The New Testament in Byzantium

Co-symposiarchs: Robert Nelson and Derek Krueger

The New Testament lay at the center of Byzantine Christian thought and practice. Scribes copied its gospels and epistles. Lectionaries apportioned much of its contents over the course of the liturgical calendar; its narratives structured the experience of liturgical time and shaped the nature of Christian preaching. Quoted, alluded to, and expounded, it inspired and fueled the genres of hagiography and hymnography. Patrons and illustrators brought scenes from the life of Christ and his apostles to manuscripts, icons, and the walls of churches. Preachers, theologians and political theorists drew inspiration and authority from its teachings. Considering such varied legacies, this symposium assesses the impact of the New Testament on Byzantine civilization.

Following the successful symposium and volume on the Old Testament in Byzantium, we extend the investigation of the Bible in Byzantine history. We raise the following questions: What was the New Testament for Byzantine Christians? What of it was known, how, when, where, and by whom? How was this knowledge mediated through text, image, and rite? What was the place of these sacred texts in Byzantine arts, letters, and thought? We draw upon the current state of textual scholarship and explore aspects of New Testament manuscripts. But manuscripts of complete biblical texts, collections of texts, or entire Bibles were not the only or even the most important way in which the New Testament was understood, and accordingly, we explore the transformation of the New Testament as read, heard, imaged, and imagined in lectionaries, hymns, homilies, saints’ lives, and illustrations in miniatures and monuments. We turn also to the role of the New Testament in framing theological inquiry, ecclesiastical controversy, and political thought. Central is our conviction that liturgy, liturgical arts, and intellectual culture offered places where exegesis continued, long after the tradition of Patristic biblical commentary had ceased. Our interdisciplinary conversation will yield fuller knowledge of the New Testament and its varied reception over the long history of Byzantium.

Friday

8:30 Coffee

9:00 Welcomes

9:15 Introduction to the Symposium. Derek or Rob

Texts and Copies of the New Testament

9:30 The New Testament Textual Tradition in Byzantium: David Parker, University of Birmingham

11:00 Discussion and coffee


12:30 Discussion

1:00 Luncheon

II. The Gospels in Hagiography, Hymnography, and Iconography

2:00 Biblical Allusions and Quotations in the Lives of the Saints: Derek Krueger, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

2:45 New Testament Women in Syrian and Byzantine Hymns: Susan Harvey, Brown University

3:30 Discussion and tea


5:00 Discussion

5:30-7:30 Reception

Saturday

9:00 Coffee

IV. The Epistles in Byzantine Thought

9:30 Byzantine Exegesis of Pauline Doctrines of Salvation, Margaret Mitchell, University of Chicago

10:15 New Testament Exegesis in Middle Byzantine Polemic: Tia Kolbaba, Rutgers University

11:00 Discussion and coffee

11:30 The Textuality of the New Testament in Commentaries and Catena, Jeremy Schott, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
12:15 Discussion
12:45 Luncheon

V. Homilies, Exegesis, and Apocalyptic

2:00 Eighth Century Homilies on New Testament Themes: Mary Cunningham, University of Nottingham

2:45 Later Byzantine Homilies: Maximos of Simonopetra (Nicholas Constas), Mount Athos

3:30 Discussion and tea

4:00 The Afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Later Byzantine Apocalyptic Literature and Commentary: Stephen Shoemaker, University of Oregon

4:45 Discussion

Sunday

VI. Church and Liturgy

9:00 Coffee

9:30 The Abridged Lectionary: Robert Nelson, Yale University


10:30 Discussion and coffee

11:00 Time and Narrative in Church Spaces: Charles Barber, Notre Dame.

11:45 Discussion

12:00 Conclusions