

DUMBARTON OAKS

ART • NATURE • SCHOLARSHIP

On Being Conquered in Byzantium
Byzantine Studies Virtual Symposium
April 16–17, 2021, 9:00 a.m.–1:30 p.m. EDT

Friday, April 16, 2021

9:00–9:10 a.m. Tom Cummins and Anna Stavrakopoulou, Dumbarton Oaks
Welcome

9:10–9:30 a.m. Adam Goldwyn, North Dakota State University
Introduction

Conceptualizing Conquest

Chair: John Duffy, Harvard University and Dumbarton Oaks

9:30–9:50 a.m. Yannis Stouraitis, University of Edinburgh
Whose War Ethic? Dominant vs. Subaltern Views of Justified Warfare in Byzantium

9:50–10:10 a.m. Emily L. Spratt, Columbia University
Eucharistic Imagery and Dissent: The Iconography of Liturgical Discord

10:10–10:30 a.m. Discussion with Speakers

10:30–10:45 a.m. Q&A with Public

10:45–11:55 a.m. Break

Slaves and Prisoners of War

Chair: Claudia Rapp, University of Vienna and Dumbarton Oaks

11:55 a.m.–12:15 p.m. Alasdair Grant, University of Edinburgh
The Wandering Captive's Letter of Clerical Advocacy (Aichmalotikon)

12:15–12:35 p.m. Jake Ransohoff, Harvard University
The Mass-Blinding of Prisoners of War in Byzantium

12:35–12:55 p.m. Roland Betancourt, University of California, Irvine
Conquered Things: Omens, Sculptures, and the Imperial Landscape

12:55–1:15 p.m. Discussion with Speakers

1:15–1:30 p.m. Q&A with Public

DUMBARTON OAKS

ART • NATURE • SCHOLARSHIP

Saturday, April 17, 2021

9:00–9:05 a.m. Adam Goldwyn, North Dakota State University
Introduction

Wartime Experience in Marginalized Communities

Chair: Dimiter Angelov, Harvard University and Dumbarton Oaks

9:05–9:25 a.m. Nadia Maria El Cheikh, American University of Beirut
Arab-Byzantine Wars and the Capture of Byzantine Women

9:25–9:45 a.m. Kiril Petkov, University of Wisconsin, River Falls
Acculturate to Compete: The South Slavs and the Byzantine Conquest, 10th–12th Centuries

9:45–10:05 a.m. Discussion with Speakers

10:05–10:20 a.m. Q&A with Public

Virtual Bliss Awardees

Chair: Derek Krueger, University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Dumbarton Oaks

10:20–10:40 a.m. Virtual Bliss Awardees Introduction (James Baillie, Fermude Gülsevinç, Nicolette Levy, Arie Neuhauser, Marissa Smit, and Paul Ulishney)

10:40–11:35 a.m. Break

Conquest and Cultural Memory

Chair: Ioli Kalavrezou, Harvard University and Dumbarton Oaks

11:35–11:55 a.m. Adam Kosto, Columbia University
The Experience of (Re)conquest in Medieval Iberia

11:55 a.m.–12:15 p.m. Yılmaz Erdal, Hacettepe University
Byzantine Warriors at Nicaea: How Do They Differ from the Common People?

12:15–12:35 p.m. Emmanuel Bourbouhakis, Princeton University
A Thing Neither Able to Be Described in Words or Borne in Deed: Re-enacting the Conquest of Thessalonike

12:35–12:55 p.m. Discussion with Speakers

12:55–1:10 p.m. Q&A with Public

Final Discussion

Chair: Elizabeth Bolman, Case Western Reserve University and Dumbarton Oaks

1:10–1:15 p.m. Adam Goldwyn, North Dakota State University

1:15–1:30 p.m. Q&A with Public

On Being Conquered in Byzantium ABSTRACTS

Whose War Ethic? Dominant vs. Subaltern Views of Justified Warfare in Byzantium Yannis Stouraitis (University of Edinburgh)

Just war and holy war in Byzantium are two extensively researched and, especially in the case of the latter, debated topics. Modern scholarship has overwhelmingly focused on the exploration and analysis of secular and religious ideas and discourses that the educated elite employed to justify warfare, be it for the purpose of defending the territory and the populations currently under imperial rule or for the purpose of adding new ones. Given that our written sources mainly offer insights into a dominant Constantinopolitan ideology of justified warfare, an important issue that arises is how we can get a glimpse of the ways the ethic of the war was experienced by the masses of provincial subjects or even by the enemies of the empire.

In the current paper, I shall present a critical overview of emic and etic approaches to conceptions of just war and holy war in the medieval East Roman culture. Focusing on the problem of whether and how our modern categories of analysis can be reconciled with the categories of practice attested in our sources, I shall analyze the interrelation of the so-called Byzantines' ideology of just war with the debated issue of the medieval East Roman empire's offensive or defensive nature. Against this background, I shall then examine selected episodes of Byzantine warfare in an effort to explore potential similarities and differences in the ways rulers and ruled, as well as victors and vanquished, experienced the justified nature of the war.

Eucharistic Imagery and Dissent: The Iconography of Liturgical Discord Emily L. Spratt (Columbia University)

In the context of the political demise of Byzantium and the Venetian rule over formerly Byzantine territories, this presentation considers the role of art in the assessment of cultural transformation under hegemonic circumstances and questions the degree to which the adoption of prevailing styles may be interpreted as a marker of cultural assimilation. Through an examination of the reinvention of Byzantine iconographic subjects relating to the liturgy that were often rendered in a style betraying Italian Renaissance influences, the visual response to the renewed theological disputes concerning the nature of the Eucharist will be explored in relation to the politics of cultural dissent. With focus placed on the inventive mid-sixteenth-century painter, Michael Damaskinos, who created the icon types of the Allegory of the Holy Communion and the Divine Liturgy, the visual insistence of liturgical orthopraxy in painting will be demonstrated as an effective mechanism in fostering community cohesion. Not surprisingly, icons of these types were copied and reverently placed in the Orthodox churches of the Venetian colonies, typically upon the iconostasis, where they were widely viewed by congregants. By privileging the experience of the colonized above the colonizer, an alternative perspective on the complex visual politics of the early modern Eastern Mediterranean world is thus offered.

The Wandering Captive's Letter of Clerical Advocacy (*Aichmalotikon*) **Alasdair Grant (University of Edinburgh)**

During the Palaiologan period (1261–1453), a crisis of captivity emerged in which many Greek Christians were captured by Turkish Muslims or Latin Christians and sold into slavery via mercantile emporia across the Aegean and wider Mediterranean. Those affected by captivity sought to ransom themselves and their relatives by travelling around and collecting money from their coreligionists. To help these alms-seekers, clergy wrote testimonials sometimes called *aichmalotika* ('pertaining to captives').

Aichmalotika outline specific instances of captivity and employ scriptural quotations to implore charity. Around a dozen such texts have been identified, mostly letters but also including a couple of associated sermons. They are likely mere fragments of a much wider phenomenon. All survive as copies and are usually anonymized, intended for reference as templates. A number remain unpublished, while those in print have gone virtually unnoticed. The corpus spans the entire Palaiologan era, while analogous texts survive from the early modern period. They pertain to instances of captivity among Turks, who are usually hostilely portrayed. Many were written and/or copied in Latin-ruled contexts, predominantly Cyprus in the earlier fourteenth century and Crete thereafter.

This paper establishes the genre of the *aichmalotikon* with reference to the surviving corpus and its manuscript contexts. It then considers other contemporary evidence, both narrative and archival, to assess the significance of the *aichmalotika* for the study of captivity, slavery, and inter-confessional relations in the later medieval Mediterranean. It suggests that the *aichmalotika* testify to the particular importance of clergy as social brokers among displaced Greek Christians in an increasingly fragmented world. Patterns of captivity and redemption indicate, too, that Greek Christians' relations with Latins were more cordial and those with Turks more inimical than some recent scholarship would claim.

The Mass-Blinding of Prisoners of War in Byzantium **Jake Ransohoff (Harvard University)**

Prisoners of war faced a range of prospects in Byzantine captivity, from comfortable confinement in Constantinople to forced labor, sale, execution, or—occasionally—mutilation. My paper examines one distinctive chapter in the history of Byzantine prisoner mutilation: the recurrence of mass-blinding during the reign of emperor Basil II (976–1025). By far the most famous instance dates to 1014, when the emperor reputedly blinded every soldier of a captured Bulgarian army. "The blinding of the 15,000," as it is called, has attracted both popular notoriety and extensive scholarly attention. Yet 1014 is not the only example of mass-blinding undertaken by Basil II. The following year, the emperor again blinded all Bulgarians taken captive in his grinding Balkan wars. And in 1021/1022, at the other end of the empire, sources writing in Arabic and Armenian report that Basil blinded large numbers of prisoners during his campaigns of conquest in the Caucasus.

Situating the events of 1014 within this wider pattern, I argue against the recent tendency to treat Basil's mass-blinding as a literary *topos*, if not outright "fantasy." Doing so underscores the practice's distinctiveness to the early eleventh century. Byzantine history abounds in examples of both mass cruelty and the eye-gouging of deposed emperors and aristocratic rebels. Still, the specific, systematic, and repeated application of blinding to large numbers of war prisoners appears particular

to Basil II's long reign. I begin this paper with a background on Byzantine blinding and imperial attitudes toward prisoners, before surveying all three known cases of mass-blinding under Basil II. I suggest that, in each instance, mass-blinding occurred under conditions of imperial weakness—where wider strategic reversals threatened to erase ephemeral gains on the battlefield. Finally, I return to the well-known but often misunderstood “blinding of the 15,000” to draw several broader conclusions about Byzantine mass-violence and the limits of conquest at the empire's medieval apogee.

Conquered Things: Omens, Sculptures, and the Imperial Landscape **Roland Betancourt (University of California, Irvine)**

Conquest is an ongoing process, one which requires the consistent negotiation of people, landscapes, and monuments in order to retain authority and control. How then do objects play into narratives of conquest? How do violent transitions of power negotiate this political terrain? Using sources, such as John Skylitzes's *Synopsis of Histories* and the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, this paper narrates how objects and people were rhetorically incorporated into the landscape of the imperial capital of Constantinople in the Middle Byzantine period.

In these texts, the discussion of omens and portents is often associated either with foreigners or pagan sculptures. Their operation in the landscape is often treated with inquisitive examination, followed by expert intervention. My aim is to chart how these unruly things are rehabilitated into a notion of imperial control. By rehabilitation, I primarily refer to the host of practices and actions aimed at subduing their nefarious efficacy in the world, returning them to a safely inert state. In other words, in this paper I look at how objects and people that entered the bounds of the empire were reinscribed into a salutary vision of imperial history and rule.

Similarly, however, my interest also lies in exploring how these processes of rehabilitation also subverted those neat imperial narratives of terrestrial rule and how they self-reflexively critiqued the very methods of subjugation and power, drawing connections between peoples and things, as well as critiquing the means by which the empire went about its dealings historically.

Arab-Byzantine Wars and the Capture of Byzantine Women **Nadia Maria El Cheikh (American University of Beirut)**

In the ninth and tenth centuries, warfare between Byzantium and the Muslim world largely consisted of raids on frontier areas leading to looting, destruction, and abduction. The danger of being taken captive was ever present and constituted an almost normal course of life for the frontier populations of the Byzantine empire. It is within this context that the sources provide information on the captivity of soldiers and civilians, men and women, both adults and children.

In this paper, I will try to shed some light on the fate of the Byzantine women that were taken into captivity. To that aim, I will first analyze the information provided by the Arabic sources on important episodes of this frontier warfare that led to the capture of prisoners. The second part attempts to answer questions regarding the fate of the women captives from Byzantium, whether they were ransomed, enslaved, executed, or freed.

Acculturate to Compete: The South Slavs and the Byzantine Conquest, 10th–12th Centuries
Kiril Petkov (University of Wisconsin, River Falls)

This paper scrutinizes the response of the native population of the Balkan peninsula (the overwhelming number of them denizens of the First Bulgarian Kingdom) to the Byzantine re-conquest of the region from the late 960s to the late 1070s. The native reaction is presented in the (meager) written evidence within three consecutive timeframes: the time of the conquest itself, the period of Byzantine rule (the eleventh–twelfth centuries), and the half-century or so after the restoration of Bulgarian state sovereignty in 1185 as a result of the uprising led by the new ruling dynasty of the Asenids. During each of these periods, the native response engaged the conquest and its aftermath within a specific context and agenda. By the end of the thirteenth century, the agendas that fueled the reflection had become irrelevant; fourteenth-century authors either ignore the conquest or just note the fact without comments.

The argument of the paper is that the Bulgarian/south Slavic (the terms used interchangeably) discourse on the Byzantine conquest considered the conquest illegitimate from the outset because it separated cultural from political affiliation; the Bulgarians accepted Byzantine rule only to the extent that it acculturated native cultural consciousness on a pan-Orthodox level. Ultimately, as this enhanced the articulation of a new level of ethno-cultural parity with the Byzantines (perceived not as an universalist society but as a monocultural entity), they condemned the conquest as a violent, oppressive, and destructive act, and rejected the ensuing Byzantine rule as an aberration from the native historical destiny. For the Bulgarians, the conquest and its aftermath were perceived as an episode in the process of the acculturation of the Balkan population to the norms of the eastern Orthodox political and cultural system and were valued according to the phase of their progress along this trajectory.

The Experience of (Re)conquest in Medieval Iberia
Adam Kosto (Columbia University)

Classical Arabic historiography has an entire genre of conquest literature, known as *futuḥ*; for Iberia, the classic exemplar is the ninth-century work of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam. For the Christian side, there is no parallel genre precisely, but one can point to a series of works that might be thought of as “Reconquest literature,” from the chronicles composed under Alfonso III of Asturias in the early tenth century (which that can be said to have invented the whole idea), to something like the autobiographical *Llibre dels fets* of James I of Aragón, which details his takeover of Mallorca and Valencia in the thirteenth century. We can pull from such works’ descriptions of battles lost, but they are embedded in what is generally known as speaking narratives of victory. In the present paper, I will look briefly at three moments from medieval Iberia that may be seen to have generated narratives of *anti*-victory, not of conquest but of being conquered. The first is not a single text, but the evidence from charters—legal documents—for the conquest of Barcelona by the warlord al-Manṣūr in 985. Second, there is the *Tibyān*, the memoirs of the eleventh-century ruler of Granada ʿAbdallāh b. Buluggīn, who was defeated, in different ways, both by Christians and Almoravid armies. Finally, there is the recently (2001) discovered *Tārīj Mayūrqa* of Ibn ʿAmīra al-Majzūmī, which relates the conquest of Mallorca from the view of the conquered. These various works reveal differing ways of conceiving and expressing the experience of defeat, offered as comparanda and counterpoints for Byzantine experience that is the main subject of the conference.

Byzantine Warriors at Nicaea: How Do They Differ from the Common People? Yılmaz Erdal (Hacettepe University)

Nicaea, contemporary İznik, is one of the important cities in Byzantine history, not only as the location of the first ecumenical Christian council, but also for being conquered by Latins in 1204 CE, after which the Byzantine emperor moved to Nicaea.

The excavation conducted on the Roman theater of Nicaea revealed that after the tenth century, cut stones were brought to the city wall and that the theater was turned into a dump for domestic waste of all kinds, including animals, medieval Nicaean tiles, and other domestic waste. Over this rubbish layer, we found more than 1,000 skeletonized individuals in the outer and the inner cavea areas. The theater of Nicaea revealed three different human graveyards. One consisted of human remains belonging to the common people of Christian faith buried around the church in the theater. The second consisted of a large number of adult male skeletons in the cavea, close to the chapel burial, west of the chapel wall. Lastly, a group of Muslim and/or Turkic people were found buried in front of the analemma wall of the theater.

Anthropological studies show that the inner cavea group could be associated with Byzantine warriors. They frequently died at a very young age, 20–40 years old. More than 20% of the skeletons have antemortem skeletal wounds related to battle. Moreover, they also show signs of having suffered from a variety of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, leprosy, and syphilis. These were not usual diseases among the common people in Anatolia.

To understand what type of demographic and morphological characteristics were required to become a soldier in the Byzantine army, the effects of wars on the members of the army have been further examined. Skeletal data such as demographic pattern, diet, and some diseases of the Byzantine warriors are found in common burials from Nicaea and other parts of Anatolia. These data suggest that warriors were rather different from common people.

A Thing Neither Able to be Described in Words or Borne in Deed: Re-enacting the Conquest of Thessalonike Emmanuel Bourbouhakis (Princeton University)

Conquest, as Eustathios reminds us in his unusually intimate account of the Norman siege and capture of Thessalonike, poses problems of representation for both the historian who endured it and the one who can only imagine it. Thrice-conquered Thessalonike bore out this truth in three original narratives, which chronicled the city's capitulation to conquerors. In this paper, I discuss the historiographic dilemmas of each narrator and the recourse to distinct modes of tragic re-enactment of the city's and their own predicament. I try to show that 'being conquered' in the dramatic now of eyewitness narrative seizes on rhetorical realism even as it appears to renounce literary historiography. Pivoting from Eustathios' account of his time as a captive after the fall of Thessalonike in 1185, I try to showcase the common wellspring of historical literature born of suffering.