



Byzantium in Brisbane: Reflections on the Australian Association for Byzantine Studies Conference

28-30 November, 2014

Imagine sunny Brisbane, with its tropical climate, hilly topography, and tree-lined thoroughfares. Then think of combining this soothing atmosphere with the academic study of Byzantium; could there be a more inspiring environment for a conference?

As a representative of St Andrew's at the Australian Association for Byzantine Studies (AABS) 18th biennial conference on the topic of Byzantine Culture and Translation, I had the honour of being inspired precisely by such an environment. The conference was convened by eminent scholars Dr Bronwen Neil FAHA (Australian Catholic University, Centre for Early Christian Studies, Banyo QLD) and Dr Amelia Brown (Lecturer in Greek History and Language, University of Queensland), and the keynote speaker was Professor Maria Mavroudi (University of California, Berkeley). Dr Neil is of course well known to St Andrew's. Having been keynote speaker for two of our Patristic Symposia (2011 and 2014), she also published in both *Phronema* 27:2 (2012) and *Cappadocian Legacy* (edited by Protopresbyter Dr Doru Costache and Dr Philip Kariatlis), and participated in our 2013 Round Table on St Maximus the Confessor. For these reasons, and more, her generosity and friendship over the past few years have meant a lot to us.

I arrived on the twenty-eighth to encounter a city that had been assailed by torrential storms; but I soon realised that neither the debris nor the power-outage could dampen the spirits of the participants at this very auspicious conference. Travelling to the St Lucia campus of the University just before registration, I was met by Dr Anna Silvas FAHA (University of New England, School of Humanities, Armidale NSW) who is a tremendous friend of St Andrew's. Dr Silvas gave keynote lectures at our 2010 and 2011 Patristic Symposia and published in the second volume of *Phronema* in 2012. This year, Dr Silvas gave two guest lectures at St Andrew's on the 'Nexus of Greek, Syriac and Latin Christianity: St Basil the Great's *Small Asketikon*' and 'Was St Basil the Great a mystic? Was he a mystical theologian?', with her paper at AABS covering the first of these topics from a fresh angle. After greeting Dr Silvas and registering for the conference, the latter kindly introduced me to Emeritus Professor John Melville-Jones (Classics and Ancient History, University of Western Australia), one of the most accomplished Byzantinists in the Antipodes.

We sat together for the keynote lecture by Professor Mavroudi who was introduced by Dr Brown after the welcoming remarks of Associate Professor Martin Crotty, the Head of the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics at the University. Professor Mavroudi's keynote was entitled 'Translation from Greek into Latin and Arabic during the Middle Ages: Searching for the Classical Tradition.' This stimulating paper acted as a corrective to modern assumptions that Byzantium statically preserved the classical tradition without any innovation whatsoever. Professor Mavroudi, however, demonstrated that this 'preservation' involved a great dynamism that made the classical tradition relevant for the Christian Romans, the contemporaries of whom (i.e. Muslims and Latins) were interested not only in the classical tradition that Byzantium had preserved but also its other creative projects, Biblical, patristic, hagiographical, liturgical, and legal, etc. At the generous reception that followed the presentation, the recent publication of the Society, *Byzantium: Its Neighbours and Its Cultures*, edited by Dr Danijel Dzino (Lecturer in Ancient History, Macquarie University) and Dr Ken Parry (former Senior Lecturer in Church History at St Andrew's), was launched by Dr Neil. Bursaries were then



The Great Court of the Campus of St Lucia, University of Queensland, where the conference was held

distributed to myself and another PhD candidate Mr Matthew O'Farrell (Department of Ancient History, Macquarie University), for which I am very grateful. During the reception I was pleased to meet Justin Piggot, PhD candidate at the Australian Catholic University, who presented at our 2014 Patristic Symposium. His paper at AABS was on 'The Bishops of Constantinople and the Monastic Menace.' I also met another PhD candidate from ACU, Ryan Strickler, who presented the next day on 'Apocalyptic Discourse in *Epistula* 8 by Maximus the Confessor.' After the reception, Dr Neil generously invited me to dinner with Professor Mavroudi, Dr Amelia Brown, Dr Andrew Faulkner (Department of Classical Studies, University of Waterloo, Ontario) and Mr Andrew Stephenson (School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne), whom I finally met after much correspondence in relation to my society membership and conference registration.

The first night of the conference was just a foretaste of what transpired the next day. The morning started well with a brief breakfast at a local café attended by Dr Neil, Associate Professor Nigel Westbrook (Associate Dean of Research, School of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts, University of Western Australia), Dr Zdenko Zlatar (Reader in History at the University of Sydney), and myself. I was privileged to receive insights into their fascinating research interests. I was unable of course to attend all of the presentations because of the parallel sessions (one-and-a-half hours each, comprised of three presentations for thirty minutes each), but here I will provide some commentary on the sessions I did attend, as well as my experience throughout. My paper, entitled 'Constantinople as an *Imago et Axis Mundi*: Approaching the New Rome through the Lens of the History of Religions,' was to be presented in the morning session 'Constantinople through the Ages.' The first paper of this session was on 'The Performative Function of Column Monuments in Constantinople' by Ms Rebecca Smith, PhD candidate at the University of Queensland. I addressed Constantine's porphyry column in my paper that was up next, so I deferred to Ms Smith's excellent presentation at the places where my talk covered the same material.

My paper, however, focused on applying the renowned Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade's heuristic devices of *imago mundi* (image of the world) and *axis mundi* (centre of the world) to the founding of Constantinople in order to demonstrate Constantine's syncretistic construal of the city as a cosmic centre that borrowed motifs from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, with some Christian elements. Next I moved to the session 'Exploring Byzantine Monasticism' to deliver Protopresbyter Dr Doru Costache's (Senior Lecturer in Patristic Studies, St Andrew's) paper on his behalf. Fr Doru had intended to attend the conference, but could not make it due to unforeseen circumstances; I duly acknowledge him here for facilitating - with His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos' (Dean of St Andrew's) blessing - the strong and enduring connections that St Andrew's has with Dr Neil, Dr Silvas, and other esteemed participants at AABS. Fr Doru's paper was entitled '*The Philokalia* and Its First Translation into a Modern Language' and gives a groundbreaking spin on the modern *philokalic* saga, which, Fr Doru demonstrates, was initiated by Ukrainian and Romanian monks in the Romanian lands; lands that had an ancient history of monasticism and hesychast experience that were now made widespread by the bold translation of the *Philokalia* into the vernacular for the first time. After delivering Fr Doru's paper, I had the honour of meeting once again the legendary Professor Pauline Allen FAHA (Director of the Centre for Early Christian Studies, ACU).

Professor Allen is another dear friend and supporter of St Andrew's, who was keynote speaker at our Patristic Symposium on St Cyril of Alexandria last year, published two articles in *Phronema* this year, and will be keynote speaker again (together with Dr Wendy Mayer, another eminent scholar from ACU) at our 2016 Patristic Symposium on St John Chrysostom. Professor Allen also recently joined *Phronema's* editorial board. During morning tea that followed this session I also had the pleasure of greeting Professor Alanna Nobbs, Co-Director of the Ancient History Documentary Research Cen-





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tre at Macquarie University who, together with her husband, Emeritus Professor of the Sydney College of Divinity, Raymond Nobbs, have for many years been friends of St Andrew's.

I chaired the next session on 'Byzantine Dreambooks.' Dr Faulkner delivered an insightful paper on the 'Paraphrase and the Translation of Scripture,' showing how some ancient authors employed Hellenistic literary devices in their paraphrase of scripture. Next, Dr Lola Sharon Davidson (University of Technology, Sydney) gave a fascinating presentation on 'Pascalis Romanus' *Liber Thesauri Occulti* and the translation movement of the Twelfth Century.' Dr Davidson contextualised the Latin translator Pascalis Romanus, working in Constantinople in the twelfth century, within a wider translation movement that attempted to adapt pre-existing oneiromantic traditions within a Christian framework. Co-convenor Dr Neil's paper was thematically linked to the previous insofar as it addressed the topic of 'Translating Byzantine Dreams from West to East.'

In a fascinating investigation of the cultural cross-overs between Byzantium and Medieval Islam, Dr Neil employed Kenny's taxonomy for dream accounts in ninth century hagiography to Byzantine, Islamic, and Latin milieus. I managed to attend one more paper that day on 'Nikephoros Phokas as Superhero' by Mr John Burke (Honourary, Historical and Philosophical Studies, the University of Melbourne) before venturing back to the hotel to rest before the conference dinner, which was at the Victorian-looking Regatta hotel, and was the perfect way to cap off a day of scholarly fraternity and edification.

The next day began with a bang. I attended the session called 'Translations of text and dress in the 17th century' where Dr Alfred Vincent, founder of the Department of Modern Greek Studies at the University of Sydney, gave a remarkable presentation on 'Restoring Byzantium? Two Greek Writers in Seventeenth Century Wallachia.' These writers were Stavrinus the Vestiar and Bishop Matthew of Myra, both of whom were born in Epirus, settled in Wallachia, and delineated the Byzantine-inspired history of pre-Phanariot domination in the Danubian provinces. Dr Vincent contrasted their two approaches; what stood out to me was that Stavrinus described the death of the Romanian voivode Michael the Brave's assassination at the behest of the Habsburgian emperor as a mythical victory of a dragon (the emperor) over the hero (Michael). This continues and inverts a motif prevalent in ancient Greek and Byzantine culture (e.g. Apollo slaying Typhon, Digenis



The statue of St Vladimir the Great, herald of Orthodoxy to the Rus', was shown to me by Dr Anna Silvas FAHA.

Akritas slaying a dragon), and prompted a discussion between Dr Vincent and myself during the tea break which followed, from which I learned a lot. After the next presentation by Dr Przemyslaw Marciniak (University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland) on 'Translating Byzantine Literature in Pre- and Early Modern Poland' - which described some fascinating literary examples of Byzantine inspired literature in Poland before the Russian domination - I was whisked away by Dr Silvas who was intent on showing me something on campus that she insisted was well worth seeing.

After walking around the beautiful lake and meeting some of its inhabitants - ducks and peacocks of various shapes, colours and sizes - we finally made it to a grassy area marked with large trees that overshadowed a statue of St Vladimir the Great, the converter of the Kievan Rus', standing like a silent sentinel and beacon with his Russian cross in hand; his welcoming arms outstretched towards those who would draw near. The statue was dedicated by the Russian community in Brisbane "on the occasion of the millennium of Christian culture in Russia 1988." Strengthened by this image and Dr Silvas' commentary on it - for which again I humbly thank her - we made our way back to the conference for the session on 'Text translations in the medieval West,' which included two presentations. The first was on 'Byzantine Religious Tales in Latin Translation: The Work of John of Amalfi' by John Duffy, Dumbarton Oaks Professor of Byzantine Philology and Linguistics (Harvard University, Cambridge MA). This insightful presentation addressed the manuscript tradition behind the works of John, a bilingual priest and monk of Amalfi who in the eleventh century lived for some time in the Zoodochos Pege monastery at Constantinople.

The second paper was entitled 'Lost in Translation: Planudes in Search of Human Reason' by Dr Evangelina Anagnostou-Laoutides (School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics at Monash University). The presentation unfolded as a complex analysis of Maximus Planudes' (13th century) translation of certain passages from Macrobius, Boethius, and St Augustine as an attempt to reconcile Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic conceptions of reason. Lunch followed this nuanced paper, after which we said our goodbyes, edified in mind and collegiality. I made my way back to the airport and began to write the present reflection, when I was pleasantly surprised to bump into two conference delegates heading back to Perth, Associate Professor Westbrook and Michael Champion; both of whom are from the University of Western Australia but whose papers I unfortunately did not manage to hear.

We reflected about the conference over some coffee, and, given A/Professor Westbrook's deep interest in Byzantine architecture, I offered to show them photos on my laptop from my trip to Istanbul in 2011. The insightful commentary that followed was a fitting way to end this tour de force of a conference, and I take the opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to the conveners and participants for making me feel so welcome.

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St Stylianos Parish in Sydney, NSW celebrated its *Panigiri* on 30th of November (St Andrew's Day) with His Eminence Archbishop Stylianos and other priests:

Fr Miltiadis, Fr Nicholas Tsouloukidis, Fr John Kapetas and Fr Michael.

Fr Constantine was bestowed the honour of Protopresbyter by His Eminence. This was a great honour and Fr Constantine said it is a reflection of His Eminence's example at our Theological College, his Presbyteria Eleni's dedication, his Parents' integrity and the hardworking Church Committees that are in synergy with a Priest and his family.

This was a blessed day with so many people attending and a luncheon followed with entertainment by the dancing groups of the Parish, taught by Maria Karambelas.

Christian Dior, Gucci, Ted Baker

Katerina + Kyriacos Mavrolefteros

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