

EDITORIAL

Enhancing Byzantine Studies in U.S.A.

The revival of Byzantine Studies in the U.S.A. must be of big interest for the subscribers and friends of EJST in the Orthodox countries of Southeastern Europe especially.

The University of Notre Dame, Indiana, is in the last years seriously engaged in a program which is devoted to the enhancement of Byzantine Studies. Notre Dame represents a long American scholarly tradition that is rooted in the European legacy of learning in Theology, Philosophy, History, and the Arts. In the spirit of this tradition, Notre Dame offers values and knowledge to the world that were conceptualized and formed in the Middle Ages.

The program for the enhancement of Byzantine Studies will help to bring about balance in the presentation of this legacy which, for historical reasons, has remained focused on the Western European Latin and Catholic tradition. The complementary part of this tradition, the Greek-Byzantine heritage, is essential for a balanced presentation and cultivation of the medieval legacy. Today, Byzantine thought and its implementation in politics, art and every-day life are appreciated as a truly humanistic approach to life.

Specifically the University of Notre Dame undertakes the following initiatives: two new faculty positions in Byzantine History and in the History of Byzantine Theology, two graduate student fellowships in Byzantine Studies, program funds for conferences, symposia, and visiting lecturers, and funds for maintenance of the Milton Anastos Byzantine collection in Notre Dame's Hesburgh Library.

The University of Notre Dame is ideally suited and equipped to make the Eastern (Byzantine) medieval tradition an integral part of teaching and research. The outstanding scholars in the faculty (over 50 faculty members affiliated with the Medieval Institute in departments of History, Theology, Philosophy, Romance Languages and Literatures, German, Classics, Art History, Music; most specialize in Western medieval civilization, or the thought and culture of medieval Judaism or Islam) and the patrimony of the Anastos Library form a firm foundation for this endeavour. The legacy of Milton V. Anastos (1909-1997) who spent his entire academic life in bringing the Byzantine thought to the contemporary audience in America and who left Notre Dame with the best private library for Byzantium and the Greek heritage in the world, is especially inspiring. The Anastos Collection added more than 40.000 volumes and 50 journals to the University's already exceptional collections in medieval studies. Notre Dame now possesses the second largest (after only Harvard University/Dumbarton Oaks) dedicated collection in Byzantine Studies in the United States. This combination of faculty and library resources makes Notre Dame the ideal

place for establishing a comprehensive research and teaching centre in Byzantine Studies.

Byzantine Studies is a field often overlooked and misunderstood by academics in the West. This is unfortunate. For more than a millennium, Byzantium integrated and disseminated the rich cultures of Classical and Hellenistic Greece, Ancient Rome, Asia Minor, Early Christianity, and the Slavic world. Byzantium traces its origin to 330 CE when the inauguration of Constantinople (now Istanbul) marked the division of the Roman Empire into two halves, East and West. When the Western Roman Empire fell to barbarian invasions in the later fifth century, the Eastern Empire centred in Constantinople survived and became the heart of a thriving civilization until it was taken by the Ottoman Turks over a thousand years later in 1453. What we now call 'Byzantine Studies' is really Medieval Studies focused on the Eastern half of the old Roman Empire and its neighbours.

The richness of Byzantium's fusion of Greek, Roman, and early Christian cultures was underappreciated in post-Renaissance Europe. Only in the last century have scholars re-established the historical richness of Byzantine civilization and its authentic and specific achievements. In spite of this change of understanding it remains rare for a University to have more than one or two Byzantinists on their faculties. Where Byzantinists do exist, they tend to be either historians or art historians. Developing its already considerable strengths in the History, Philosophy, Theology, and Literature of Late Antiquity and the Western Middle Ages, Notre Dame aspires to create a comprehensive centre for Byzantine Studies under the umbrella of the Medieval Institute.

Once Notre Dame is in the position to assume the role of a leading educational centre of Byzantine Studies, it expects to attract American students with origin from Greece and other parts of Southeastern Europe who are interested in studying their cultural heritage. The cultivation of close academic cooperation with the European scholarly community, as demonstrated by the second workshop on 'Byzantine Intellectual History' of February 2006, which was devoted to the Medieval Greek Commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, is very inspiring indeed. The publications which were initiated after the first workshop (*Reading Michael Psellos*, edited by Charles Barber and David Jenkins, Leiden-Boston, Brill, *The Medieval Mediterranean*, vol. 61, 2006, p. 255) are highly appreciated by the international world of scholars.

By this occasion it is opportune to present an important publication by Prof. Charles Barber, the head of the new Centre of Byzantine Studies in Notre Dame. His title: *Figure and Likeness. On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press 1964, 207 p. Charles Barber is Professor of Art, Art History and Design at the University of Notre Dame.

Figure and Likeness presents a thought-provoking new account of Byzantine iconoclasm, the fundamental crisis in Christian visual representation during the eighth and ninth centuries that defined the terms of Christianity's relationship to the painted image. Barber rejects the conventional means of analyzing this crisis, which seeks its origin in political and other social factors. Instead, he argues, iconoclasm is primarily a matter of Theology and aesthetic theory.

Working between the theological texts and the visual materials, Barber demonstrates that in challenging the validity of iconic representation, iconoclasts were asking: How can an image depict an incomprehensible God? In response, iconophile theologians gradually developed a notion of representation that distinguished the work of art from the subject it depicted. As a result, Barber concludes, they were forced to move the language describing the icon beyond that of Theology. This pivotal step allowed these theologians, of whom Patriarch Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudion were the most important, to define and defend a specifically Christian art.

In highlighting this outcome and also in offering a full and clearly rendered account of iconoclastic notions of Christian representation. Barber reveals that the notion of art was indeed central to the unfolding of iconoclasm. The implications of this study reach well beyond the crisis it considers. Charles Barber fundamentally revises not only our understanding of Byzantine art in *the* years succeeding the iconoclastic dispute, but also of Christian painting in the centuries to come. It is therefore with great interest that we are expecting the forthcoming book by Charles Barber *Art and Understanding in 11th century Byzantium*.

Linos G. Benakis

Linos Benakis is Research Fellow of the Academy of Athens (Greece) and Editor of European Journal of Science & Theology.