



# Passing Judgment: Distinctions, Separations, and Contradictions in Late Antiquity and Byzantium

25<sup>th</sup> International Graduate  
Conference of the Oxford  
University Byzantine Society

24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> February, 2023  
Faculty of History, Oxford  
Live-Streamed on Zoom

## Programme

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***This conference was organised by the OUBS Conference Committee (2022–23):***

Nathan Websdale (President)  
Tom Alexander (Secretary)  
Jamie Chandler (Treasurer)  
Yan Zaripov (Conference Officer)

**Cover Image:** Icon with the Heavenly Ladder of John Klimax (Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai), Middle Byzantine.  
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# Welcome

The Committee of the Oxford University Byzantine Society wishes you all a very warm welcome to our 25<sup>th</sup> International Graduate Conference, *Passing Judgement: Distinctions, Separations, and Contradictions in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*. This is an important anniversary for the OUBS, marking both the 25<sup>th</sup> conference and the 30 years since the society's birth. We look forward to sharing this anniversary with you all, and to provide a forum for productive discourse on Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the wider pre-modern Mediterranean world.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues who helped with the organisation of the Conference, without whom it would not have been able to take place: Sofiya Shevchuk, Ray Ngoh, Ugo Mondini, Martina Carandino, Dan Gallaher, Ya'el Krämer, Chloé Agar, James Cogbill, Alexander Sherborne, Achraf Brahim, Alberto Ravani, Andrew McNey, and all others who have kindly given or offered help in bringing this conference to fruition.

We look forward to listening to and engaging with our speakers' research.

Best wishes from the OUBS Conference Committee,

*Nathan DC Websdale, Tom Alexander, Jamie Chandler, and Yan Zaripov.*

## **We are grateful for the support of:**

The Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research (OCBR)

The Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity (OCLA)

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# PASSING JUDGEMENT: DISTINCTIONS, SEPARATIONS, AND CONTRADICTIONS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND BYZANTIUM

*'Being the product of the incorporation of the fundamental structures of a society, these principles of division are common to all the agents of the society and make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world'.*

– Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge MA, 1984).

The study of distinctions, separations, and contradictions entails contemplating how Late Antique and Byzantine communities experienced and structured their worlds. It is a discussion of the study of identification, of change, and of recognition (or indeed assertion) of difference. However, it also demands that we as scholars reflect on how we perceive those worlds. Such a subject, therefore, brings together a wide range of themes that both answers and demands questions of us, our discipline, and our relationships with subject matters.

This sort of introspection is a fitting tribute for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our graduate conferences – a celebration gathering thirty speakers from twelve countries and four continents. As the first OUBS conference delivered fully in person since 2020 – yet still broadcasting to the world – we hope to preserve the flexibility and wide engagement of previous conferences whilst facilitating the easy exchange of ideas and collaboration that come through in-person connections.

The papers presented over the next two days engage with peoples, objects, and creeds in multiple languages and traditions, covering over one thousand years of history. It was a Christian state, governed by Roman Law and inspired by pagan literary models, positioning itself alone at

the height of an ideological hierarchy that constantly contradicted itself. It identified itself as distinctly and exclusively Roman whilst its population defined themselves through a diverse range of overlapping identities. These apparent contradictions merge and fuse, developing through the great geopolitical changes of the Byzantine millennium.

Over that millennium, each of these elements never ceased in its evolution nor its subjectivity. The distinction and distinguishing of one thing from another can never cease from being inconstant. In the fluidity of distinguishing and separating, we often find that the things which we think define us all can so often quickly collapse when tested.

Please enjoy the postgraduate forum for the discussion of Late Antiquity and Byzantium, join us as we recognise 25 years of tradition, and collaborate with us as we showcase the strength of postgraduate scholarship in Late Antique / Byzantine Studies and related disciplines both at the University of Oxford and across the world.

With best wishes from the conference committee,  
*Nathan Websdale, Tom Alexander, Jamie Chandler, and Yan Zaripov.*

# FORMAT AND TIMETABLE

*The conference is structured into 5 sessions across two days. All three sessions on Friday and the first session of Saturday consist each of 2 separate themed panels of three or four papers respectively, running in parallel in separate rooms, with livestreams available for each via the 'Breakout Rooms' function on Zoom. Papers are 20 minutes, each followed by questions. The final session on Saturday is a single panel, intended to draw the conference to a close by approaching its themes from a broad range of chronological and geographical contexts. Unlike previous panels, questions for speakers in this final panel are reserved until after all speakers have presented, and the audience is encouraged to address questions to the panel, so that multiple speakers can answer from their individual case-studies.*

## FRIDAY, 24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY

10.30 — OPENING ADDRESS AND COFFEE

11.30 — FIRST CONFERENCE SESSION:

1A: 'DEFINING SANCTITY AND FEMININITY IN THE CULT OF SAINTS'

1B: 'POLITICAL DIFFERENCES AND THE MAKING OF THE 'OTHER' IN LATE ANTIQUITY'

13.00 — LUNCH (SANDWICH LUNCH PROVIDED)

14.00 — SECOND CONFERENCE SESSION:

2A: 'DEBATING DIFFERENCE IN LATE ANTIQUE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE'

2B: 'ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE IN THE LATE AND POST-BYZANTINE MEDITERRANEAN'

15.30 — BREAK

16.00 — THIRD CONFERENCE SESSION:

3A: 'LATE BYZANTINE IMPERIAL CONTRADICTIONS'

3B: 'MANIFESTING AND BRIDGING GENDER IN THE MEDIEVAL WORLD'

17.30 — DRINKS RECEPTION

## SATURDAY, 25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY

11.30 — FOURTH CONFERENCE SESSION (COFFEE / PASTRIES AVAILABLE FROM 11.00):

4A: 'MAKING AND CROSSING BARRIERS IN LITERATURE'

4B: 'DIVISIONS AND SEPARATIONS IN LATE ANTIQUE AND BYZANTINE SPACE AND CITY'

13.30 — LUNCH (SANDWICH LUNCH PROVIDED)

14.30 — FIFTH CONFERENCE SESSION:

5: 'INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OTHERS IN THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN WORLD - ROUND TABLE'

16.30 — BREAK

17.15 — CONCLUDING REMARKS

18.00 — WINE RECEPTION

FIRST CONFERENCE SESSION, FRIDAY: 11.30–13.00

**1A: DEFINING SANCTITY AND FEMININITY IN THE CULT OF SAINTS**

(Chair: Ya'el Krämer)

**Chloé Agar**

(St. Cross College)

*Distinctions of Gender in Coptic Hagiography: Sex, Suffering, and Sainthood*

**Nuna Terri**

(Université Libre de Bruxelles)

*The Beneficiaries of the Miracles of Thekla in her Shrine of Seleukeia on the Kalykadnos: A Gender Distinction?*

**Natalie Novella**

(St. Hugh's College)

*Gems of Heaven: Bejewelled Saints and the Christian Rhetoric of Unadornment*

**1B: POLITICAL DIFFERENCES AND THE MAKING OF THE 'OTHER' IN LATE ANTIQUITY**

(Chair: Alexander Sherborne)

**Nicola Holm**

(University of Exeter)

*The Usurper Julian? Julian's Letter to the Athenians and the Construction of Imperial Legitimacy*

**James Duncan**

(University of Liverpool)

*Quodvultdeus's Others: The Old Testament, Jews, and Israel in the Liber Promissionum et Praedictorum Dei*

**Sean Strong**

(Cardiff University)

*Passing Judgment on Ideas of Treason in Late Antiquity: Theophylact Simocatta on the Distinctions between Methods of Sedition in Roman and Sasanian Contexts*

SECOND CONFERENCE SESSION, FRIDAY: 14.00–15.30

**2A: DEBATING DIFFERENCE IN LATE ANTIQUE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE**

(Chair: Thibaut Auplat)

**Ya'el Krämer**

(Queens College)

*Debating the Jewishness of Proto-Christian Martyrs: The Case of The Maccabean Mother*

**Per Johannes Jordfald**

(Worcester College)

*Nestorius after Nestorius: Heretic and saint in the wider religious world*

**Maria Christian**

(Regents Park College)

*Rubbing Saffron between kāfirāt. Interfaith Relations in the Encyclopaedia of Pleasure (10<sup>th</sup> c.)*

**2B: ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE IN THE LATE AND POST-BYZANTINE MEDITERRANEAN**

(Chair: Jamie Chandler)

**Allison Grenda**

(University of Michigan)

*A Byzantine Gnadenstuhl: The Reception of a Western Iconography in Rural Venetian Crete*

**Evan Zakardas**

(Independent Scholar)

*When do we call them Romans? The Use of the Roman vs. Local Identity in the Chronicle of Ioannina*

**David Williams**

(University of St. Katherine, San Diego)

*Negotiating Orthodoxy in Frankish and Venetian Cyprus*

SESSION 3: FRIDAY, 16.00–17.30

**3A: LATE BYZANTINE IMPERIAL CONTRADICTIONS**

(Chair: Nathan DC Websdale)

**Maria Varela**

(Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

*The Divided Self in Times of Crisis: The Case of Manuel II Palaiologos*

**Daiki Sano**

(University of Edinburgh)

*An Historian's Professed Beliefs and the Reality: Narrative Bias in George Pachymeres' History*

**James Cogbill**

(Worcester College)

*Between Empire and Genos: The Emperor in Early Palaiologan Byzantium*

**3B: MANIFESTING AND BRIDGING GENDER IN THE MEDIEVAL WORLD**

(Chair: Chloé Agar)

**Scarlett Kiaras-Attari**

(Oriental College)

*Understanding 'Transgender-Like' Expression in Byzantine Hagiography through an Analysis of the Life of St Matrona of Perge*

**Defangyu Kong**

(University of Edinburgh)

*Virgin Mary and Devi Jinguang 淨光天女: Employing Gender to Justify Matriarchal Rule in Medieval Byzantium and China*

**Henry Anderson**

(University of Exeter)

*Court Eunuchs and Imperial Authority in the Reign of Theodosius II*

#### FOURTH CONFERENCE SESSION, SATURDAY: 11.30–13.30

##### 4A: MAKING AND CROSSING BARRIERS IN LITERATURE

(Chair: Ugo Mondini)

**Kat Aizlewood**

(St. Catherine's College)

*Separating the moral from the immoral: The use of binary dichotomies in Hysmine and Hysminias to express Byzantine moral values through a pagan and erotic setting*

**Yan Zaripov**

(St. Hilda's College)

*Poetry as Distinction: The Literary Strategy of Theodore Prodromos*

**Aiden Mattingly**

(Bryn Mawr)

*An Eye Looking to the East: Benjamin of Tudela's Depiction of Byzantium*

**Martina Naretto**

(University of Turin)

*The Philogelos: Crossing Genres and Languages*

##### 4B: DIVISIONS AND SEPARATIONS IN LATE ANTIQUE AND BYZANTINE SPACE AND CITY

(Chair: James Cogbill)

**Julia Borczyńska**

(University of Warsaw)

*How strangers became fellow citizens. Pseudo-Damasian epigraphic poetry as a testimony to the ideological continuation of the creation of Rome as a city of saints.*

**Catherine McNally**

(St. Cross College)

*Cross-Confessionalism in Early Islamic Architecture: The Kathisma Church in Jerusalem*

**Tom Adamson-Green**

(St. Catherine's College)

*"From the river unto the ends of the earth" – rivers as conceptual boundaries in the De Administrando Imperio*

**Foteini Sioli**

(University of Edinburgh)

*Discussing the public life of Jews in middle Byzantine Peloponnese in context: Limitations and interpretations*

#### FIFTH CONFERENCE SESSION (ROUND TABLE), SATURDAY: 14.30–16.40

##### 5A: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OTHERS IN THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

(Chair: Tom Alexander)

**Daniel Berardino** (Fordham University), *Byzantine ambivalence toward Turkish soldiers in the Komnenian army: The case of Poupakes*

**Edwin Pendlebury** (Jesus College), *Romanness and Provincial Identities in Procopius' Wars*

**Thibaut Auplat** (Aix-Marseille Université), *The Use of Irony and Bad Faith as Strategies to Identify and Define the Other in John Damascene and Abu Qurrah's Accounts of Islam*

**Zeynep Olgun** (University of Cambridge), *Floating Communities: Shipboard Society in Byzantium*

**THE AUDIENCE IS ENCOURAGED TO ADDRESS QUESTIONS TO THE PANEL AS A WHOLE, SO THAT MULTIPLE SPEAKERS CAN ATTEMPT TO ANSWER FROM THEIR INDIVIDUAL CASE-STUDIES.**

# ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS

## *PANEL 1A: DEFINING SANCTITY AND FEMININITY IN THE CULT OF SAINTS*

### **Distinctions of Gender in Coptic Hagiography: Sex, Suffering, and Sainthood**

Chloé Agar (St. Cross College, Oxford)

The study of gender in early Christianity is growing, especially regarding pilgrimage and monasticism. Key within this is how judgement is passed upon female saints, nuns, and female laypeople against a standard based on monks and male saints. I will contribute to gender studies in Late Antiquity and Byzantium by focusing on the principles of distinguishing men and women in Coptic hagiography. Hagiographies were intended to be read aloud to lay audiences in order to produce for them a common, meaningful world and set limits upon it based on viewpoints conveyed by the writers.

Through case studies, I will demonstrate that writers not only demarcated characters in Coptic hagiography based on their gender but also judged them according to it, thus establishing hagiographers as an authority that defined the audience's world in a combined literary and social context. I will compare the experiences of laypeople in miracle collections and saints in *encomia* and martyrdoms. While saints can be distinguished from laypeople by their sanctity, making saints the in-group and the laity the out-group, I will argue that characters' experiences – notably suffering and threats – are shaped primarily by their gender rather than by their sanctity and define monks and male saints as the ultimate in-group. I will show this through the fact that female saints actually bridge the lay and the holy, thus establishing the significance of gender in hagiography as a means for writers to make demarcations that defined the world for the audience.

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*Chloé Agar has recently completed her DPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford, specialising in visions, miracles, eschatology, and demonology in Coptic hagiography. She was the Deutsch Scholar in African History at St Cross College from 2018 to 2021 and is currently a Junior Teaching Fellow at the Ashmolean Museum. She is also a research assistant at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, and Harris Manchester College. Previously, she completed an MA in Archaeology with German at the University of Liverpool in 2018 and a BA in Egyptology with Coptic at the University of Oxford in 2017.*



## **The Beneficiaries of the Miracles of Thekla in her Shrine of Seleukeia on the Kalykadnos: A Gender Distinction?**

Nuna Terri (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

The *Miracles of Saint Thekla* is a peculiar fifth-century hagiographic work, written by a former *rhetor* turned priest as a follow-up to a rewriting of the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*. Written as a publicity piece to display the power of the virgin from Iconium, the obvious distinction present in the work is that of religious division. Pagan, Jews, and Christian alike form the protagonists of the 46 miracles stories that the hagiographer claims to have unearthed. However, the question of distinction and separation also arises in another context. Thekla, one of the most important early female saints, is known from stepping outside of the boundaries of her gender. This paper will focus on how this narrative resonates in the context of her *Miracles*, as a large majority of the beneficiaries of the miracles are women. Is there a gendered distinction to be found? Do the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* influence the way the hagiographer views or passes judgment on women, or is there a contradiction with this patristic authority? Once the question of whether women constitute an out-group as opposed to a male in-group, or on the contrary, an in-group as opposed to a male out-group is answered, the question of distinction between the female beneficiaries of Thekla's miracles will be addressed. This paper will showcase how the various confessions, origins and social status of these women influence the narrative of the miracle stories, and how these divisions differ in contrast to the experience of male beneficiaries.

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*Nuna Terri is a PhD candidate from the Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium, where she working on a thesis with the provisional title: 'Saint Thekla in Seleukeia on the Kalykadnos: nature and issues at stake of the implantation of a Christian cult in the religious landscape of a Greco-Roman city in Asia Minor (3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries)' under the supervision of Prof. Aude Busine. She was awarded a four-year Research Fellowship from the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research and spent last academic year in Oxford as a Recognised Student thanks to a doctoral research grant from the Wiener-Anspach Foundation.*

## **Gems of Heaven: Bejewelled Saints and the Christian Rhetoric of Unadornment**

*Natalie Novella (St. Hugh's College, Oxford)*

When the image of female saints first appears along the walls of church space in the fifth and sixth centuries, they were wearing jewels. This sumptuous visual depiction of adorned female saints follows several centuries of patristic writings, in which the Church fathers worked for a radical departure from female adornment. The measure of a woman's inward Christian virtue, they determined, was to be dependent on her unadorned and modest outward appearance. The repertory of popular literary motifs suggests that a virtuous Christian woman should not wear jewellery, as it was useless and functioned only to bolster one's vanity and to taint one's spiritual beauty. However, mosaics of bejewelled female saints glittering from the walls of churches like the sixth-century Sant'Apollinare Nuovo stand in stark contrast to the female ideals expressed in late antique Christian literature. While women in late antiquity were being told to take off their jewellery, female saints were nonetheless depicted in copious amounts of rich jewels and gemstones, and this lavish depiction soon became a standardized iconography in female saint depictions across the Mediterranean. The adorned female saints of the sixth-century mosaics coincide with a shift in how Christians viewed the function of jewellery and gemstones and used it to create meaning. The emergence of saintly adornment, though conflicting with moral injunctions against the bodily display of jewellery, neatly aligns with the tradition of lapidary texts. The early Christian appropriation of these literary and aesthetic elements produced a corpus of religious literature that at once rejected and relished jewels and female adornment.

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*Natalie Novella is an MSt candidate in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford, based at St. Hugh's College. She received her BA in History at the University of California, San Diego.*

## PANEL 1B: *POLITICAL DIFFERENCES AND THE MAKING OF THE 'OTHER' IN LATE ANTIQUITY*

### The Usurper Julian? Julian's Letter to the Athenians and the Construction of Imperial Legitimacy

Nicola Holm (University of Exeter)

The Emperor Julian's reign was one of great contradiction from its outset, with his accession as *Augustus* in 361 simultaneously a usurpation as well as dynastically legitimate. After his appointment as Caesar in 355 by Constantius II, Julian's military career in the West saw his popularity surge amongst his men and he was subsequently acclaimed as *Augustus* twice – once in 357 after the Battle of Strasbourg, and again at Paris in 360. After accepting this second acclamation, it was vital for Julian to solidify his position of imperial authority as a true emperor rather than usurper. This resulted in his Letter to the Athenians, which, I will argue, can be understood as both an *anti-basilikos logos* and *auto-basilikos logos* due to its bizarre political context. It was vital for Julian to avoid the label of usurper to ensure a smooth accession and, as I will demonstrate, this was a consistent theme of his *Letter*. The *Letter* has received relatively little scholarly attention, despite its importance as a document for legitimising a usurpation. This paper will therefore consider how the *Letter* subverts the traditional aspects of the *basilikos logos* to legitimise Julian's position and avoid the association of his accession with usurpation. I will pay particular attention to Julian's usurpation in 360 and his immediate actions as *Augustus* following his *adventus* to Constantinople in late 361 / early 362. I will ultimately demonstrate that Julian's careful control over his imperial authority subverted the narrative surrounding his usurpation to one of a legitimate accession.

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*Nicola Holm is in the very last stages of her PhD at the University of Exeter, where she is completing her thesis 'The Successors of Constantine and Ecclesiastical Politics: 337-380' under the supervision of Richard Flower. Her thesis has been reconsidering the traditionally accepted 'orthodox' presentations of the period, and has presented new readings into a time of great imperial and ecclesiastical tension. She is particularly interested in the narratives of authority and imperial legitimacy in the fourth century.*

## **Quodvultdeus's Others: The Old Testament, Jews, and Israel in the *Liber Promissionum et Praedictorum Dei***

James Duncan (University of Liverpool)

This paper will examine Quodvultdeus's use of Jews in his *Liber Promissionum et Praedictorum Dei* (*Book of the Promises and Predictions of God*). The work as a whole set out to demonstrate that a series of promises and predictions made across all of biblical time had each come true. This, however, presented the problem of how to approach the Jews and the Old Testament. The nature of Quodvultdeus's work required the Old Testament to remain legitimate, yet this risked thereby recognising the legitimacy of Judaism as well, something that the bishop of Carthage wished to avoid. To circumvent this problem, Quodvultdeus ensured that the Jews discussed in the *Liber* were never those contemporary to him, but rather exclusively those of the New Testament. While this implicitly suggested that Judaism no longer existed, it importantly enabled Quodvultdeus to imbue Judaism with legitimacy, placing them as, at the time of the beginning of the New Testament, the rightful inheritors of the *populus* of Israel. However, Quodvultdeus demonstrated to his reader that with the calling of the nations by Christ, and the advent of a universalist Church, this same legitimacy was passed on to Christians, placing them as the new inheritors of the covenant of Abraham. In so doing, Quodvultdeus sidestepped the issue of imbuing contemporary Jews with legitimacy, while simultaneously ensuring the Old Testament retained its validity, in a manner alternative to that of Augustine's 'witness doctrine'.

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*James Duncan is a third year PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool, studying under Robin Whelan and Marios Costambeys. He examines the works attributed to Quodvultdeus of Carthage, exploring the manner in which the bishop constructed Christian identity. Primarily, this focuses on Quodvultdeus's attempts to influence his aristocratic audience to undertake a more Christian life, resembling that of urban asceticism.*

## **Passing Judgment on Ideas of Treason in Late Antiquity: Theophylact Simocatta on the Distinctions between Methods of Sedition in Roman and Sasanian Contexts**

Sean Strong (Cardiff University)

Treason, or actions that could be associated with it, were a central theme in Theophylact Simocatta's narration of Emperor Maurice's reign (AD 582-602). We can identify this idea by examining specific events, such as military mutinies, civil unrest, and the more direct method of usurpation. The threat of military and civil unrest was not a new phenomenon during the sixth century and as Walter Kaegi (1981) argues, they merely reached 'new intensities' during Maurice's reign. The necessity to deal with acts of sedition was not exclusive to the Romans and we find the Sasanian Empire having to manage several critical moments of rebellion under Hormizd IV and Khosrow II. Theophylact decides to narrate these types of events in varying ways and therefore it is interesting to identify how he puts forward his judgment on these situations and individuals. This is not only the case for internal forms of rebellion against the Roman emperor, but distinctions are also made comparatively with his depiction of seditious acts against the Sasanian king of kings (*Šāhanšāh*). In this paper, I will highlight some of the ways in which Theophylact narrates these distinctions by focusing on case studies. It will also consider how certain events under Emperor Heraclius (AD 610-641) might have impacted Theophylact's own judgment and presentation of specific types of sedition.

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*Sean Strong is a fourth year PhD candidate at Cardiff University. His research examines Theophylact Simocatta's portrayal of Roman and Sasanian leadership in imperial and military contexts. Sean is currently a 'Graduate Associate' of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies (SPBS) and has recently been awarded the Iran Society Bursary to support the completion of his thesis.*

## **PANEL 2A: *DEBATING DIFFERENCE IN LATE ANTIQUE RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE***

### ***Debating the Jewishness of Proto-Christian Martyrs: The Case of The Maccabean Mother***

Ya'el Krämer (Queens' College, Oxford)

Canonized martyrs whose heroic deeds occurred before the coming of Christ posed a dilemma for Christian leaders and their communities. Martyrs who fought for a distinctly “Jewish” cause posed a seemingly larger issue for Christian authors, who faced not only a substantial Jewish presence but also a variety of Christ-believing communities still practicing laws considered to be Jewish. In this respect, the example of the Maccabean Mother is especially intriguing. As her Christian cult had local Jewish beginnings, early Christian authors faced both a pre-existing narrative of deuteronomic martyrdom and an actual Jewish interest in her. Thus, those who decided to propagate her cult had to negotiate her religious allegiance, oftentimes through elaborate exegetical exercises meant to Christianize her sacrifice. A fascinating aspect of this discourse comes to light through the descriptions of her burial site at Antioch in early Arabic Christian sources, most of which suggest a mythic Jewish beginning to her Christian martyr shrine. This paper will examine the varying responses to the deuteronomic reality of her canonical narrative as well as to the information about her earlier Jewish worshippers. Examining sources stretching across eight centuries, the paper will expose not merely different understandings and approaches to her sacrifice, but also a variety of fascinating traditions that have developed around this holy mother and her tomb.

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*Ya'el Krämer is currently pursuing a DPhil in Oriental Studies at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, where she is working on the Late Antique Syriac Cult of the Maccabean Mother. She is currently co-authoring an edition to a Greek text on the Struggle between Michael and Satan, as well as working on curse tablets and religious pluralism in Late Antique Antioch.*

## **Nestorius after Nestorius: Heretic and saint in the wider religious world**

Per Johannes Jordfald (Worcester College, Oxford)

The proclamation, 'Let no one call Mary *Theotokos* but *Christotokos*' was the controversial preaching of both Nestorius and his presbyter Anastasius, during the former's years as Archbishop of Constantinople. The provocative doctrine of Christ's natures had major Christological consequences for the Western and Eastern churches, both immediately following the Council of Ephesus of 431 and beyond. The Church of the East, while ignoring the council itself, sounded a cacophony of protest surrounding the Christological uproar following the Council of Chalcedon and the 'matter of Nestorius.' For while Nestorius was sanctified, several sources from the dyophysite's of the Church of the East loudly debated the aspects of internal and external miaphysitism, and these form the topic of this paper. While there are numerous authors in the Church of the East critiquing the different Christological branches and upholding Nestorius as an exemplar along with his mentor Theodore of Mopsuestia, others were more scathing. A range of authors within the Church of the East engaged with these issues including, Michael Badoqa, Babai the Great, Eustathius under Mar Abba II, and Timothy I. Juxtaposed are the western portion of the church along with miaphysites which produced the scant writings of Henana of Adiabene that survive, John of Tella, Leontius of Byzantium, Evagrius Scholasticus and other council proceedings. These demonstrate the manifest width and depth of the debate, and this paper will dive into a small selection of the contradicting issues surrounding the 'matter of Nestorius' and the natures of Christ which defied unanimous distinction so intensely after 431 across the various branches of the Christian religious world.

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*Per Jonas Fikkan Jordfald is a current second year MPhil LABS student at Worcester College, University of Oxford. He has previously written for The Byzantinist and Prosopopeia. He was previously affiliated with the University of Oslo in Norway where he completed his bachelors' degree in both history and archaeology before coming to Oxford, where he focuses on the Church of the East, the concept of 'Nestorianism' and graphicacy. Prior to Oxford he joined the international multi-disciplinary society The Explorer Club after venturing around China focusing on the lived experiences of Chinese minority peoples in Southern China and how these contrasts to the Han.*

## Rubbing Saffron between *kāfirāt*. Interfaith Relations in the *Encyclopaedia of Pleasure* (10<sup>th</sup> c.)

Maria Christian (Regents Park College, Oxford)

The *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* (*Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdhah*), the oldest extant Islamic sex manual, tells the story of Hind bint al-Nu‘mān (also known as al-Ḥurqah) building a monastery in memory of al-Zarqa, her lesbian lover who has sadly passed away. They are described as an interfaith lesbian couple, the most “sincere and honest” of women and the best at “sexual union” with the beloved, through the sophisticated and tasteful act of “rubbing saffron.” In the context of a love affair narrated in a sexual health manual, “rubbing saffron” is a reference to the act of love and the belief that lesbians could only be sexually satisfied through such motions. The Arabic terms for “lesbianism” reflect this, as *sahiqa*, *sahhaqa*, and *musahiqa* (terms for “lesbian”) come from s-h-q, which means “to pound” or “to rub.” The motifs of the story itself - a lesbian love affair between a Christian princess and an Arab *kāfira* (non-believer), ending with the construction of a monastery - although perhaps closer to fable than historical fact - brings together the differences present in medieval Islamic society in the most intimate of ways. The realities of Christians living under Abbasid rule, Muslim knowledge of Christian ascetics (and their sex lives), Christians translating Greek medicinal texts about lesbianism, and Baghdadi literary culture under the patronage of the Caliph.

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*Maria Dolores Christian is in her second year of her MPhil in Islamic Studies and History at Oxford. She is currently writing her thesis on Christian anecdotes in the Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdhah, a sexological manual from tenth-century Baghdad. She is part of the Love in Religion Project at Regent’s Park College and runs Bible and Qur’an study groups at the Centre for Muslim and Christian Studies.*



**PANEL 2B: *ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE IN THE LATE AND POST-BYZANTINE  
MEDITERRANEAN***

**A Byzantine *Gnadenstuhl*: The Reception of a Western Iconography in Rural Venetian Crete**

Allison Grenda (University of Michigan)

Thus far, art historical studies of cross-cultural interaction in medieval Europe have tended to focus more on Byzantine influences in the Latin West than western influences in the Byzantine East. Furthermore, the study of cultural exchange has typically concentrated on the metropole, concerning itself with large cities and their diverse populations and/or foreign travellers rather than rural village life. This paper seeks to tackle each of these issues by investigating the transplant of a prominent western European iconography, the *Gnadenstuhl*, to a rural village church in late fourteenth-century Crete. While the *Gnadenstuhl* is found widely across medieval western Europe, the Church of the Panagia in Roustika contains the only documented example of the image in the eastern Mediterranean, prompting questions about its import and reception. Three main lines of inquiry drive this study: 1) how the *Gnadenstuhl* arrived in Roustika, including who was responsible for its inclusion in the Church of the Panagia; 2) how it interacted with the rest of the church's visual program; and 3) how this foreign iconography was received by the church's parishioners. Drawing on the growing body of research on Byzantine rural villages, this study suggests that despite its foreign origins, the *Gnadenstuhl* may have been not only well-accepted by Roustika's parishioners as a devotional tool, but in fact uniquely situated to connect with this specific audience

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*Allison Grenda is a second year PhD student in the History of Art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her research centres on Late Antique and Byzantine architecture and urbanism, with a focus on the formation and display of civic identity. In 2020, Allison earned a masters' degree in art history from the University of California, Davis, where her thesis reconstructed the urban layout of Athens in the seventh century C.E. Prior to this, she graduated with her bachelors' degree summa cum laude from the University of California, Los Angeles. Most recently, she served as Lecturer of Roman Art and Architecture at UC Davis.*

## **When do we call them Romans? The Use of the Roman vs. Local Identity in the *Chronicle of Ioannina***

Evan Zakardas (Independent Scholar)

The anonymous fifteenth-century *Chronicle of Ioannina* describes the history of Epiros during the fourteenth century, and the political and social events and interactions between the Romans, Albanians, Serbs, and other ethnic groups from the area. This paper will focus on the city of Ioannina within a Roman versus a local identity framework. The author of the chronicle follows an interesting pattern of identification of the Roman citizens of Ioannina when it comes to their identity. The author used the Roman identity from the beginning of the *Chronicle*, up until the description of the Battle of Achelous in 1359 when the Albanites won and took over all of Aitolia leaving Ioannina as the only Roman city that was not captured. After this battle, the author abandons the Roman identity and adopts the local identity of “Ioannites” when referring to the citizens of the city.

The discussion that this paper will engage in is why the author shifts from the established and canonical Roman identity that was used for all Roman citizens in the Eastern Roman Empire to a local identity when comparing Roman citizens to foreigners that came into the region. Why does the *Chronicle* not refer to the local citizens of Ioannina as Romans, especially given that it is making a comparison between Romans and foreigners. The paper will argue that the reasons behind this change were based on the need to emphasize local patriotism and pride and not to abandon the Roman identity.

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*Evangelos Zarkadas is an independent scholar based in the United States. In 2022 he received his Master's degree from the University of Maine in European history with a medieval concentration. His master thesis looked at the effects of regional separatism on late Roman identity in fourteenth century Byzantium, while his research engages with late medieval ethnicity and identity.*

## **Negotiating Orthodoxy in Frankish and Venetian Cyprus**

David Williams (University of Saint Katherine, San Diego)

This paper explores the negotiation of identity and *sacra* between the Christian denominations on Cyprus during Frankish and Venetian rule (1191-1571). The Latin Church of Cyprus made the Orthodox bishops swear an oath of loyalty to the papacy. The submission of the Orthodox of Cyprus posed serious difficulties for its relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, as demonstrated by a synodal decree in 1406 forbidding concelebration between clergy of the patriarchate and the Cypriot Orthodox. The decree notes that the Orthodox of Cyprus ‘concelebrate with Latins’. The Cypriots responded that the submission was only superficial and that ‘in our hearts’ they rejected it. The superficiality of the Cypriot submission is attested in several accounts, particularly concerning the Orthodox attitude to the Latin Eucharist. Simultaneously there is admission of concelebration between the Orthodox, Latins, Copts, Armenians, and Jacobites, but also the insistence that such instances are meaningless and are the result of duress. I intend to examine the accommodations and contradictions of this period and what they can tell us about Cyprus and Byzantium, as well as paying attention to hagiography, sacred space and sacred objects.

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*David Williams is a postgraduate student at Royal Holloway, University of London. His PhD research is titled ‘Shared Sacred Space, Saints and Objects in the Byzantine Mediterranean’.*

## PANEL 3A: *LATE BYZANTINE IMPERIAL CONTRADICTIONS*

### **The Divided Self in Times of Crisis: The Case of Manuel II Palaiologos**

Maria Varela (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

The meaning of “self” is complex and multidimensional, especially in times of crisis, when life changes constantly. This division particularly manifests itself in the case of emperor Manuel II Palaiologos who appears both as Emperor (historical self) as well as a man (epistolary self). Specifically, the deeds of Manuel II Palaiologos as Emperor are sourced from three of the historians who wrote about the conquest of Constantinople (Sphrantzes, Doukas, Chalkokondyles). They describe him as a capable diplomat, praise his political maneuvers (e.g., direct negotiation with the enemy, sign of peace treaty, protection of Mehmed’s I children, diplomatic recapture of Thessaloniki) and record his travels in the Peloponnese, Thessaloniki and Western Europe in general. Along with his imperial duties, Manuel II himself wrote private letters to his friends and family members. He wants to discuss literature and rhetoric, to ask for consolation and advice, to write his impressions and to share – indirectly – his concerns about politics. He seeks to find a balance between the imperial and the private self and to restore his relationship with some friends. Through his personal writings he portrays himself as a simple and ordinary man who is concerned both about historical events and his private life. Manuel II has inner peace and balance in an extremely volatile historical period in which crisis plagues his state. He tries to be both a capable Emperor and a thoughtful friend.

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*Maria Varela is a PhD Candidate in Byzantine Studies at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, with a thesis entitled: “Friendship as Leitmotiv in the Letters of Palaeologan Period (1261-1453)”. Before her doctoral studies, she completed a masters’ degree in Byzantine and Medieval Studies (2020) cum laude and a bachelors’ degree in Classics (2018). Maria has previously spent time as a visiting research fellow at the University of Cologne (2019-20), and has worked at the Center of Byzantine Studies in Thessaloniki (2020). She now works at the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (2020-today) as a research fellow. She has published in Parekbolai (<https://doi.org/10.26262/par.v11i0.8197>) and has three further forthcoming articles. Her academic interests are focused on epistolography, literary motifs, rhetoric, twelfth-century poetry, Theodore Prodromos, and the reception of Homer in Byzantium.*

## **An Historian's Professed Beliefs and the Reality: Narrative Bias in George Pachymeres' *History***

Daiki Sano (University of Edinburgh)

George Pachymeres' *History*, which describes the reign of Michael VIII (1259–1282) and the first half of that of his son Andronikos II (1282–1328), remains the most important source for the events of the decades following the Byzantine Empire's return to Constantinople. Pachymeres, who held official posts in the Patriarchate and imperial court, provides a vivid and detailed account from his privileged position. In Pachymeres' *prooimion*, he speaks of the preciousness of telling the truth and declares that he will pass fair judgement on what happened, and even if its cliché-filled language is not to be taken at face value, has generally been perceived by scholars as a balanced and impartial assessment of the deeds of each of the two emperors. This paper, however, argues that Pachymeres adopts a very different narrative stance towards both emperors, using various rhetorical and narrative techniques to portray Michael VIII as an authoritarian despot and Andronikos II as a thoughtful orator. Through analysing this apparent contradiction between the author's professed beliefs and reality, this paper offers a new blueprint for how to read the *History* as a source.

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*Daiki Sano is a second-year doctoral candidate in Classics at the University of Edinburgh. He received a BA from Keio University and a MA from the University of Tokyo, both in History. His main research interest lies in the relationship between governance and rhetoric in the Byzantine empire, and he is currently working on his thesis on the topic of imperial decision-making in the early Palaiologan period.*

## Between Empire and *Genos*: The Emperor in Early Palaiologan Byzantium

James Cogbill (Worcester College, Oxford)

Scholarship on the Byzantine *genos* consistently emphasises its societal importance as a nexus of loyalty and mutual support which superseded other networks and ties. Like any of his subjects, the emperor too was a kinsman imbedded in a complex web of obligation. At the same time, however, historical, didactic and panegyric texts stressed the emperor's responsibility to promote an ill-defined 'common good'. Such texts insisted that the empire was not tied to any one emperor or family, yet also clearly recognised that an emperor's relatives were entitled to participate in government and receive public funds. Although not necessarily mutually exclusive, this apparent contradiction created tension and blurring between the emperor's parallel roles of officeholder and kinsman. In this paper, I argue that the histories of Gregoras and Kantakouzenos reveal an increasing unease about how early Palaiologan emperors fulfilled their obligations to both the empire and their *genos*. Imperial relatives holding high office are ubiquitous in these texts, providing a significant number of occasions upon which the emperor's two roles intersected. In their accounts of these episodes, Gregoras and Kantakouzenos frequently made strategic use of rhetoric, *topoi* and juxtaposition to proscribe how emperors should interact with their relatives in certain circumstances, such as after rebellions and incidents of inappropriate behaviour. In doing so, I argue, the two historians sought to more strictly delineate the public and private roles of the emperor, and to subordinate the latter to the former. Such attempts to constrain imperial action point towards a hitherto largely unexplored aspect of Late Byzantine political culture.

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*James Cogbill is a second-year DPhil candidate in History at the University of Oxford. His research interests centre on the interaction of kinship with the concept of 'political culture' in the late medieval Byzantine Empire. He convenes the Oxford Byzantine Graduate Seminar and co-organises the 'Governability Across the Medieval Globe' discussion group.*

## PANEL 3B: MANIFESTING AND BRIDGING GENDER IN THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

### Understanding ‘Transgender-Like’ Expression in Byzantine Hagiography through an Analysis of the *Life of St Matrona of Perge*

Scarlett Kiaras-Attari (Oriel College, Oxford)

Church synods and law codes make it clear that conceptions of gender in Byzantine society were strict and unchanging. This paper considers whether and how far these mandates could be stretched by looking beyond these codes to explore how hagiographical texts of the period may suggest possibilities in which contemporary queer individuals expressed themselves. To do this, I analyse the *Life of St Matrona of Perge* (d.c. 510), a sixth-century work by an unknown author, through a lens inspired by Judith Bennett’s ‘lesbian-like’ framework (*Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9.1/2, 2000), termed ‘transgender-like’ to potential pathways and possibilities for transgender-like expression that would have been available to contemporary individuals. Such examples demonstrate ways in which contemporaries could live and exist in a manner contrary to the strict gender mandates.

Although it is impossible to ascribe a gender identity to the characters in the text, Byzantine society seemingly offers several possibilities, either wittingly or unwittingly, whereby one could express oneself in ways that offer affinities to modern individuals. This paper will investigate hagiographical tropes and structures in Byzantine society which facilitate a space and role where individuals could escape heteronormative societal obligations, adopting a more liminal gender position, and through doing so uncover behaviours that speak to a useable history for modern social groups.

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*Scarlett Kiaras-Attari is a current MSt Medieval History student at Oriel College, University of Oxford. She received her undergraduate degree in History and Politics from the University of Edinburgh in 2022. Her current research interests lie in the relationship of gender and sexuality with saints and sanctity in Byzantium and Late Antiquity.*

## Virgin Mary and Devi Jingguang 淨光天女: Employing Gender to Justify Matriarchal Rule in Medieval Byzantium and China

Defangyu Kong (University of Edinburgh)

In the medieval Eurasian geopolitical space, Byzantium and China – two sedentary empires at the far ends of the Steppe Belt and Silk Road system – stand out as two centralised imperial orders that witnessed seemingly unbroken lines of emperors. Among the heirs of Augustus and Constantine in Byzantium and those of Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇) in China, two female rulers, Empress Eirene (r. 797-802) and Empress Wu Zetian (武則天) (r. 690-705), stood out to challenge the male monopoly of imperial office in two patriarchal societies. According to the established scholarship, these two empresses legitimised their female rules by masculinising themselves, such as adopting male imperial titles, to erase or at least minimise the effect of gender. In this paper, I will engage with this plausible theory and prove that instead of obscuring their role as women, the two empresses actively employed their female gender not only to secure their legitimacy but also to distinguish themselves from their male counterparts. In their propaganda, they are merciful mothers who have liberated their children from slavery imposed by previous male tyrants. They are God anointed new Virgin Mary and Buddha appointed *Devi* (goddess) who are destined to save the Christendom and ‘All under Heaven’ (天下) respectively. Through my comparative study, I intend to challenge the stereotype and demonstrate that although medieval Eurasian societies were generally patriarchal, female gender was not necessarily a political deficiency that needed to be neutralised by ambitious imperial or royal women.

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*Defangyu Kong is a PhD student in Byzantine Studies at the University of Edinburgh and a research associate of the ERC funded PAIXUE project led by Prof. Niels Gaul (University of Edinburgh) and Dr. Curie Virág (University of Toronto). His PhD thesis is titled ‘Female rule in Byzantium and Tang China: The Empresses Eirene and Wu Zetian’ and examines the sociological and ideological backgrounds in these two historical contexts that contributed to the establishment of female rule in eighth-century Byzantium and China. Apart from his PhD thesis, he is currently composing a co-authored paper with Prof. Michael Höckelmann (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg) about military function of the imperial office in the middle Byzantine Empire and the Chinese Tang dynasty. Prior to his PhD research, he received an MA in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at King’s College London and an MSc in Medieval History at the University of Edinburgh.*



## **Court Eunuchs and Imperial Authority in the Reign of Theodosius II**

Henry Anderson (University of Exeter)

Eunuchs were an ever-present aspect of the Late Roman and Byzantine imperial court, but in the fourth and fifth centuries they were a somewhat marginalised group, often the target of vitriolic literature that made them the central scapegoats in complaints made about imperial rule. A standard trope presented the chief eunuchs as exercising a malign influence over the emperor, manipulating politics so that they might amass great power and wealth at the expense of the ruler. In their portrayal of Theodosius II (r. 408-450), Priscus and Theophanes make this an important theme in their accounts, something modern scholarship has taken at face-value and viewed as reflecting a weakness in imperial authority during his reign. Yet my paper will argue that the marginalised nature of the palace eunuchs, forever distinct from regular elite society, provided a useful political tool for Theodosius. Firstly, their separation made them easy targets for attack; blame for imperial policies could be readily pinned on the chief eunuch rather than the emperor himself. Secondly, as a ruler lacking a male heir, Theodosius could delegate authority into the hands of his eunuchs without fearing for the security of his dynasty. The intrinsic weakness of their societal position and inability to have families of their own meant they depended entirely upon imperial favour and couldn't so easily be disloyal. I argue that the distinctive and marginal nature of the court eunuchs was utilised as an important means of preserving, rather than detracting from, imperial authority in fifth-century Constantinople.

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*Henry Anderson is a third year PhD candidate at the University of Exeter. He is currently working on his thesis 'Theodosius II and the Evolution of the Imperial Role' supervised by Professor Richard Flower. Before moving to Exeter, he completed his BA and MA at Newcastle University. His research interests include Late Roman emperorship, the imperial court, and the interaction between state and church during the late fourth to mid-fifth centuries.*

## PANEL 4A: *MAKING AND CROSSING BARRIERS IN LITERATURE*

### **Separating the moral from the immoral: The use of binary dichotomies in Hysmine and Hysminias to express Byzantine moral values through a pagan and erotic setting**

Kat Aizlewood (St. Catherine's College, Oxford)

The twelfth-century novels are a curious mixture of different and apparently clashing themes. They are classicised, with an ancient, pagan setting, but reflect twelfth-century thought and practice. They have an erotic nature but present a moral lesson on love and excess. In particular, Makrembolites' *Hysmine and Hysminias*, the most daringly explicit of the novels, contains the most obvious moralistic character. Within the novel, contrast and opposition are the driving force of the narrative, focussed on the struggle of the heroes against adversity, civilised against uncivilised, and *sophrosyne* against *eros*. The high-born, chaste couple fight against their lust, misfortune, and the dangers of rash and lusty barbarians to finally unite in a proper, sanctioned marriage. For the heroic nature of the protagonists and the moral rightness of their victory to be clear, they are delineated in series of dichotomies, including good and bad, temperate and immoderate. The constant use of antithesis defines these boundaries distinctly within the novels, and for the contemporary audience, allowing the author to express moral judgement by aligning elements of life, real or fictional, with the moral or immoral. In this way, further to the oppositions presented within the narratives, the novel presents an ongoing and judgemental discourse between past and present, real and fictional. The intertextuality of the novel embeds a wealth of meaning into an outwardly straightforward and potentially profane story, creating a complex amalgamation of potentially contradictory interpretations. This paper addresses the ways in which these dichotomous binaries are constructed, linked, and used to express an overall moral message that is superficially contradictory to the erotic and pagan narrative.

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*Kat Aizlewood is a graduate student at the University of Oxford, reading for an MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies. They completed their undergraduate degree at Royal Holloway University of London.*

## Poetry as Distinction: The Literary Strategy of Theodore Prodromos

Yan Zaripov (St. Hilda's College, Oxford)

Literature of the Komnenian period is arguably one of the most remarkable cultural achievements of the entire Byzantine millennium. Despite the diversity of form and subject matter, the predominant part of the twelfth-century literature shared one important feature: it was produced on commission. This meant that to survive as an author one had to compete for patrons' attention. This paper aims to consider the self-promotion strategy of one of the most successful Komnenian authors, Theodore Prodromos. The general proposition of this paper is that Prodromos achieved success through reviving the outdated Homeric hexameter in a literary milieu dominated by rhetoric (and therefore prose) to such an extent that one modern scholar has labelled it the 'Third Sophistic'. To support this thesis, I will consider two case studies, diachronic and synchronic. Firstly, I will discuss Prodromos' poetic farewell to Constantinople. While Prodromos relies on rhetorical template of farewell speech most famously exemplified in Gregory of Nazianzus' resignation speech in Constantinople, he significantly departs from earlier models, not least by transforming the rhetorical genre into an epic poem. Secondly, I will highlight Prodromos' originality by comparing his *encomium* of Alexios Aristenos with the eulogies of the same official penned by Nikephoros Basilakes and George Tornikes. Despite overlaps in content, Prodromos distinguishes himself by celebrating Aristenos in an ensemble of poems written in four different meters, most importantly hexameter. Given Prodromos' overwhelming success, one may conclude that what in Classical Antiquity was a generally employed prosodic form in Komnenian Byzantium has become a major asset in literary competition.

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*Yan Zaripov is a DPhil candidate in Classical Languages and Literature. His research project is focused on classical mimesis in twelfth-century Byzantine literature. His previous research projects have dealt with conceptual history, rhetoric and ancient literary criticism.*

## **An Eye Looking to the East: Benjamin of Tudela's Depiction of Byzantium**

Aiden Mattingly (Bryn Mawr)

The observation that understanding Byzantine religious culture is essential to understanding Byzantine society as a whole is neither original nor controversial. It is common, however, to treat discussion of religion in Byzantium as essentially synonymous with discussions of Byzantine Christianity. Nonetheless, at no point in Byzantine history did Christians constitute the sole recognized religious group in the Byzantine Empire. In particular, a vibrant Jewish community existed throughout the Empire, and especially in Constantinople, for its entire existence, a community whose socio-political status and concomitant cultural developments are essentially unique in medieval Jewish history.

Of central importance in understanding Byzantine Jewry is the travelogue, the *Sefer ha-Masa'ot* (Book of Travels) of Benjamin of Tudela, a Navarrese Rabbi who journeyed across the Mediterranean and into the wider Islamic World during the mid-twelfth century, detailing the Jewish communities of the lands he visited. Prior scholarship of the *Sefer*, however, has essentially focused on its usefulness as an essentially demographic source, *i.e.* in quantifying the scale and distribution of otherwise poorly attested Jewish communities. In this paper, I will focus instead on the *Sefer's* construction of Byzantium as a distinct society, and the position of Jewry in that society. I argue that Benjamin portrays Byzantium in a distinctly Oriental lens (in the Saidian sense), but subverts the mainstream use of Orientalism in Western discourses by finding in it the root of relative tolerance and integration of the Jews in Byzantine society.

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*Aiden Mattingly is a first year Ph.D. student in Classics at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, USA, having received her B.A. from Middlebury College, Vermont, USA. Her interests include portrayals of gender diversity in the Classical and Late-Antique Mediterranean, Judaism and Jewish identity in the ancient world, and the sociocultural transition from Roman to Islamicate civilization in the Middle East.*

## The Philogelos: Crossing Genres and Languages

Martina Naretto (University of Turin)

The *Philogelos* is a highly interesting book of jokes from Late Antiquity, containing some 270 jests and funny stories, it is the only example of this peculiar kind of comic literature. Defying definition, it is not a properly comedic book complete with narrative, but rather an anthology of jokes with a still unidentified purpose. As the origin and purpose of the *Philogelos* also still remains unclear as a result of its combined different literary genres, the characters that we meet in the jests are very similar to the Theophrastean sort we could find on stage, and a lot of jokes suggest that maybe they were acted, not only read, or told to the audience.

This paper engages with the literary tradition of the text, isolating matters that arise from translation and reproduction. Translating such a peculiar text provides difficulties: sometimes the stories have altered and those which were deemed obscene, through the decades of the jests have been translated in a more refined way, that changed the whole meaning of the story and even made it less funny and coherent. Translating comic literature is a highly complex task today because the whole cultural frame of reference has changed, and it requires the combination of what we can read in Greek with an effective translation that meets the original idea of the text itself.

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*Martina is an independent researcher affiliated with the University of Turin, where she studied Classics and graduated in 2021 in Philology, with a thesis on the Philogelos. Her work is focused on textual criticism and translation issues. She worked at the University of Innsbruck in 2018 and 2019 for an international project; recently, she attended the Lincoln College Greek Palaeography Summer School in Oxford and the Editionspraktiken Summer School in Berlin.*

**PANEL 4B: *DIVISIONS AND SEPARATIONS IN LATE ANTIQUE AND BYZANTINE SPACE AND CITY***

**How strangers became fellow citizens. Pseudo-Damasian epigraphic poetry as a testimony to the ideological continuation of the creation of Rome as a city of saints**

Julia Borczyńska (University of Warsaw)

Damasus, bishop of Rome (366-384), through epigrams in honour of the martyrs began the process of creating Rome as a city of saints. In his verse poetry, one element resonates in particular: the emphasis that the martyrs of Rome were almost all foreigners, and acquired Roman citizenship through martyrdom in the City. Through considering death as a new birth, these martyrs in Damasus' conception became Roman citizens as if recognized by *ius soli* (a concept inherently alien to the Graeco-Roman civilization). The direction set by Damasus had a large group of followers in the later centuries and is evidenced by the so-called Pseudo-Damasian inscriptions. The successors of Damasus consistently imitated his style and form of writing about the martyrs, but completely neglected emphasizing the process of their acquiring ties with the city where they were venerated.

In my paper, I would like to examine which ideological, historical, and cultural factors caused a central element of Damasus' verse poetry – his emphasis on the strangeness of the martyrs and creating their links with Rome – to fail to gain recognition in the eyes of his successors. Inscriptions might be particularly susceptible to representing even the tiniest ideological changes, as they are intended in themselves to convey ideas and beliefs worth disseminating. They themselves represent the forms of historical memory of a represented society. Through these inscriptions, I would like to consider the factors which made it clear to the Christians living in *Urbs* that all martyrs who were venerated and buried there has become fellow citizens.

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*Julia Borczyńska is a doctoral student at the University of Warsaw, with a thesis entitled 'Pseudo-Damasian epigraphic poetry as a testimony to the ideological continuation of creating the urban space of Rome between 384-568.' She has previously completed a masters' degree with a dissertation on the role of the bishops of Rome in the Arian controversy.*

## **Cross-Confessionalism in Early Islamic Architecture: The Kathisma Church in Jerusalem**

Catherine McNally (St. Cross College, Oxford)

This paper aims to engage with and further develop recent scholarship on the reception of Christian heritage and its effect on Islamic architecture in early medieval Jerusalem. The lack of substantial archaeological evidence from Islam's first century of practice does not contradict that a cult bearing its essential characteristics had already emerged, however non-Muslim material culture may provide insight into Islam's self-perception during this period. From the seventh to the at least the late ninth century, Muslims remained the religious minority in a Christian-dominated region. While the nascent religion began to utilise architecture and other media as a means to express its permanency, sources point to the natural interaction with Christian material culture. Several historians stress in their respective scholarship the blurred boundaries between Islam and Christianity throughout the early medieval period. The earliest references to Islam come not from Islamic sources themselves, but from the Christian milieu in which they interacted. Consideration for Umayyad material culture in light of the period's religious coexistence may therefore offer greater cognizance of the aesthetic narrative and semiotic value of shared ornamentation. Renovations dating to the late seventh or early eighth century at the Kathisma Church in Jerusalem provide an ideal opportunity to highlight how architecture may serve as an expression of cross-confessionalism due to the appropriation of its southern section into a space for Muslim worship.

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*Catherine McNally is a second-year MPhil candidate in Islamic Art and Architecture at the University of Oxford, focusing on Christian architecture in the medieval Middle East. She completed her BA (Hons) in Classics at the University of Pennsylvania in 2019, then spent two years working in education and the art world before returning to academia. Her research primarily focuses on Christian-Muslim interaction and its expression in material culture, medieval semiotics, and urban memory.*

## **“From the river unto the ends of the earth” – rivers as conceptual boundaries in the *De Administrando Imperio*”**

Tom Adamson-Green (St. Catherine’s College, Oxford)

This paper will examine the symbolic role of rivers and watercourses in the *De Administrando Imperio* and in the construction and articulation of imperial space under Constantine VII. The *De Administrando Imperio* (DAI), a compilation of ethnographic material, was produced during the latter years of Constantine VII’s reign (913–959), a point of transformation in Byzantine military fortunes. The text has traditionally been viewed as the hurried attempt to produce a practical diplomatic handbook for the emperor’s son Romanos II, a haphazard miscellany of ethnographic reports useful only for snapshots of the world surrounding Byzantium in the tenth century. However, there are unifying elements in narrative structure of the text which suggest an underlying consistency in its conceptualisation of space. Chief among these is the prominence given to rivers as topographical features throughout the DAI. Throughout, rivers are used to define conceptual as well as geographical boundaries: structuring both the text and the world outside it. They are the skeleton on which the descriptions of foreign peoples are hung. They define the internal contours of the *oikoumene* and articulate its boundaries, marking temporal as well as spatial transitions from ‘out’ to ‘in’ and from ‘known’ to ‘unknown’. This paper will demonstrate how, in the *DAI*, rivers functioned as instruments of imperial control, drawing on Roman and biblical iconography and the institution of the military triumph, to bring subject peoples into a system of Byzantine order and underline the personal role of the emperor in defining, structuring and maintaining the *oikoumene*.

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*Tom Adamson-Green is a DPhil student at St Catherine’s College, Oxford. His work focuses on the relationship between imperial ideology, politics and representations of knowledge in Byzantine encyclopaedic works of the tenth century.*



## **Discussing the public life of Jews in Middle Byzantine Peloponnese in context: Limitations and interpretations**

Foteini Sioli (University of Edinburgh)

Although there has been extensive discussion about the public life of Jewish communities in the Byzantine Empire in general, very little has been written on a more local level. This paper shall discuss the public life of Jews in one such context, the Peloponnese. Defining the public life of Jews and their relationship with others here poses a challenge, especially after the fifth century, when the archaeological evidence testifying to peaceful coexistence between Jewish communities and Greeks comes to an end. The most important source for the following period is the *Life* of Nikon

One of these cases is the case of Peloponnese, about which I will discuss in my presentation. It is a challenge to give a description on the image of public life of Jews and how their relationship with others was, especially after the fifth century when the available material is extremely limited. Archaeological material, such as graves in common cemeteries, inscription, provide evidence that until the end of fifth century the Jewish communities were living peacefully alongside with Greeks. After fifth to sixth centuries there is a gap in the sources and the only evidence we have available is the *Life* of Nikon the Metanoite (*d.* 998), which records the expulsion of the Jews from Sparta. This interesting incident has been mainly addressed as an aspect of imperial theocratic policy against religious minorities, however has proven difficult to contextualise due to an absence of comparable evidence. In this paper, I shall analyse this testimony and examine whether and to what extent other social aspects apart from religion caused this event and formed barriers between Jews and Christians in the Peloponnese during the middle Byzantine period.

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*Foteini Sioli completed her MA in Late Antique, Islamic, and Byzantine Studies at the University of Edinburgh in 2022, writing a thesis on the evolution of the urban landscape of early Byzantine Arcadia. She previously attained a BA in history, archaeology, and cultural resources management at the University of the Peloponnese in 2013, with a thesis on numismatic iconography as a testimony of the Middle Byzantine monumental art. Her main research interests are related to archaeology and the social conditions of early Byzantine Greece and especially the Peloponnese. She has a variety of other interests including climate change in Late Antiquity, numismatic iconography, monumental art, naval routes and trade, diplomatic relationship with other nations, ceramics, ecclesiastical history, Byzantine music, hymnography and patristic theology.*

## **PANEL 5: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OTHERS IN THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN WORLD - ROUND TABLE**

### **Byzantine ambivalence toward Turkish soldiers in the Komnenian army: The case of Poupakes** Daniel Berardino (Fordham University)

The *μιξοβάρβαρος* was the cause of great anxiety in the Komnenian period. For Anna Komnene, this term was closely associated with the West and her anxieties about Byzantine-Western interactions. This was not always the case. The twelfth-century historian, Niketas Choniates, had a more expansive perspective on the meaning of *μιξοβάρβαρος*. For Choniates, the term could mean a half-Greek, half-Turk, but it could also mean any insufficiently Romanized Byzantine soldier. He thought that this racial mixing rendered the Roman army soft and easily beaten. In the fourteenth century, Doukas referred to those who were of mixed Turkish and Roman ancestry as *μιξοβάρβαροι*. The term was clearly important in Byzantium and described a large subset of the citizens of the empire, soldiers, and functionaries. Byzantines, however, were anxious about the increasing number of these individuals in their society. To illustrate this point, in this paper I will discuss the case of Poupakes, a half-Arab soldier in the Komnenian army. He is described by both Choniates and Kinnamos, and his story is illustrative of broader trends. Drawing on the work of Rustam Shukurov on Byzantine Turks in the later period, this paper will argue that Poupakes represented both a source of strength because he succeeded in taking the walls of a fortress from the Sicilians that no Roman would dare to assault, and weakness since he freed Andronikos Komnenos and smuggled him to Ukraine. This case study can help us to understand how Choniates conceived of ethnic differences and his own Roman identity.

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*Daniel Berardino is a second year MA student at Fordham University in Medieval Studies. His research explores Byzantium's relations with its neighbours and how it managed difference in legal custom, political culture, and religious practice to forge alliances and maintain peace. His MA thesis explores the 1191 conquest of Cyprus by Richard the Lionheart to ask how both the English king deployed political ritual to cement his conquest and later chroniclers architected the memory of the conquest to advance Latin claims to ritual supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition to his thesis project, Daniel has presented papers on issues of non-Roman soldiers in the Byzantine army, Byzantine canon law, and the role of medieval history in Russian propaganda about its war in Ukraine.*

## **Romanness and Provincial Identities in Procopius' *Wars***

Edwin Pendlebury (Jesus College, Oxford)

My paper will explore the conceptualisation of provincial identity and provincial difference in the works of Procopius, especially the *Wars*. Whilst the topic of 'Roman identity' in Byzantium has been a popular and controversial topic in recent years, studies have tended to view this identity (or the lack thereof) as something monolithic and essentially stable. This paper will take a different approach, building on Guy Halsall's work on the late Roman and post-Roman west and applying his methodology to the eastern empire. Halsall has argued that we should view identity, ethnic or otherwise, as something multi-layered and multifaceted; to use his example, we could layer a series of identities as Londoner-Southerner-English-British-European, and it can be difficult to tell which of these identities is paramount, or which counts as an 'ethnic' identity at any given time. I will argue that the picture of the eastern empire presented by Procopius is one in which identity could oscillate between the imperial ('Roman') and the provincial, with the provincial background of soldiers, bureaucrats, and emperors seen as an important part of their identity and at times even as a potentially ethnic marker, both distinct from and ultimately subordinate to their Romanness. This does not just apply to provinces long seen as in some way distinct, such as Isauria and Syria, but also to well-integrated Greek-speaking provinces like Thrace, and so calls for a reconceptualization of the importance of provincial difference in the late Roman and early Byzantine Empire.

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*Edwin Pendlebury is a MSt candidate on the Late Antique and Byzantine Studies course at Jesus College, University of Oxford, having previously completed his BA (Hons.) in History at Corpus Christi College.*

## **The Use of Irony and Bad Faith as Strategies to Identify and Define the Other in John Damascene and Abu Qurrah's Accounts of Islam**

Thibaut Auplat (Aix-Marseille Université)

This paper focuses on the Greek testimonies on Islam in the eighth and ninth centuries, especially John Damascene and Theodore Abu Qurra. These authors participated in a polemical environment where their objective was to pass judgement about the faith of a religious 'other', and to ensure that these are understood so that the faithful understood the differences between religious groups, and to avoid conversion away from Christianity.

In this context, two strategies were available to writers. The first was to convince by argumentation to draw clear distinctions and separations between themselves and others, whose apparent religious contradictions the polemicist would constantly highlight. Such arguing appears to have had a limited impact on religious dialogue as it usually only reaches out to educated, already convinced, intellectuals. Thus, the problem emerges of how the polemicist reaches the widest possible audience whilst passing accurate and understandable judgement about other religious groups? This question was essential when distinctions between monotheisms were blurred, and when Islam, still in the process of structuring its faith, could come across as close to and indeed more advantageous than other religious groups. To address this difficulty, writers employed another strategy of appealing to the audience's emotions, fulfilling both the need to provide accurate insights into the religious other's beliefs, and sharp in style to arouse emotions in the audience.

The process of passing judgement in these texts is twofold. On the one hand, through the theological argumentation which forms the pillars of religious polemic, whilst on the other, it is supported by an appeal to emotions, which range from anger to playfulness. With this in mind, this paper works from a typology of emotions to identify links between the intended emotions, the idea that they support, or the point that they want to make understand, and the linguistic base which arouse them. Through this, the paper seeks to work towards a system that would bind and give structure to these aspects.

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*Thibaut Auplat is currently completing a PhD at Aix-Marseille Université, in partnership with the Maison Française d'Oxford, offering a translation and commentary on the 'On the Heresy of the Ishmaelites' (Heresy 100) of John Damascene's De Haeresibus and the first French translation of Theodore Abu Qurra's Dialogues with a Muslim. It will also include a commentary on the texts and a theoretical part on humour and its potential benefits for religious studies.*

## **Floating Communities: Shipboard Society in Byzantium**

Zeynep Olgun (University of Cambridge)

Eustathios of Thessalonike adapts an ancient metaphor in his Epiphany Oration of 1174: “the empire is a great ship (τὸ μέγα τοῦτο τῆς οἰκουμένης σκάφος)” with the emperor at the helm. Certainly, this image would not be foreign to the Byzantine sailor. The ship perhaps was not the empire but was indeed a society on its own. While some conventional social practices were left on land, the ship on board nonetheless had a hierarchy and designated roles and rules for each member that occupied this universe it encapsulated. This paper, then, aims to evaluate the ship as a distinct physical and mental space in the Byzantine world. It combines various pieces of evidence regarding journeys on board from the Eastern Mediterranean between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, including literary sources such as hagiographies and letters, as well as archaeological evidence from shipwrecks and harbours. Following Foucault’s conceptualisation of shipboard communities as places in which society is simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted, it seeks to demonstrate how this closed microcosm can help us understand the broader Byzantine society. It questions how the relationship between the people and the sea creates distinct patterns of behaviour on board or reinforces the existing social roles.

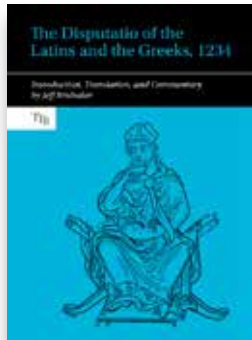
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*Zeynep Olgun is a PhD student at the Faculty of History, Newnham College, University of Cambridge. Her thesis focuses on the Byzantine approaches to, perceptions of, and experiences with the sea. Her research interests are maritime culture, materiality, and society of the Byzantine Empire: ships and shipbuilding, merchant and sailor communities, naval administration, and warfare. Zeynep holds an MA degree in Maritime Archaeology from Koç University, and an MA degree in Medieval Studies from Central European University (CEU).*



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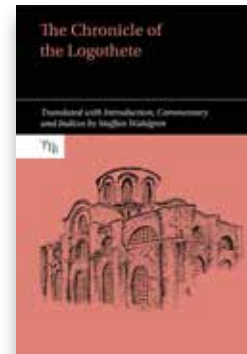
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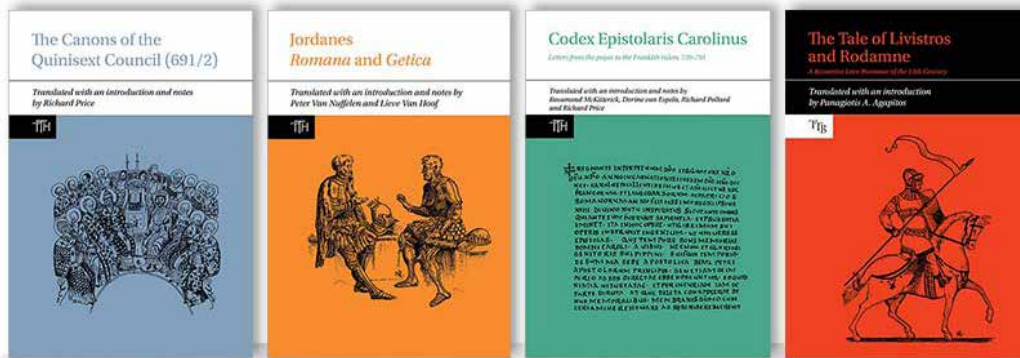
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