

Music Room Terrace, Dumbarton Oaks

Please RSVP acceptances only to [museum@doaks.org](mailto:museum@doaks.org) or (202) 339-6984.

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## Upcoming Events

### Byzantine Studies Public Lecture

*Conceiving Byzantium: Behind the Scenes at Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*

Thursday, September 20, 5:30-7:00 pm

Helen Evans, Mary and Michael Jaharis Curator of Byzantine Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Dumbarton Oaks Music Room



From March to July 2012 Dr. Helen C. Evans curated her third blockbuster exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*. Following *Glory of Byzantium* and *Faith and Power*, themselves successors of *The Age of Spirituality*, it was a critical and popular success. Of all the exhibitions this was the one with a story, of the impact of Byzantine art and culture on the empire's southern provinces even as they became part of the emerging Islamic world from the seventh to the ninth centuries.

On September 20, 2012, in the Music Room of Dumbarton Oaks, Dr. Evans will reflect on the story behind the exhibition. To register please contact [Byzantine2012@doaks.org](mailto:Byzantine2012@doaks.org) or (202) 339-6940.

Image, right: Object loaned by Dumbarton Oaks to the exhibition *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*. Gold and lapis lazuli necklace with Aphrodite, early 7th century.



### Pre-Columbian Studies Symposium

*The Measure and Meaning of Time in the Americas*

Friday, October 5 - Saturday, October 6

### Sign and Design Symposium

*Script as Image in a Cross-Cultural Perspective (300-1600 CE)*

Friday, October 12 - Sunday, October 14



## A Warm Welcome to the Dumbarton Oaks Fellows, 2012/13

The academic year at Dumbarton Oaks begins on September 10, and we are delighted to welcome our new Fellows in Byzantine, Garden and Landscape, and Pre-Columbian studies! The twenty-three Fellows resident this fall hail from as far afield as Harvard, Oxford, Gent, Birmingham, Bonn, and Milan; and are working on topics ranging from money in Byzantium, to concepts of “Heaven” and “Hell” in early colonial Christianization, to the social and cultural history of gardening in imperial Russia. A full list of our Dumbarton Oaks Fellows is available [here](#).

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## God’s Regents on Earth: A Thousand Years of Imperial Seals



For over a thousand years the Byzantine Emperor ruled over the empire as God’s regent on earth. His was the ultimate authority. The emperor was the granter of titles and offices, distributor of largesse, master of the Church, commander of the army, head of the bureaucracy, and supreme judge. The decisions of the individual who sat on the throne had repercussions throughout the Byzantine world and far beyond. Decrees, letters, judgments, and commands left Constantinople every day signed by the emperor in red ink and secured with the imperial seal. These seals not only protected and authenticated imperial documents, they also served as imperial propaganda.

Dumbarton Oaks is proud to announce the online exhibit, *God’s Regents on Earth: A Thousand Years of Byzantine Imperial Seals*, curated by Jonathan Shea, Post-Doctoral Associate in Byzantine Sigillography and Numismatics with assistance from Seals Intern, Lain Wilson. Displaying seals from the Dumbarton Oaks collection, the exhibit offers high resolution



images, presents comparative views of the obverse and reverse, and enables the viewer to juxtapose distinct seals. Each seal is accompanied by a brief outline of the life of the ruler who issued it, and an assessment of what the object reveals about that ruler's character, beliefs, and policies.

For a further exploration of the collection of seals at Dumbarton Oaks, please visit the [Byzantine Seals Online Catalog](#). With a collection numbering over 17,000, Dumbarton Oaks is home to the world's largest collection of Byzantine Seals.

Thanks are due to Eric McGeer, Kathy Sparkes, Lisa Wainwright, Noah Mlotek, and Prathmesh Mengane for their help in preparing the exhibit. All photographs were taken by Joe Mills who is tirelessly photographing all 17,000 seals in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection.

Images: Top, seal of the emperor Philippikos (711-713); right, gold seal of the empress Theodora (1055-1056)

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## **New Director of Pre-Columbian Studies Colin McEwan**

With the beginning of the 2012/13 academic year, Colin McEwan will become full-term Director of Pre-Columbian Studies at Dumbarton Oaks.

Before making the move to Dumbarton Oaks, Colin headed the Americas Section within the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum. For eleven years prior to heading the section, Colin served as Curator of Latin American Collections in the Department of Ethnography, also at the British Museum. He received his BSc from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland and his MA and PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Colin will bring to Pre-Columbian Studies grounding in archaeological fieldwork and museum curating. Although an Andeanist by training, he has promoted at the British Museum the broadest view of Pre-Columbian studies and has attended not merely to the Mesoamerican and Andean but also to the Caribbean, Amazonian, and Patagonian areas.

Dumbarton Oaks looks forward to building on the strengths of the department of Pre-Columbian Studies under the leadership of Colin McEwan.

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## **Farewell to Michael Lee**



After completing his three-year term as Post-Doctoral Associate in Garden and Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, Michael Lee will move on, this fall, to become Ruben McCorkle Rainey Professor in the History of Landscape Architecture and Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Virginia.

While at Dumbarton Oaks, Dr. Lee has contributed to a number of in-house publications, including *Clio in the Italian Garden* and the forthcoming symposium volume *Technology and the Garden*.

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## From the Archives

James Carder

### Bliss Apartment—1785 Massachusetts Avenue

Between 1920 and 1923, while Dumbarton Oaks underwent extensive renovations, Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss resided at an apartment at 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, now the headquarters of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Designed in 1916 by Jules Henri de Sibour in a Beaux-Arts classical style, this was one of Washington's first luxury apartment buildings. The industrialist Andrew Mellon also resided at 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, in an apartment on the floor above the Blisses' apartment. The Blisses visited Mellon on several occasions to view his painting collection, later given to establish the National Gallery. A set of five photographs (AR.PH.Misc.001-05) in the Dumbarton Oaks Archives documents the Bliss apartment and their artworks and furnishings, many of which still remain at Dumbarton Oaks.



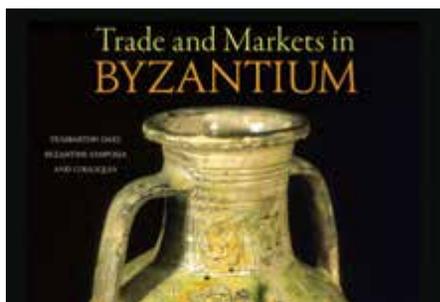
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## Staff Highlights

Cécile Morrisson, Consultant for Byzantine Numismatics, participated in a seminar on “L’histoire économique du Moyen Age” organised in the Fondation des Treilles (Tourtour, Var, France), June 19-22, 2012, in honor of Pierre Toubert, with a paper on “La place de Byzance dans l’histoire économique médiévale (v. 717-1204): méthodes, acquis, perspectives” (The place of Byzantium in medieval economic history [c. 717-1204]: methods, conclusions, perspectives).

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## Off the Press



We are pleased to announce the publication of *Trade and Markets in Byzantium*, edited by Dumbarton Oaks Consultant for Byzantine Numismatics, Cécile Morrisson.

How are markets in antiquity to be characterized? As comparable to modern free markets, with differences in scale not quality? As controlled and dominated by the State? Or, in completely different terms, as free but regulated? In *Trade and Markets in Byzantium* seventeen

scholars address these and related issues by reexamining and reinterpreting the material and textual record from Byzantium and its hinterland for local, regional, and interregional trade. Special emphasis is placed on local trade, the least studied of the three. To understand the recovery of long-distance trade from its eighth-century nadir to the economic prosperity enjoyed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the authors analyze the variety and complexity of the exchange networks, the role of money as a measure of exchange, and the character of local markets. This collection of ground-breaking research will prove to be indispensable for anyone interested in economic history in antiquity and the medieval period.

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Dumbarton Oaks  
1703 32nd Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20007

[www.doaks.org](http://www.doaks.org)

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