

# WORLDS OF BYZANTIUM

BYZANTINE STUDIES SYMPOSIUM



Symposiarchs

Elizabeth S. Bolman (Temple University)  
Scott F. Johnson (University of Oklahoma)  
Jack Tannous (Princeton University)

April 22–23, 2016  
Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection  
Washington, D.C.



## Worlds of Byzantium | Spring Symposium 2016

Symposiarchs: Elizabeth S. Bolman, Scott F. Johnson, and Jack Tannous

The 2016 Dumbarton Oaks Spring Symposium, “Worlds of Byzantium,” seeks to reconsider Byzantium from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages, problematizing long-established notions of its character and parameters.

In 1980 Dumbarton Oaks hosted the now famous “East of Byzantium” symposium, which resulted in an era-defining volume of scholarly articles under the same name, edited by N. Garsoïan, T. Mathews, and R. Thomson. This gathering of experts in various eastern Christian traditions put Dumbarton Oaks at the forefront of the emergent conversation about Byzantium’s eastern neighbors. Today, the medieval Mediterranean within which Byzantium was situated appears much more complex and fluid than what was envisioned thirty years ago. New archaeological, historical, and literary research has made this fluidity abundantly clear and has opened up new questions about the formation of identity in the empire as the relationship between the metropolis and the provinces fluctuated.

What was Byzantium? Where was it? What religions did its people practice, and which languages did they speak? The 2016 Symposium will examine the very foundations of what we think “Byzantium” was—Greek-speaking, Orthodox Christian, Constantinopolitan—and attempt to reset scholars’ expectations about what counts as Byzantine. Nevertheless, just as “East of Byzantium” transformed the expectations of a generation with regard to the value of eastern Christianity for medieval studies, we believe that Byzantium itself, however it is defined, can play a more central role on the world historical stage if Byzantinists are willing to let it be decentered and reconstituted for the next generation. This symposium will argue that a polycentric and interconnected Byzantium only strengthens Byzantine Studies as a discipline by making it indispensable to other fields: in order fully to understand essential aspects of the medieval Middle East or the medieval West one must also understand Byzantium.

### Friday, April 22, 2016

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| 8:30 AM | Morning Registration and Coffee                         |
| 9:00 AM | Welcome by Jan Ziolkowski (Dumbarton Oaks)              |
| 9:15 AM | Introduction by Elizabeth S. Bolman (Temple University) |

### IDENTITY AND EMPIRE

#### Chair: John Duffy

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| 9:30 AM  | <i>A New Byzantine Commonwealth</i><br>Scott F. Johnson (University of Oklahoma)  |
| 10:15 AM | <i>How Byzantines became Greeks: Greek Nationalism and Byzantine Studies</i><br>Kostis Kourelis (Franklin and Marshall College) |
| 11:00 AM | Coffee on the Music Room Terrace  |
| 11:30 AM | <i>Byzantium and the Turn to the East</i><br>Averil Cameron (University of Oxford)  |
| 12:15 PM | Lunch in the Orangery   |

**Chair: Ruth Macrides**

- 2:00 PM *Islamic Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and Iran*  
Antoine Borrut (University of Maryland)
- 2:45 PM *King and God(s) in Early Armenian Sagas*  
Robin Darling Young (Catholic University of America)
- 3:30 PM Tea on the Music Room Terrace

**Chair: Bob Ousterhout**

- 4:00 PM *Byzantine Georgia / Georgian Byzantium*  
Stephen Rapp (Sam Houston State University)
- 4:45 PM *Art at the Edges: Shifting Perceptions of the Middle Byzantine Eastern Periphery*  
Alicia Walker (Bryn Mawr College)
- 5:30 PM Discussion of IDENTITY AND EMPIRE Section
- 6:00-8:00 PM Reception in the Orangery

**Saturday, April 23, 2016**

- 9:00 AM Morning Registration and Coffee

**MOVEMENT AND PLACE**

**Chair: Dimiter Angelov**

- 9:45 AM *The Dynamics Place and Space in Early Byzantine Visual Culture*  
Elizabeth Bolman (Temple University)
- 10:30 AM Coffee on the Music Room Terrace
- 11:00 AM *Babel on the Bosphorus? Languages in the Byzantine World*  
Arietta Papaconstantinou (University of Reading)
- 11:45 AM Lunch in the Orangery

**Chair: Derek Krueger**

- 1:30 PM *Byzantine Syriac and Byzantine Arabic*  
Jack Tannous (Princeton University)
- 2:15 PM *Jerusalem's Liturgy and Its Byzantinization*  
Daniel Galadza (University of Vienna)
- 3:00 PM Tea on the Music Room Terrace

**Chair: Ioli Kalavrezou**

- 3:30 PM *The Social Lives of Things East of Byzantium*  
Cecily Hilsdale (McGill University)
- 4:15 PM Discussion of MOVEMENT AND PLACE Section

**CONCLUSION**

- 5:00–6:00 PM *East of Byzantium Revisited*  
Columba Stewart (Hill Museum and Manuscript Library/Saint John's University)

## ABSTRACTS

### IDENTITY AND EMPIRE

#### **A New Byzantine Commonwealth**

*Scott F. Johnson (University of Oklahoma)*

How do we conceive of Byzantium's relationship to the East? For some, Byzantium is fundamentally European and represents a lost voice in current debates over European diversity and identity. For others, Byzantium is foreign, exotic, and oriental, sharing more with the Middle East than with Europe. In this paper I explore these perceptions and offer the debated concept of "commonwealth" as a place where very different views of Byzantium's eastern reach seem to converge. My goal, however, is to problematize commonwealth as a heuristic, drawing attention to the many different ways in which eastern Christians of various stripes defined themselves with respect to Byzantium throughout the early Middle Ages. On one hand, eastern Christian groups never viewed themselves as completely independent of the Nicene, Roman church of Constantine, which provided a doctrinal foundation for all eastern Christians. Yet, at the same time, from the seventh century on their relationship with the Caliphate was one of subordination and dissent, even while they were at times privileged members of Muslim society. This paper seeks to open once again the conversation of the Dumbarton Oaks symposium "East of Byzantium" from 1980 as a means of signaling how far eastern Christian studies have come in the past three decades. In addition, I highlight what those rich fields, now remarkably mature, might be able to contribute to ongoing debates about Byzantine identity within the now dominant movement towards "global history."

#### **How Byzantines became Greeks: Greek Nationalism and Byzantine Studies**

*Kostis Kourelis (Franklin and Marshall College)*

The modern nation-state of Hellas rejected Byzantium as an unfortunate episode interfering with an otherwise direct lineage to classical antiquity. Byzantium was suppressed and its material culture systematically destroyed in the building of a neoclassical fabric. The elevation of Byzantium from the most degenerate into the most admirable civilization coincided with Europe's systematic rethinking of history as a scientific discipline in the mid-nineteenth century. The theorization of historical process as dialectical rather than progressive and the preference for material over textual sources replaced the Enlightenment's notion of the "middle" ages (apologetically in the "middle" of antiquity and modernity) with new constructs like the Gothic, the Romanesque, or the Byzantine. In the case of architecture, for instance, the French Neogrecs, the German advocates of Rundbogenstil, and the British followers of John Ruskin all singled out Byzantine architecture as a paradigm for modernity. Watching how Europe and America appropriated their material heritage for resolutely internationalist ends, Greeks sought to recover Byzantium, aligning it with folk culture and an unrealized "modernity." A new theory of "three civilizations" galvanized the nation against the geopolitical chaos of resulting from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. An overtly Greek Byzantium may have failed Greece's territorial dreams in 1922, but it guaranteed its cultural prominence after World War II. The Greek state and its intellectuals partnered with academic institutions to assert the Hellenic integrity of Byzantium so that it could not be used by competing narratives, either from the Soviet north or to the Arab south whose national movements galvanized against the state of Israel. Nineteenth-century notions of an organic and multicultural Byzantium were abandoned for a stricter alignment between Greek language, Orthodox faith, classical heritage that could sustain Greece's new geopolitical role as a Cold War frontier.

## **Byzantium and the Turn to the East**

*Averil Cameron (University of Oxford)*

Much has changed since the original Dumbarton Oaks symposium on the subject “East of Byzantium” in 1980. One of these changes has been a real turn to the east among scholars of Late Antiquity and early Byzantium, amply demonstrated in the papers in the present symposium. With the broadening of study of that period into what became known as “Late Antiquity” it was no longer enough to focus on the late Roman or early Byzantine state: now scholars enthusiastically embraced the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean, and the rise, and at least the early history, of Islam. On the other hand the identity of Byzantium itself became more problematic. Early Byzantium was in danger of dissolving into Late Antiquity or eastern Mediterranean studies, and several prominent Byzantinists argue that “Byzantium” only began sometime in the seventh century. The recent tendency to read Islam as a religion of Late Antiquity only adds to these complexities. As for later periods of Byzantine history, we now see increasing moves to bring Byzantium into transnational and global narratives, and to emphasize the fragmentation of the Byzantine world after 1204; indeed this has led to the quite common practice of ending general treatments of Byzantium at 1204. At the same time Byzantium is still routinely omitted from treatments of “European” history and from narratives of modernity cast in terms of a line drawn from antiquity to modernity through the Middle Ages. This paper will ask what Byzantium now means in relation to these wider trends, and where it might fit within today’s historical understanding.

## **Islamic Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and Iran**

*Antoine Borrut (University of Maryland)*

The inclusion of nascent Islam into a late antique framework has become largely conventional in the wake of Peter Brown’s seminal work. And yet, with a few exceptions, Islamicists have been reluctant to discuss the implications of such an analytical framework, or have had the tendency to reduce it to its religious dimension. This paper thus aims to focus on (some of) the consequences of the inclusion of early Islam into a late antique paradigm, primarily at the cultural level. In particular, I will challenge the false dichotomy between Muslim and non-Muslim sources and elaborate on the implications of intercultural transmission in the late antique and early Islamic Near East to rethink our historiographical and literary classifications. This will notably allow me to reconsider the notion of a gap of narrative sources allegedly shared by Byzantium, Iran, and early Islam roughly up to the ninth century CE, and to highlight broader historiographical trends of the period. In turn, this will shed a new light on the cultural and political significance and legacy of the Umayyad imperial moment that was largely obliterated in subsequent layers of Abbasid historiography. Lastly, this paper will question the benefits of approaching early Islam as primarily torn between Byzantine and Persian cultural and political influences to address the cultural memory of early Islam in its own terms.

## **King and God(s) in Early Armenian Sagas**

*Robin Darling Young (Catholic University of America)*

When the Armenian royal house definitively aligned itself with Rome, its successors acquired a library, a culture, a fractionated religious organization, and three centuries of intermittent war against or alongside Sasanian Iran, depending upon the pragmatic alliances of the noble houses in the country. Traditionally dated to 301, Trdat’s acceptance of Christian baptism led to the

introduction into Armenia of an already well-developed political-religious outlook and practice, one with a range of approaches to describing the relationship between religion and government. If Syriac- and Greek-speaking missionaries had come to the region before Trdat's baptism, their efforts now gained legitimacy and monetary support, and increasing in numbers they brought with them their own distinctive interpretive traditions. Both the missionaries, and, after the creation of the Armenian script, a native cadre of translators and writers made available the scriptures with the works of many Greek and Syriac interpreters. Armenian writers in turn incorporated the biblical sagas of Judaeon kings, later accounts of martyrs' confrontations with imperial power, and the fourth-century developments – notably Eusebius' works – to create a narrative particular to their own origins and their ongoing deep connection with a Persian government whose kings claimed descent from Zoroastrian gods. Such traditions shape the account of kingdom and kingship in successive Armenian sagas of the "Christian nation," yet necessarily adapted it to the clan-rule that conditioned an Armenian client-statehood balancing, as Garsoian definitively demonstrated, between two imperial powers. This lecture explores the development of the royal image in (mostly) Christian Armenia, from Agat'angelos to Lazar Parpec'i.

### **Byzantine Georgia / Georgian Byzantium**

*Stephen Rapp (Sam Houston State University)*

This paper proceeds from the notion that Byzantium was considerably more than the imperial core based at Constantinople: it was a cosmopolitan, cross-cultural commonwealth extending far beyond the empire's borders, however they might be conceived. Despite the focus on Slavic peoples in Dimitri Obolensky's groundbreaking *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453*, the Caucasus region was an integral part of this world from its inception. Deploying a pan-Caucasian approach, I shall investigate Georgia's active membership in the Byzantine Commonwealth. Of particular interest are the patterns of selective Byzantinization germinating in a diverse society that had been oriented towards Iran since the Achaemenid era. What aspects of Byzantine culture took root among late antique and medieval Georgians? How and why did this occur? What was specifically Byzantine about these cultural threads? And what did Georgians contribute to Byzantine culture? Because the selective Byzantinization of Georgian (and larger Caucasian) society did not occur within a vacuum, we must also consider Georgian individuals and communities functioning inside the empire. Among other things, a vibrant monastic network stretched from the Balkans to Anatolia and south to Syria, the Holy Land, and Egypt. Priority will be given to indigenous sources from Caucasia, especially the literary and visual culture of the eastern Georgians (Iberians, Kartvelians). Armenian and, as they exist, Caucasian Albanian sources will also be exploited.

### **Art at the Edges: Shifting Perceptions of the Middle Byzantine Eastern Periphery**

*Alicia Walker (Bryn Mawr College)*

Scholars of the early to mid-twentieth century tended to view the material culture and built environment at the eastern edges of the middle Byzantine empire as "peripheral" (i.e., dependent and derivative, if not simply inferior) to the artistic and architectural production of Constantinople. Yet, given the low rate of preservation of monuments in the capital as well as the difficulty of securely identifying the provenience of most Byzantine objects, the Constantinopolitan architectural and artistic canon was in many ways an imaginary model and, ironically, was often extrapolated from better preserved provincial works of art and architecture. Such studies relied largely on style-based analytical methods to construct a canon

of “Byzantine” art that often neglected the socio-historical contexts of production and use. As a result, the term “Byzantine” was applied to objects and monuments based on formal properties rather than their actual relationship to Byzantine people or geography. More recent scholarship demonstrates that this style-based, “Byzantium-without-borders” approach limits our understanding of how works of art and architecture reflected and shaped the identities of medieval peoples and the societies in which they lived. Studies published since the late 1980s often undertake a regional approach, attending to the unique circumstances and reference points that obtained at the micro level. Rather than assuming a uniform, unilateral dynamic of the sophisticated, dominant urban center shaping the passive, inferior periphery, scholars recognize the Byzantine provinces to be fluid and innovative zones of cultural exchange and production, in which works of art and architecture reflect diverse and shifting affiliations with not only Byzantium, but also a wide range of regional Islamic and Eastern Christian religious, political, and ethnic groups. The resulting image depicts a complex world in which networks of people, things, and ideas circulated through pathways that did not always intersect with Constantinople, sometimes routing instead through competing centers that challenged or even overpowered the influence of the capital. Engaging these current interpretations of the eastern edges of medieval Byzantium, this paper concludes with an exploration of how pseudo-Arabic motifs in middle Byzantine art and architecture suggest alternative networks of artistic identity, emulation, and meaning at the edges of the empire.

## **MOVEMENT AND PLACE**

### **The Dynamics of Place and Space in Early Byzantine Visual Culture**

*Elizabeth S. Bolman (Temple University)*

The last few decades have seen a spatial turn in historical studies, drawing attention to the significance of location, movement, and the perception of space. The remarkably tenacious, grand narrative of early Byzantine visual culture, however, appears largely unchanged by it. Art historians have traditionally focused on the notions of center (Constantinople) and periphery, and have attempted to use artistic character to locate places of origin for portable objects, without success. High quality objects (often illusionistic) have been attributed to Constantinopolitan workshops without corroborating evidence, based on the assumption that the principal site of sophistication, creativity and invention was the imperial capital. Scholars have for some time been problematizing the question of generative centers of culture, but these specialized studies are often ignored. I suggest that the traditional model is too simplistic accurately to describe early Byzantine artistic production and reception. The impossibility of identifying precise sites of manufacture based on style, despite decades of attempts, points to a very different model for creative activity. It can arguably be seen as evidence for a world in which people, objects and ideas were in constant motion, within and far beyond the borders of the empire. While the capital, other major cities, and provinces certainly all had unique characteristics, the frequent movement of patrons, artists and objects meant that place of manufacture quite possibly did not account for style or iconography. In a new, twenty-first century paradigm for early Byzantine visual culture, connectivity is the rule, and specific context determines significance.

## **Babel on the Bosphorus? Languages in the Byzantine World**

*Arietta Papaconstantinou (University of Reading)*

Since Gilbert Dagron's article on linguistic pluralism in Byzantium, published in 1994, very little has been written on the subject, despite the growing interest in historical multilingualism as an area of study: loyal to Dagron's verdict, Byzantinists have only looked for linguistic diversity at the margins, be they geographical or chronological. Twenty years after that pioneering article, however, the historiographical landscape has changed radically, and so has the theoretical framework for the study of multilingualism in the past. It is now possible to look at the evidence anew, and to bring new evidence, in an attempt to offer a more integrated approach of language in the "Worlds of Byzantium." While the view from upper-class Constantinople has tended to obscure the reality of the multilingual empire, that reality has been at the center of recent work on its provinces, most prominently – though not exclusively – Syria, Palestine and Egypt. To be sure, the sources at our disposal for those regions are very different from those of the capital, but the questions asked by respective scholars have also reflected their expectations and preconceptions. In this paper I would like to bring together different strands of research on multilingualism in the broader Byzantine world up to the end of the tenth century, to contextualize the evolution of linguistic practice, and to present a number of political, social, economic, religious, and cultural issues at stake not only in the multilingual empire itself, but also among its immediate neighbors.

## **Byzantine Syriac and Byzantine Arabic**

*Jack Tannous (Princeton University)*

In this paper, I will seek to explore the use of Syriac by Chalcedonian Christians in the Middle East from the fifth century till the seventeenth—the community that is today known as the Rūm Orthodox. Syriac has typically been associated with Miaphysite and "Nestorian" churches whereas the Chalcedonian communities of the Fertile Crescent have been strongly associated with Greek and Arabic. These associations, I will suggest, are misleading and largely the result of the vicissitudes of transmission history. Part of my paper, therefore, will also discuss Greek as a Miaphysite language and the beginnings of the use of Arabic as a Christian language. As is the case with Chalcedonian Syriac, I will argue that our understanding of both these phenomena has been shaped by the fates of libraries and monasteries in the medieval and post-medieval period and has, generally speaking, been inaccurate. Looking at Chalcedonian Syriac specifically and the fate of Chalcedonian Syriac texts provides a cautionary example: if we focus on putatively sectarian connections between particular Middle Eastern languages and specific religious communities without taking into account transmission history we will find ourselves with distorted understandings of the connection between language and confession. Moreover, failing to take into account the disappearance and destruction of enormous amounts of Syriac literature leaves us with a misleading grasp of the role Syriac and Greek played in the late antique Near East.

## **Jerusalem's Liturgy and Its Byzantinization**

*Daniel Galadza (University of Vienna)*

From the perspective of Constantinople, Jerusalem was part of the Byzantine periphery. Jerusalem's liturgy reflected Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, and Constantinople eagerly imitated Hagiopolite liturgical practices because Jerusalem was the setting of biblical events. In Jerusalem, liturgy was intrinsically connected to movement in stational processions and holy

places, creating a distinctive Eucharistic liturgy, a local calendar of commemorations, and a particular lectionary. After the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries and the Arab conquest of the seventh century, this liturgy proved a unifying factor, grounding the identity of Chalcedonian “Melkite” Christians in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Jerusalem’s liturgy eventually underwent a process of “Byzantinization,” abandoning local practices and adopting Constantinople’s liturgy. Ironically, however, this only occurred once Jerusalem was beyond the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Despite the absence of imperial policy to propagate the Byzantine Rite abroad, the reconquest of Antioch in 969 facilitated liturgical Byzantinization by disseminating Byzantine liturgical manuscripts from Constantinople to Antioch and then Jerusalem. The liturgical rites these books contained were, however, received and adopted in Jerusalem only gradually. Thus, the destruction of holy sites after the Arab conquest—most notably by Caliph al-Ḥākim in 1009—only explains the historical circumstances in which liturgical Byzantinization occurred. Fundamentally, liturgical Byzantinization occurred because Greek, Georgian, Syrian, and Arab scribes in Jerusalem, Palestine, and Sinai, selected which elements of liturgical texts were recopied and preserved, and which were to be abandoned, themselves influenced by their allegiance to Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and the prestige of Constantinople. Throughout this process, these scribes remained cognizant of their role as keepers of the holy sites and the liturgical tradition of Jerusalem, and increasingly peripheral in the eyes of Byzantium.

### **The Social Lives of Things East of Byzantium**

*Cecily Hilsdale (McGill University)*

If the goal of this symposium is to de-center Byzantium by insisting on its multiple worlds, my contribution considers how art objects could construct “Byzantine-ness” beyond Byzantium as traditionally defined. In recognizing the incongruous relationship between imperial territories and cultural affiliation, the paper examines how art objects could articulate a sense of Byzantine identity outside the empire’s ever-shifting borders. Unlike aspects of Islamic art that inflect middle Byzantine culture, in the later period a diverse range of foreign source material had become so deeply rooted as to challenge any sense of a mainstream Byzantine aesthetic or a dominant Byzantine style. Instead, the regional character of later Byzantine visual culture becomes the norm. To this end, borrowing and appropriating cease to serve as fruitful explanatory models for stylistic diversity. Central to my understanding of these expanded worlds of Byzantium is a temporal dimension. What does the cessation of imperial authority mean for expressing Byzantine identity among Christian communities and their artistic worlds in the east? And how might the works of local Christian communities there compare with Orthodox art produced elsewhere under Ottoman authority?





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