The State Between
Liminality, Transition & Transformation in Late Antiquity & Byzantium
The Oxford University Byzantine Society’s XXII International Graduate Conference

The State Between: Liminality, Transition and Transformation in Late Antiquity and Byzantium

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Welcome

The conference committee wishes you all a very warm welcome to the Oxford University Byzantine Society’s 22nd International Graduate Conference.

For many centuries, Byzantium was characterised in historiographical narratives as a transitional state: a retrospective bridge between antiquity and modernity. However, while Byzantium undoubtedly acted as an intermediary between these worlds and eras, it is important to recognise the creativity, originality, and vitality which characterised this empire and its population. Much as Late Antiquity has been reframed as a period of evolution rather than decline, so too can the Byzantine world be viewed in a new light through the lens of liminality. This conference aims to explore the fluid and the unfixed, periods of transition and ambiguity; the state of being ‘betwixt and between’.

Including contributions on political, social, literary, architectural and artistic history, and covering geographical areas throughout the central and eastern Mediterranean and beyond, this conference aims to provide a kaleidoscopic view of the Late Antique and Byzantine world.

We hope the next two days will raise as many questions as they will resolve. But most of all, we aim to provide a forum for interdisciplinary discourse on Late Antiquity and Byzantium.

We look forward to listening to and engaging with your research.

Best wishes from the committee,
Daniel Gallaher, Lorenzo Saccon, and Josh Hitt
The proposed paper examines the role of Apollonios of Tyana in middle Byzantine literature. The wandering Pythagorean philosopher of the first century AD became widely known in the third century, when Flavius Philostratus composed his biography. In Late Antiquity, Apollonios had acquired the status of a theios aner—a man who came close to the gods through his wisdom. His legend was used by the Hellenizing Neoplatonists in their disputes with the Christians. This controversy provoked the Church fathers, in particular Eusebius of Caesarea, to issue a reflection on the essence of Apollonius’ knowledge. However, in middle Byzantine literature, Apollonios became known as an ambivalent character, a ‘philosopher on the street’, who predicts the future and creates talismans. He is a wise man, working for the good of people, he forms the heart of such great cities as Antioch and Constantinople, and, in the Patria of Constantinople, he even acts as a companion of the Emperor Constantine. But at the same time, he is situated outside the Christian world and does not seem to have heeded the teachings of Christ. This ambivalence allowed citizens of the Christian Empire to hold him responsible for those parts of knowledge (magic, prediction) and everyday life (interaction with talismans), which could not be legitimized within the Christian dogmatic system. This role is assigned to Apollonius in various texts until the thirteenth century, when it passes to another sage of the Byzantine oecumene—Emperor Leo VI.

Vasily Zagrebin is an MA student at the Faculty of History, Lomonosov Moscow State University, where he completed his undergraduate studies in 2017. He specializes in Byzantine studies, and his research interests lie in the area of secular knowledge, occult science and everyday life in middle Byzantine Constantinople.

Theodore Prodromos between Christian Piety and Classical Learning
Yan Zaripov (St Hilda’s College, Oxford)

Theodore Prodromos is one of the most prolific and versatile writers of twelfth-century Byzantium. Oscillating between vernacular and atticing Greek, poetry and prose, poverty and success, loyalty and subversion, he is a liminal figure indeed. A conspicuous, yet understudied, aspect of Prodromos’ protean nature is the juxtaposition of classical and Christian elements in his oeuvre. On the one hand, as the author of a Platonic dialogue, lucianesque satires and romantic novel, Prodromos was at the forefront of Komnenian Hellenism. On the other, as the one who penned tetrastichs on the Old and New Testament, dedicatory epigrams addressed to prophets, apostles and the Virgin and a saint’s live he was affirming his faithfulness to Orthodoxy. In this paper I aim to study the ramifications of this divided authorial identity. Firstly, I illustrate the various ways of bringing Christian and Classical together in one piece of writing. My case studies include application of Homeric meter, language and imagery to Christian subject matter; incorporation of pagan myths about the afterlife into a funerary oration; production of a treatise on Aristotle to application of Homeric meter, language and imagery to Christian subject matter; incorporation of classical and Christian elements in a single piece of writing. Secondly, I demonstrate how Prodromos explicitly emphasized his ability to switch between Christian and Classical rhetoric. I argue that by doing so Prodromos advertised his versatility in a bid to secure commissions to write both for ecclesiastical and secular occasions and audiences. Thirdly, I discuss the challenges (in particular, the accusation of impiety) of Prodromos’ liminal position and his strategies of responding to them.

Yan Zaripov reads for DPhil in Classical Languages and Literature at Oxford. His thesis is dedicated to imitation (μίμησις) of classical literature in twelfth-century Byzantium. He aims to demonstrate that even the seemingly most faithful reproductions of classical models (e.g. Platonic dialogue, Lucian’s satire) conceal urgent concerns and ambitions of a Byzantine author. Yan’s previous projects dealt with the history of semantics, rhetoric and Byzantine intellectual history.

‘And Also Others Have Written Iliads’
The Boundaries of the Iliad in 12th-century Byzantine Literature
Alberto Ravanì (Exeter College, Oxford)

There is no poem which explores the concept of liminality as the Iliad does. A border, constantly relocated between the shore and the gates of Troy, marks the phases of the narrative and, hence, of Achilles’ rage. However, the Iliad as a poem has also its own borders and they have been moved over time. This paper explores the ‘state’ of the Iliad in twelfth century Byzantium focusing on the works of Constantine Manasses, John Tzetzes and Eustathios of Thessaloniki. In the Synopsis Chroniche, Manasses starts telling the war of Troy from the birth of Troy and promises he will write as the historians do (v. 1111 Lampidis) and not like Homer (v. 1113 Lampids). But was the poem not about the rage of Achilles and not about the war? Tzetzes in the Exegesis of the Iliad names more than seven authors who wrote an Iliad (p. 67.19 Papathomopoulos) and among them places Triphiodorus and Quintus Smyrnaeus; in the introductive scholion of his Little-big Iliad he then promises to write down ‘the whole Iliad’ (Leone p. 101.2) and starts his narrative again from Paris’ birth. Eustathios, in the Prologue of his monumental commentary, says that the poem is called Iliad because it ‘describes what happened in Ilion, which is the events of the Trojan war (τα Τροϊκα)’ (5, 10 Van der Vaalk). What is the relation between the events of the war and the Iliad? What was in 12th century Byzantium the perception of a poem so distant in time and so important for their culture and paideia? Can a line be drawn between the Iliad and τα Τροϊκα?

Alberto Ravanì obtained his Bachelors in literature (Classical curriculum) from Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna; he then moved to Ca’ Foscari – University of Venice where he did a two-year Masters in Literature, Philology and History of the Ancient World, spending the second year as an Erasmus student at the University of Hamburg. He is currently a first year DPhil candidate in Medieval and Modern language at the University of Oxford with a project in Byzantine philology about John Tzetzes’ Allegories of the Iliad.
Prompted by the changes brought on by the Byzantine Reconquista (tenth century), the Syriac speaking churches underwent a series of remarkable changes. These cultural mutations, which manifested in liturgy, art, theology, and philosophy, led Anton Baumstark to speak of a period of Renaissance for the Syriac Churches between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.

In a new geopolitical context – the return of the Byzantines in the Middle East, the Crusades and Mongol invasion – authors such as Dionysius Bar Salibi (d. 1171) developed new ideas about their own identity as well as that of their neighbours. The use of new identity markers, which were also applied retrospectively, can be seen as the emergence of proto-nationalism, or more properly, as an unprecedented mustering of ethno-religious feelings (Christopher MacEvitt). Together with this socio-cultural development, authors such as Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) and Abdisho Bar Brikha (d. 1318) engaged with Islam and critically adopted philosophical and theological ideas. Lastly, particularly the renewed Byzantine presence in the Middle East led to a liturgical and artistic renewal that was characterised by a hybridity. Although theoretically opposed, Syriac, Armenian and Georgian liturgies and art of this period were heavily influenced by Byzantine culture.

In my paper I will investigate these aspects of the Syriac Renaissance and highlight how the Syriac Churches engaged with the work of Islamic and Byzantine writers and artists. More broadly, I intend to show that Syriac authors of this period do not belong to an age of decadence, but renewal, and had the conviction that ‘Syriac culture should not be fostered in isolation, rather it should participate fully in the surrounding culture’ (Lucas van Rompay).

Bogdan Draghici is a second-year DPhil student in Oriental Studies. He is researching the previously unedited polemical treatise of Dionysius Bar Salibi (d. 1171) ‘Against the Chalcedonians’. He is a graduate of the Universities of Bucharest, Leuven and Oxford.

Longing for a Miracle

The Tale of Euphemia and the Goth and the Shaping of Local Identity in Edessa within the 5th-century Roman Empire

Daria Jędrzejewska (Adam Mickiewicz University)

The Tale of Euphemia and the Goth, presumably written originally in Syriac, describes the fortunes of a girl from Edessa, who departed from her homeland with a Gothic husband and was later miraculously freed from captivity through the intercession of three local martyrs. This short narrative can be perceived as a skilful attempt to strengthen the regional identity and self-consciousness of a small society on the borders of the Roman Empire. The story claims to describe events from the year 395/6 and was probably created in the fifth century, a time of general prosperity but also growing religious and social discrepancies in Edessa. The barbarian factor in the form of Gothic soldiers is used in the narrative to emphasize the value of ‘the little homeland’, boosting local confidence hardly deriving from affiliation to the Roman Empire. The story captures many contrasts, reflecting the vitality of this period. Religious devotion is united with a longing to return to an earthly home. Thanks to heavenly intervention, time and space are exceeded by an ordinary girl. Faith and prayer are as substantial as the presence of physical remains of the saints. Edessa had already boasted a widespread tradition of early conversion and the blessing of Christ. The story of a miracle of the martyrs can be perceived as complementary, but also competitive. Finally, the literary narrative shows the real problems facing a city on Roman-Persian borders, the inhabitants’ attitude to the ‘barbaric’ Goths, as well as the hostility and coexistence of different cultures under Roman administration.

Daria Jędrzejewska has graduated with a master’s degree in archaeology at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow in 2012. She took part in numerous archaeological excavations, and was cooperating with Forschungsstelle Asia Minor, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster as a co-worker of six expeditions to Doliche, Turkey. Currently she is in the fourth year of doctoral study at the Faculty of History in Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, under the supervision of Prof. Kazimierz Iłski. Her research interests include the history and archaeology of Roman-Persian borders, the history of pre-islamic Arabs and urbanization in Late Antiquity.

Chrysostom on Marriage: Syriac Ideas Transformed in an Antiochene Context

Nicholas Ttofis (King’s College London)

Antioch in the fourth century was a city located on the crossroads between Greek and Syriac speaking culture. This is a fact especially true of the ecclesiastical sphere where Syriac-speaking monks from the Syrian interior freely mingled with Hellenised urban clergy and devotees. However, despite this reality, previous scholarship on John Chrysostom, one of the city’s most prolific churchmen, has often situated him in an exclusively Greek-speaking context. This is particularly true of his teachings on marriage, which are usually placed in the wider Greco-Roman marriage tradition or compared with other Greek-speaking Fathers. This neglect is especially striking when one considers the widespread recognition that Chrysostom’s ascetic formation had a significant impact on his theology of marriage: this formation took place among the notably Greek-Syriac bilingual monks of Mt. Sipius and thus would have exposed him to Syrian ascetic ideals.

In this paper, I intend to situate Chrysostom’s teaching on marriage in a more Syrian context, examining his thought in comparison to the writings of the prominent fourth century Syriac-speaking theologian Ephrem the Syrian. In particular, I will be focusing on the common use of bridal imagery, polemics against Manicheans, and the relationship between the imago dei and gender hierarchy in Genesis. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate a Syriac precedent for some of Chrysostom’s concerns, imagery, and teachings. Furthermore, I will also show how Chrysostom takes these ideas and reshapes them to suit his specific needs as an urban priest seeking to transform and sanctify the institution of marriage.

Nicholas Ttofis is a first year PhD student at King’s College London researching marriage in John Chrysostom under the guidance of Dr. James Corke-Webster. His wider research interests include Late Antique Christian asceticism, Greek-speaking Patristic theology, and the fourth Century Syrian Church. Nicholas graduated from King’s College London in 2015 with a BA in Ancient History. In 2018 he completed an MPhil degree at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford University; he wrote on comparison between the Cappadocian Fathers and the Syriac tradition (as represented by Ephrem the Syrian, and Aphrahat the Persian) on the place of ascetics in the wider church.
Halmyris was a Romano-Byzantine military fortification and civil settlement situated in the Danube Delta (modern-day Murighiol, Romania), which ancient peoples occupied between the first and seventh century CE. Halmyris functioned as a political, military, economic, and religious hub at the edge of the empire, but it also served as a threshold — this was the place where the river met the sea, the empire commingled with the native peoples, and the military interacted with the civilian. The location of the site in Late Antiquity was near a strategic confluence of the Danube River and Black Sea and, as such, witnessed the activities of multiple cultural groups throughout this period.

The research here employs a transdisciplinary approach that draws upon historical literature and the archaeological record, as well as place-making and landscape theories, to investigate the liminality of Halmyris during Late Antiquity. The concept of place-making assesses how the politico-military leaders used the fortification and civil settlement to (re)design the immediate environment, and furthermore how ancient peoples related to this place. The geographical and architectural features of the site, especially the fortification, defy the predictable standard of military-civilian frontier instillations. The dynamic ecosphere of the Danube Delta forced the inhabitants to reorganise the physical layout of the fort throughout its occupation, and as a result the place, in turn, effected the site. The premise of this study contends that the geographical placement and, moreover, the architectural modifications to the site were the direct result as the peoples of Halmyris continuously (re)negotiated their position within the landscape.

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Jonathan M. Querry is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the Department of Archaeology at Durham University — his academic research focuses on ancient art and architecture, Romano-Byzantine and native interactions, and the Romano-Byzantine military. Jonathan is also the Assistant Director and a Field Supervisor at the Archaeology at Halmyris excavation in the Danube Delta, Romania.

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Robert Hayes is currently studying for an MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at Oxford. He is particularly interested in the organisation of urban space in middle and late Byzantium.
My paper focuses on the social drama which revolved around the figure of Symeon the New Theologian and his theological conceptions in the beginning of the eleventh century. As Evelyne Patlagean shows in one of her articles, the processes on ‘heretics’ of the eleventh century in the Byzantine Empire were part of a broader global spiritual anxiety which overwhelmed the West as well as Byzantium. A private spirituality, which sought to get around the institutionalised forms of spirituality, was a part of this anxiety, as it put individuals into conflict with the discourse.

Symeon’s theological conceptions of prayer and direct contact with God, which became the core of the hesychast movement, were liminal in a sense that transformation of a subjectivity and an acquisition of a new status were the main steps on the ladder to Heaven. Nicetas Stethatos, Symeon’s disciple, who also composed Symeon’s Life, showed in the narrative about his tutor how the multiple passages reached by Symeon during his prayers and vigils transformed his persona. Symeon’s theology was very ambiguous in its imagery and use of metaphors for the description of the individual’s spiritual ecstatic conditions and relations with God.

Symeon’s concepts were breaching the contemporary orthodox view of the spirituality, promoted a new type of patron-disciple relations and undermined the integrity of monastic communities, since Symeon aspired to control the bodies and emotions of the monks. All these dramatic aspects made Symeon stuck between the orthodoxy and the new spirituality he pursued.

Intertextual Political Debate in Justinian’s Constantinople
Matthew Hassall (University of Cambridge)

This paper takes an intertextual approach to the political culture of Justinian’s Constantinople. It is concerned with the transition of phrases, motifs, and ideas between texts in the course of political debate. This paper offers two case studies. The first case is a propagandistic case. The paper tracks an element of Justinianic propaganda, the motif of sleeplessness, between imperial texts like laws and inscriptions and the writings of the bureaucrat John Lydus, conceiving of the intertextual translation of the motif as a process of quoting and recontextualising which enabled scrutiny of the terms through which imperial power represented itself. The second case is an argumentative case. The paper explores the use of the ‘ship of state’ metaphor between Agapetus’ Advice, Justinian’s Novels, and the Dialogue on Political Science in order to show both how the dominant imperial discourse about nature and the law could be ideologized and how this imposition on Constantinople’s political culture necessitated the adoption and manipulation of the linguistic structures of imperial argument by those thinkers who resisted its terms.

Overlapping Authorities
Chair: Chloé Agar (St Cross College)

Friday, 12pm
Rees Davies Room

Symeon the New Theologian
Nikita Bogachev (Central European University)

Matthew Hassall is a second-year PhD student at the University of Cambridge. He has a BA in History from Cambridge and an MA in Classics from Chicago. He now works on the political thought of the sixth-century Byzantine empire, with a special interest in intertextuality and debate.

Adjacent but Apart
The Liminality of Imperial Kinship by Choice in Late Byzantium
James Cogbill (Worcester College, Oxford)

Having graduated from the History Programme at the Higher School of Economics in Saint Petersburg in 2018, Nikita Bogachev is now in his second year of MA studies in the Medieval Studies Department of the Central European University in Budapest. Nikita’s academic interests range from historical anthropology and literary studies to the history of emotions.

James Cogbill is studying for an MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at Worcester College, University of Oxford. He received his undergraduate degree in Ancient and Medieval History from the University of Birmingham in 2019, and is particularly interested in imperial kinship networks and their implications for the governance of the empire in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods.

The aim of the paper is to showcase the high degree of referentiality which typified sixth-century political culture under Justinian, a political culture where motifs moved freely between texts, and to begin to explain the sorts of pressures and contortions which could be applied in the process of recontextualising these motifs within the reproductive structure of Justinianic power.

From the Komnenoi onwards, familial proximity to the emperor increasingly determined social status within the Byzantine court regardless of actual titles or offices held. Extant seals suggest that kinship terms such as ‘cousin of the emperor’ were at least equally as important as an official appointment.

It is therefore significant that several Late Byzantine emperors repeatedly referred to certain non-family members as ‘brother’ in personal correspondence and official documents. Although liberal use of kinship terms was an epistolary convention, the ‘brothers’ in the case studies I will examine were elevated to unique positions within society, above other courtiers and even imperial ‘kinsmen by blood’. In 1258, Theodore II chose his childhood friend George Mouzalon as regent for his son John IV, instead of a biological family member; after Mouzalon’s murder, Demetrios Tornikes’ descendants were considered strong candidates for the regency explicitly because of his closeness to John IV’s grandfather John III.

In this paper, I will explore these figures and their descendants as liminal personae who were adjacent to imperial ‘kinsmen by blood’, but never among them. More specifically, I will examine the significant tension between these ‘brothers’ and the biological kin they displaced, and the implications of their positions for the dynastic strategies employed by emperors in their governance of the state. I will suggest that studies of Byzantine imperial kinship should not consider emperors who were heavily reliant upon non-family members as anomalies, but rather should acknowledge and make space for the liminal existence of ‘kinship by choice’.
Hagia Sophia as Built by Muhammad and al-Khadr
David Williams (Royal Holloway)

The use of memory, and the interpretation of the history of a sacred space, can be equally compelling as the sanctifying presence of relics and their associated miracles. The Ottoman historiography of Hagia Sophia re-founded the sacred space as an Islamic one.

After the fall of the city, the conversion of the Great Church of Byzantium into a mosque happened in a number of ways. Most interestingly, ‘converting’ the church into a mosque also entailed the conversion of the history of the sacred space, all the way back to its (Justinianic) foundation through careful reading and reimagining. The history of the construction of Hagia Sophia commissioned by Mehmed II in 1480 drew heavily upon the existing Byzantine Patrícia and particularly a Diegesis that can be dated to the ninth century. The Ottoman reimagining of the Diegesis is reminiscent of the Umayyad’s recycled Byzantine hagiography in the case of the finding of the head of St. John the Baptist by Caliph Al-Walid. The aim of both of these narratives is to place the hierophanies of each of the sacred spaces within an Islamic context. The primary difference between the Hagia Sophia and Walid’s Grand Mosque in Damascus, however, was that the former did not require an Islamic re-founding because, as will be explored, the Ottoman history of Hagia Sophia demonstrates that the building was in fact designed to be a mosque from its inception.

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

Islamic Influences in Norman-Sicilian Art after Roger II:
The Deterioration of a Precious Heritage or a Natural Cultural Evolution?
Mathilde Sauquet (Independent researcher)

Scholarship on Norman Sicily has been principally focused on Roger II and Frederick II, whose attitudes towards the Muslim identity of the island greatly differed. The attractive comparison between Roger’s multi-cultural, Muslim-friendly court and Frederick’s preference for Romance culture and anti-Muslim policies, however, disregards the half-century that separates these two men. My paper, therefore, addresses the transition period between these two rulers, revealing a fifty-year liminal phase instead of an abrupt and distinct change of politics and architectural language. Looking at the reigns of William I (1154-66) and William II (1166-89) in the context of artistic production and royal patronage, I offer a careful analysis of architectural examples from both secular and religious contexts- the Zisa palace, the Church of San Cataldo, the Cuba pavilion, and the Cathedral of Monreale- to create a constructive timeline. These buildings, juxtaposed to the socio-political context of their construction, especially the power struggles involving the King, the nobility, the Latin Church, the local Muslim population and external Muslim powers, demonstrate how the changing norms in Norman Sicilian architecture are a reflection of the evolving state-church hierarchies in Sicily, shifting the attitudes of the crown away from Islamic affinities and towards European models before Frederick II’s accession to the throne.

Mathilde Sauquet received an MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies from the University of Oxford (St. Stephen’s House) in 2019. She graduated in 2018 from Trinity College, CT, USA with a joint BA in Art History and Modern Languages (Italian and Arabic). Her undergraduate thesis focused on Roger II of Sicily and the artistic programme of the Cappella Palatina, looking at the relationship between Christian and Islamic art and symbolism. She continued to explore the causes and meaning of Islamic influences in Norman-Sicilian architecture as part of her Master’s thesis on William I and William II.

Dying on a Frontier Region:
Reassessing the Contribution of Necropoleis in the Study of Late Antique and Byzantine Liguria (5th-7th centuries)
Alessandro Carabia (University of Birmingham)

The passage between life and death is a liminal space that can tell us much about a society in many aspects: beliefs, rituals, material culture, relationships, economy, living habits, health, etc. To fully grasp all its facets, an interdisciplinary approach is essential, from the humanities to the hard sciences.

The crisis of the Roman Empire and the victory of Christianity over paganism significantly changed many aspects of the daily life of the new societies that were forming both in Byzantium and in Western Europe. One of these aspects was the perception of and relation with death, both in its spiritual and physical manifestations. In this paper, I will reassess the rich material evidence of Ligurian necropoleis during the period of transition between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (fifth to seventh centuries), during which time Liguria was a frontier province of the Byzantine Empire for almost a century (569-643/4CE).

Beginning with the interaction between necropoleis and the rapidly changing urban and rural landscapes, this paper will examine the new burial forms that emerged in this period, their chronology and micro-regional differences. A special focus will be on the role of Byzantium in preserving Roman-derived traditions plus the consequences of the Byzantine departure. Finally, I will address the limits of the research approaches used up to now in Liguria and propose a research methodology to go beyond them, exploiting the full contribution which can be derived from Late Antique and Byzantine necropoleis in Liguria and across the Mediterranean.

Alessandro Carabia is a third year PhD student in Byzantine Archaeology at the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Birmingham. In his PhD Alessandro is analysing Byzantine borders in the context of the westernmost Byzantine provinces. His research is focused on the early Byzantine frontier, and on the study of the effects of the imperial occupation and its consequences on the region and the ‘trauma’ of marginalization of a once central province of the Roman Empire in the passage from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages.
In the Vita Antonii of Athanasius, the young Antonius is depicted as follows: a boy polemically refusing to learn τὰ ὑπὲρτα to stress his distance from society. Henceforward, this (stereotyped) image became the ideal representation of the ascetic, who should refuse profane education and possess a spiritual wisdom, avoid books and meditate on the Scripture. This representation is far from being true: recent studies have shown that, despite living at the border of the society, Egyptian monks had access to written culture. Papyri, ostraka and archeological findings attest that books (not only the Book par excellence, the Bible) were widespread in coenobitic and anchoritic settlements. In effect, the Rule of Pachomius prescribes that every monk should be able to read and write. Literary sources such as the Apophthegmata and the Historia Lausiaca of Palladius also display a lively, sometimes controversial, relationship between monks and reading.

In my paper, I will focus on this debated relationship in a partially overshadowed context: Palestine and Sinai on the eve and immediately after the Persian and Arab invasion. Based on literary sources such as the letters of Barsanuphius and John, the Pratum Spirituale of John Moschus, the Narrationes of Anastasius, and the Scala Paradisi of Climacus, I will shed light on how books were employed in monastic milieu and how they might have circulated in a liminal area between Christians and Muslims. Indeed, our sources suggest that monks were generally alphabetised and acquainted mainly — but not only — with biblical and ascetic texts.

Anna Trento is a third year PhD student at the University of Padua. She earned her MA in Classical Philology and Ancient History at the University of Padua in 2015 with a thesis entitled ‘Nilus, Praeculus or Nestorius? Five Homilies in Search of an Author’ (Phot. Bibl. 276). Her research interests include Greek philology and literature, Byzantine and Modern Greek, early monasticism and authorship issues, especially concerning the corpus of monk Nilus of Ancyra (IV-V century).

Chloé Agar is a second-year DPhil student in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford at St Cross College. She specialises in Coptic hagiography, focusing on the representation of visions experienced by saints and laymen in such texts. She holds a BA in Oriental Studies (Egyptology) from the University of Oxford and an MA in Archaeology from the University of Liverpool.

Miracles at saints’ shrines have long been acknowledged within scholarship to be liminal and transformative experiences. Analysis of these experiences, particularly within the study of Greek material, has focused on the physical changes wrought by miracles. These physical changes have predominantly been the healing of the sick. Another notable, albeit non-physical, transformation in such texts is the conversion of pagans and heretics to Christianity.

While the transformative aspects of miracles have received significant scholarly attention, visions of the saints performing those miracles have not. They are often an integral, and likewise liminal, part of miracle narratives, in Greek as well as in other languages. Their inclusion is itself typically a transformative experience for the laymen witnessing them, and they often act as precursors to healing miracles or additional incentives to convert to Christianity. However, the range of transformative experiences for laymen that visions enable is far wider than this suggests, also encompassing elements such as travel and the repurposing of space.

This paper will demonstrate the range of transformative experiences had by laymen found in visions, including physical, moral, spiritual, and emotional examples. These examples will be from Coptic hagiography, to also demonstrate the kinds of transformative experiences present in a less-studied tradition and how they compare to the more familiar Greek. The saints whose appearances are witnessed by laymen in these examples will range from being unknown outside of Coptic material, to having widespread traditions. However, all of the narratives used will be unique to Coptic.

Pneuma: Between Body, Soul and Mind
Ekaterina Rybakova (Lomonosov Moscow State University)

Medieval scientists were concerned with human anatomy: the correlation between body and mind, the material and spiritual sides of the human, the natural and the supernatural. Where was the boundary between them and how did they connect with each other? They found a universal answer: pneuma.

John Actuarios, a Byzantine physician of the fourteenth century, compiled a treatise dealing with the question: if a person had mental problems, what had to be treated first in this case — body, soul or anything else? From his point of view, pneuma was a third element of human construction: it combined body and soul and could heal a person from his illness or make it milder. It is material but acts as something incorporeal. Pneuma can be both homogenous and different, it may have different forms, features and fulfils different duties. When pneuma is changed everything in the body can be changed too. Such a small and ambiguous element played a huge role in the functioning of the human organism.

So why did the Byzantines need this third, mediating element? How far was the existence of the third, limitary, element necessary for the functioning of the microcosm and the macrocosm? Was it unique to Mediterranean culture? Where did this view emerge: in Antiquity, Christian theology or oriental doctrines? In my proposed paper, seeking answers to these questions, I am going to place Actuarios’ ideas into a broader intercultural context by comparing them with other authors and traditions.

Ekaterina Rybakova is a second-year PhD student at Lomonosov Moscow State University. She specialises in the history of medicine, especially Byzantine medicine, pharmacology and dietetics. Her thesis focuses on the concept of pneuma in the work of John Actuarios.
Liminality in Politics and Identity on the Eastern Frontier of Byzantium, c.969-1071
George Robert Luff (Independent researcher)

After the conquests of the Macedonian dynasty in the tenth century and the annexations of Armenian principalities during the first part of the eleventh century, a great many non-Orthodox, non-Byzantine peoples became ‘subjects’ of the empire. These ethnically and religiously diverse communities, often with very strong identities, responded differently to the new regime and its institutions, adopting either confrontational or complimentary characteristics and attitudes towards their new political and social world. Furthermore, the imperial authorities had to develop policies for governing these populations, which ranged from the imposition of Roman norms in some regions, to granting practical local autonomy in others.

This paper seeks to explore the politics of the eastern frontier, which were associated very strongly with the identities of the diverse ethno-religious groups that, despite the conquests, continued to play leading roles in local administration. Furthermore, these identities began to change as the imperial authorities imposed their will upon the region and inserted their institutions in everyday life. These changes are not only found in textual evidence, where identities are clearly demarcated by chroniclers, but also in visual sources such as art, and through sigillography. The paper advance the argument that the strong identities of the local populations and the ‘light touch’ of the Byzantine administration resulted in a ‘liminal’ space in the eastern frontier which was supposedly Byzantine territory but possessed multifaceted and complex characteristics and influences.

George Robert Luff recently completed a Master of Arts in Medieval Studies at the University of York, writing his thesis on Byzantine-Islamic diplomacy in the tenth century, George also completed his BA in History at the University of York, graduating in 2018. He is now spending time before edding his BA (Hons) in History, a degree in Education, and an MSt in History in the Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaiso, Chile. Joaquin’s main research interest is in Late Antique and Byzantine cultural history, particularly the relations between historiography, literature, art and imaginations.

Betwixt and Between
Bilingual Arab-Greek Seals and the Lives of Arabs in 10th and 11th century Byzantium
Eric Medawar (Princeton University)

Following ‘Abbasid decline at the start of the tenth century, the East Romans assumed an offensive posture and launched a series of military campaigns which reconstituted much of the former territory of the empire in the east. One consequence of this ‘reconquest’ would be the movement of some Christian and Muslim Arabs from the periphery of the empire into the core. Working on the theme of liminality, this paper will examine the cultural alterity of these Arabs under their new conquerors and, with migration to major cities of the empire, the anxieties of transition. Previous scholarship by Angeliki Laiou and Alexander Kazhdan, among others, has drawn attention to the presence of Muslims in Byzantium—the Syrian prandiopratai (foreign traders of silk textiles) and the mosque located in Constantinople are noteworthy examples. However, there has been little discussion of Arabs from Syria and Iraq, already entrenched in a liminal space, the thughur or ’awāṣim, climbing the ranks of Byzantine society through various means (e.g., conversion to Chalcedonian Christianity). An unusual type of bilingual, Arabic-Greek lead seal from the eastern provinces reconquered by the Byzantines provides insight into the fate of these Arabs. Yahya of Antioch, for example, mentions a Muslim named ‘Ubaydallah who had converted to Christianity through the efforts of the Orthodox church and, in 976, became a basilikos—a lead seal of ‘Ubaydallah is still extant. Relying on these lead seals as documentary evidence, in addition to textual accounts, this paper intends to demonstrate that the Arab Muslim officials using these voulves, rather than holding an uncomplicated and opportunistic relationship with the Byzantine state and indifference to the Christian message of the seals, were faced with the difficult situation of maintaining a permanent state of ‘in-betweeness’.

Eric Medawar is a fourth-year PhD student in the History Department at Princeton University. Eric studies and researches Middle Byzantine and medieval Syrian history, with a special interest in the social and intellectual historical dimensions of those fields. His dissertation, tentatively entitled ‘The Byzantine Reconquest of the Jazīra in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: The Administration and Integration of Muslims into an Orthodox Christian State,’ examines the extent to which the Byzantine reconquest in the tenth century CE led to new social and political transformations in Syria and the Jazīra. In particular, the dissertation focuses on the question of how the Byzantines reintegrated into their state the Muslim population at the Byzantine-Arab border, which had formerly been under Islamic rule for centuries.

Between Medieval Legend and Byzantine History: Emperor Heraclius’ Single Combat
Joaquin Serrano del Pozo (University of Edinburgh)

Since the seventh century, several sources from the Medieval Latin West (for example, the Chronicle of Fredegar or the Homily for the Exaltation of the Cross) relate the story of a duel, or single combat, in which the Emperor Heraclius defeated a Persian warrior during the war against the Sasanians. This topic is, in fact, part of a bigger legendary tradition of Heraclius, which the Western imaginary associated intimately with the story of the Holy Cross and even considered as the precursor of the crusaders. While western medieval studies have examined some aspects of this tradition, Late Antique and Byzantine studies have focused on the historical Heraclius, only occasionally mentioning his legend, but never analysing it. However, there are some noteworthy parallels between the narrative of these Latin medieval texts and that of some Byzantine sources (for example, the Brevarium of Nicephorus or the chronicle of Theophanes). These similarities suggest that this tradition may not be limited only to the West, and that the legend of Heracles may have its origins in Byzantium, perhaps in the Emperor’s own time, in a liminal space between history, literature, reality and imaginaries. A possibility that nobody has analysed yet, and that I will explore in this presentation.

Joaquin Serrano del Pozo is currently a first-year PhD student in History at University of Edinburgh, under the supervision of Dr. Yannis Stouraitis and Professor Niels Gaul. Before this, he completed a BA (Hons) in History, a degree in Education, and an MSt in History in the Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaiso, Chile. Joaquin’s main research interest is in Late Antique and Byzantine cultural history, particularly the relations between historiography, literature, art and imaginaries.
Two trading levies appear throughout late medieval Muscovite exemption charters (zhalovanye gramoty): myt, a toll charged on transporting goods, first attested in pre-Mongol Rus; and tamga, a tax on exchange that had emerged across the Mongol khanates of western Eurasia. In its derived form, this etymologically Turkic term – originally denoting a seal or stamp used to authenticate goods – was eventually fashioned into the modern Russian word for customs, tamozhniki. Perhaps unsurprisingly, tamga has therefore often featured historiographically as a prima facie instance of Moscow’s ‘borrowing’ from nomadic models, but without more detailed consideration of that process.

This paper seeks to problematise such generalised conceptions of ‘borrowing’ through two strands of analysis. First, it will resituate the exemption charters within a framework of agent-led fiscal evolution: who collected these dues, and for whom? Were Muscovite tamozhniki (customs agents) qualitatively distinct from their Mongol counterparts, the tamghachis? Second, it will delineate the implications of this framework for understanding how the grand princes conceived of tamga against myt: was the extraction of tamga in Moscow motivated simply by financial greed, or part of a wider administrative change? In evaluating east Slavonic fiscal practice against its Mongol antecedents, this paper will hence query the idea that liminality is defined by spatial boundaries – and to ask instead how far Muscovite rulers engaged consciously with the legacy of the steppe in constructing their literal state between.

Angus Russell is a doctoral student at the University of Cambridge, whose work focuses on the transmission of institutional models to Moscow across the long fifteenth century. More broadly, he is interested in forms of intercultural mediation in late medieval and early modern Eurasia, and theoretical questions of globally-oriented connected histories. Before starting his PhD, he studied for his undergraduate degree in History and Russian, and his master’s degree in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, at the University of Oxford.

The Slavs’ Transition from Customary Law to Written Law Systems
Paolo Angelini (Independent researcher)

The transition from customary law to juridical systems based on the Byzantine model took place among the Slav populations after their conversion to Christianity. Slav tribal societies evolved new political and juridical models, based on written laws and on the monopoly of the justice of the central authority. The Slav rulers adopted written laws to strengthen their political power, reducing the risks for public order, deriving from the blood revenge (feud) in use among the Slavs. The paper will focus on the Zakon Sudnij Ljudem (First Bulgarian Empire or Great Moravia – ninth century), on the legislation of Yaroslav the Wise and his successors in the Kievan Rus’ (Russkaya Pravda – eleventh century), and on the tripartite codification of Stefan Dušan (fourteenth century). Byzantine laws were translated into the different Slav languages and adapted to the Slav socio-economic contexts. The elements of byzantine law (personal liability, monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force, physical punishments and mutilations, and the death penalty) coexisted with some elements of the Slav customary law, as for instance collective liability, pecuniary compositions.

If on the one hand the enactment of legal codes gave a decisive contribution to the building of the Slavo-Byzantine monarchies, on the other hand customary law was partially codified in the legal texts. Slav populations experienced a period of transition between customary and written law, when the new legal systems were adopted by their rules, and the two elements coexisted. This transition was fundamental for the Slav monarchies.

Paolo Angelini has been a post-doc at Leuven University and a fellow at Dumbarton Oaks. He currently works as a collaborator of the Italian National Agency of Job Policies Development (ANPAL) and as a legal advisor. His research interest is focused on Byzantine legal history and criminal law, and on its reception among the Slav populations.

‘The Buried People’: Novgorod and the Baltic Finns
Benjamin Gray (Balliol College, Oxford)

The most northerly Orthodox Christian state and outpost of Byzantine cultural influence, the Republic of Veliky Novgorod was situated at a point of intense cultural exchange. In the later Middle Ages the city was involved both in trade and warfare with its fellow Rus’ city states and with the emerging Catholic kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark, and also with the German crusading orders and a rising Lithuania. Often overlooked in the study of Novgorod, however, are its oldest and closest neighbours- the Baltic Finnic peoples. This short paper aims to explore the influences of the Yen, Izhora, Korel, Vod and Estonian Chud not only when in conflict with Novgorod but as its allies, as inhabitants of its domains and possibly co-founders of the city itself.

The Baltic Finns are a quiet but consistent presence in the Novgorodian sources. Their agency, though small in scale, was occasionally quite remarkable. Interaction is recorded at an elite level, but the famous birch bark letter No.292, which stands as the first example of a document written in a Finnic tongue, also tantalisingly suggests that the regularity of Finnic presence within the city allowed Finns to begin participating in its remarkable popular literary culture. This paper will suggest that Finnic peoples were an integral part of the Novgorodian world and that they played a part in shaping the identity of the republic. It will also attempt to make suggestions about the nature of Finnic societies and political structures from the few available accounts.

Ben Gray is currently studying for an MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, having graduated from Balliol College, Oxford with an Honours degree in History. Ben specialised during his undergraduate studies on cultures which were subjected to conquests and colonisation efforts in medieval and early modern Europe.
The Kelsey Pendant: The Performative and Sensorial Experience of an Early Byzantine Amulet
Shandra Lamaute (Kellogg College, Oxford)

In The Sensual Icon, Bissera Pentcheva in part argues for the performativity of Byzantine eikons; which, in Byzantium, represented a variety of objects including imprinted images on metals that were ‘...meant to be physically experienced’. For Pentcheva, the term ‘performative’ encompasses several aspects. However, the primary focus of this study will be Pentcheva’s alignment with J. L. Austin’s linguistic function of ‘performative’, which argues for ‘the simultaneity of utterance and action’.

I will consider how the Kelsey Pendant, an early Byzantine amulet (sixth to seventh centuries) from the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, may fall within the Byzantine understanding of an eikon. The Kelsey Pendant is a circular bronze amulet with a multivalent illustrative and textual programme. I will examine the imagery and text of the obverse side of the pendant to discuss some of the ways in which the amulet interacted with and was experienced by its bearer. More specific to the premise of the conference, the crux of the argument is that liminality resides in the space between performativity and the sensorial experience, both of which may be gleaned through the manner in which the engraved illustrative programme (image and text) unfolds within the activated, compressed space of the amulet. The Kelsey Pendant’s obverse side embodies what Pentcheva describes as the ‘...circular dynamics of participation of object and subject...’, which is energized from the acts of uttering and hearing the text inscribed upon the pendant coupled with seeing and interacting with the active scene mainly comprised of a mounted rider smiting a demon.

Shandra E. Lamaute is a DPhil student in Archaeology at the University of Oxford. Her interests fall within the area of the visual and material cultures of magic in the late antique and early Byzantine times. Her thesis is a case study of an early Byzantine bronze amulet where she explores the object from a holistic perspective inclusive of sensory archaeology, societal contexts, material, and materiality.

Between Chroma and Christology:
The Role and Function of Colour in the Three Treatises of John of Damascus
Julian Wood (University College, Oxford)

This paper examines colour in the Three Treatises on the Divine Images of John of Damascus, the eighth-century Palestinian and giant of iconophile thought during Byzantine Iconoclasm. James’ oeuvre demonstrates chromatic centrality within Byzantine aesthetic experience, yet Muthesius has deemed open for investigation its potential for ideological weaponization. Amid the Iconoclastic disputes, the charged potential ‘meanings’ of images became more important, more contested, and more partisan than ever before. This paper therefore seeks to contribute to woefully under-researched key questions of how colour – a central element in almost any aesthetic experience – may have played a distinct role amid the crossfire. John of Damascus’ Three Treatises, the best known of his specifically iconophile writings, tread a fine line in their treatment of colour; describing it both, often even simultaneously, as mere material medium and as powerful abstract concept that reveals Christian truths. The Treatises are examined through a twofold analytical framework that encompasses both language and wider ideological and intellectual contexts. This paper shall explore how the fine line between material medium and theological tool became almost invisible as John of Damascus expounded his justification of images, and also where the origin of his particular thinking may have originated through cross-reference to his appended florilegia. This paper shall also refer to how John of Damascns’ novel and significant contribution may have gone on to influence later thinking during the Iconoclastic dispute; providing ideological ‘fuel’ across the division and becoming appropriated by both the Iconoclast and Iconophile causes.

Julian Wood is currently reading for the MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at University College, Oxford. He received his BA in History and English from Pembroke College, Oxford, in 2019. His research interests primarily focus on the construction and reception of colour in Byzantium between 726-1204, with a specific focus on its potential for literary manipulation to indicate praise or criticism within aristocratic and learned texts.

Transformation of the Crossing of the Red Sea Sarcophagi
Alexis Gorby (St John’s College, Oxford)

Of the approximately three thousand surviving late antique sarcophagi, less than thirty display the iconography of the Crossing of the Red Sea. Two types of Crossing sarcophagi exist: those produced during the second quarter of the fourth century, the Constantinian type, and those from the last quarter of the fourth century, the Theodosian type. Both types share a basic iconography with soldiers drowning in the Red Sea on the left and Moses standing with a crowd of saved Israelites on the right. One major difference separates the sarcophagi along a chronological divide: the earlier sarcophagi contain many biblical scenes, whereas the later sarcophagi display the iconography stretched out across the entire facade without other narratives. This transformation distinguishes the Theodosian type within the corpus of sarcophagi. The selection of one biblical story as the only narrative on the front of a sarcophagus radically breaks with tradition. Why was the Crossing chosen above all other biblical narratives? How does going from being one of many abbreviated narratives to being the sole narrative change the interpretation of the iconography? By analyzing the compositional differences between the two types, this paper examines the transformation of the Crossing sarcophagi and places their development into their historical context. Through examining the way in which death is represented, what emerges is a renewed interest in Moses’ role as mediator between life and death. I hope to demonstrate that the Theodosian type only developed during a time when the role of intercession was paramount in the minds of Christian communities.

Alexis Gorby is a third year DPhil student in Classical Archaeology at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on the interplay between religion and social status in late antique funerary spaces and objects. She is currently working on her dissertation titled ‘The Social Life of Late Antique Sarcophagi: Location, Audience, and Meaning’. In her dissertation, she examines sarcophagi from known archaeological contexts from across the late Roman Empire to interpret how architectural space and iconography relate to better understand the non-religious function of sarcophagi.
Literature Between: Byzantine Dialogues with the Latins during the Comnenian Age
Carmelo Nicolò Benvenuto (Università degli Studi della Basilicata, Potenza)

The twelfth-century anti-Latin polemical production is, so to speak, a ‘literature between’, since first of all it was mainly composed by dialogical and pseudo-dialogical forms, which had a fundamental role in the relationships between East and West. But, if Byzantine literature is generally ‘under-theorized’, theological works of the Comnenian period are usually even left out of any attempt to re-write a comprehensive literary history of Byzantium. This ‘literature between’ probably still needs to be reshaped and to be included within a wider discussion about literature in Comnenian Byzantium. Was it literature, indeed? These texts are, first of all, between literature and history: could actual dialogues (e.g. the debates between Peter Grosolanus and a group of Byzantine theologians in 1112, between Anselm of Havelberg and Niketas of Nicomedia in 1136 and with Basil of Ohrid in 1154, and the Christological dispute which in 1166 had as its protagonist Hugh Eteriano) be reconstructed on the basis of the witness of extant literary dialogues? Moreover, from a purely literary point of view, which tools and criteria do we actually possess to define these texts within the frame of traditional literary analysis and genre distinction? How much did the contact with western cultural trends influence the development of new literary formats (as in the case of syllogisms)? Twelfth-century dialogues also constitute a crucial ‘literary hub’ in which the writings of the Church Fathers and anti-Latin authors converge, being incorporated, cited, modified, and re-elaborated. Thus, it is also a literature between past and present, between tradition and transformation. Are traditional categories, like those of authorship, originality, intertextuality, effective and useful tools to understand and describe the fluid magma of this production?

Carmelo Nicolò Benvenuto is a PhD Candidate at Università degli Studi della Basilicata. His academic interests deal with Byzantine civilization, history and philology, with the history of Byzantine studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Currently, his main field of research is the manuscript traditions of Byzantine anti-Latin theological treatises, with particular attention to the Comnenian age.

Neither Greek nor Latin:
Cardinal Bessarion’s Encyclical to the Greeks and the Plight of the Byzantine Pro-Unionists
John-Francis Martin (Oriel College, Oxford)

Branded ‘centaurs’ by Marc Eugenics, a sort of half-breed – no longer Greeks, but not really Latin either – for accepting union with Rome, the pro-unionists in late Byzantium lived an acutely marginal, liminal existence, ostracised from greater Byzantine society as Latinizers and traitors.

Writing from Rome as Ecumenical Patriarch in exile to all his faithful in 1463, Bessarion’s Encyclical to the Greeks provides us with some fascinating insights to the incredibly tense and delicate situation faced by these pro-unionist Byzantines as they tried to convince their compatriots to accept union with Rome. My paper will analyse the strategies employed by Bessarion in his encyclical, paying careful attention to the things he is anxious to say in order to convince his listeners of the truth and honesty of his decisions, but also to those things which he is perhaps even more careful not to say. I will do this by comparing Bessarion’s Greek original, intended for an Orthodox audience, with his own translation of the encyclical into Latin, most likely intended for the humanists and Curia in Rome. The striking differences between the two texts reveal something of the huge complexities encountered by pro-unionist Byzantines like Bessarion when it came to navigating the cultural and religious minefield of Church union. Rejected as a traitor by his fellow Byzantines and often seen as suspect by the cardinals of the Curia, Bessarion’s Encyclical to the Greeks reveals something fundamental about the liminal but also desperately engaged position of the Byzantine pro-unionists.

John-Francis Martin is a first-year DPhil candidate working on the efforts of the Byzantine pro-unionists in their struggle to achieve Church union from the time of the Council of Ferrara-Florence until a generation or so after the fall of Constantinople. He holds a BA in Classics from Trinity College Dublin and an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies from the University of Oxford.

Holy Fools in Byzantine and Persian Sources: Liminal Behaviours and Urban Environments
Sofia Simões-Coelho (University College, Oxford)

The holy madman figure in Byzantine and Islamic urban environments embodied liminality on various levels. Marginalised by society, he nevertheless engaged in transformative interaction with it, working to bring his coreligionists to salvation. His transgressive behaviour, forbidden to normal people, placed him above social conventions though its superficially sinful nature was connoted with baseness. Under a pretence of worldly insanity, the fool hid his ascetically acquired divine wisdom occasionally revealed in miracles.

Popular judgement was variously hostile or charitable to holy fools, depending on whether one interpreted them as medically insane, impostors, or saints. As Kekaumenos put it, ‘[the madman] will insult you and even pull you by the beard. Think of the disgrace! If you let him get away with it, everyone will laugh at you; if you beat him, everyone will blame you and reproach you.’

Based on texts produced in seventh-century Cyprus, tenth-century Constantinople, twelfth-century Khurasan, and fourteenth-century Konya, this paper adopts a comparative approach to the liminality of holy madness as developed in Christian and Islamic traditions. It focuses on the biographies of the Byzantine saloi Symeon and Andrew, the Sufis Abu Sa‘id and Loqman, and the dervish Shams al-Din-e Tabrizi. Through close textual analysis of the places and people Christian and Muslim holy fools frequented, it will draw conclusions on their relationships with urban power structures.

Sofia Simões-Coelho completed a History and Modern Languages (Russian) undergraduate degree at the University of Oxford. Since October 2018 she has been working towards an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies (University of Oxford), focusing on fifteenth-century holy fools in northern Rus’ under the supervision of Dr Jonathan Shepard and Dr Marek Jankowiak.
Transmission of the Images: Personification in Medieval Georgian Monumental Painting
Murals of the Ishkhani Cathedral
Natalia Turabelidze (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University)

Founded in the seventh century, the Ishkhani Cathedral was renovated several times. During the last renovation in 1032, the murals were completed. Surviving parts of the murals show that the cathedral’s painting scheme and program were created based on the Orthodox monumental art of that time whilst bringing together the images, the existence of which must have been determined by certain prerequisites. One of them is the personification of the moon in the scene of the ‘Exaltation of the Cross’ in the dome.

Among the assumptions regarding the identification of the figure, the point of view of Nicole Thierry seems noteworthy, according to which the image in Ishkhani is a unique embodiment of the personification of the moon. It is indicated that the image resembles the scene of the abduction of Europa, where the artist possibly mixed up the images of Selena and Europa.

Cases of medieval images being inspired by antique prototypes are well known. In the context of Ishkhani, the murals acquire importance from the fact that this plot of Greek myth became the subject of interest during the ‘Macedonian renaissance’. The study of the image suggests that the figure depicted in the painting of the dome of Ishkhani Cathedral can be identified with Europa. Its connection to the moon points to additional semantic meanings, e.g. the idea of renewal and rebirth. Therefore, it seems quite logical to depict it as a symbol of resurrection in the painting of the dome of the Cathedral of Ishkhani, in the scene of the triumphal appearance of the cross.

Natalia Turabelidze is a PhD candidate in Art History at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Before this, she received a BA and an MA in the ‘History and Theory of Art’ from the same institution. In the course of her academic career, she has been a visiting fellow at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and has served as a project co-ordinator on ‘Ani: Georgian Cultural Heritage’.

ʿAlam al-Dīn Qayṣar and His Shrine for Rūmī
Zarifa Alikperova (Wolfson College, Oxford)

ʿAlam al-Dīn Qayṣar was the chief patron of a shrine for Sufi mystic and poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), which was built in the Seljuk capital city of Konya in the late thirteenth century. Until the present, ‘ʿAlam al-Dīn Qayṣar has received meagre attention in scholarship on the shrine, which generally emphasizes the role of the Seljuk vizier Sulaymān Parvānā and his wife Gurjī Khāṭūn, who financially assisted the construction project. This paper deals with the identity of ‘ʿAlam al-Dīn Qayṣar to set his patronage in a context of late medieval Anatolia, when the region was politically fragmented and the process of Islamization gained impetus. By examining historical and hagiographical accounts, letters and poems, all composed in Persian during the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, the paper addresses ‘ʿAlam al-Dīn Qayṣar’s military career and his close links with the top of the Seljuk elite, specifically Gurjī Khāṭūn, daughter of the Georgian Queen Tʿamar; also, it inquires about comparison of ‘ʿAlam al-Dīn Qayṣar to the Roman/Byzantine Emperor and the ‘Muslim’ status attributed to him. In doing so, the paper opens a discussion on conversion and architectural patronage of converts in the Seljuk court, with particular focus on shrines. It is believed that this will help better understand the transformation of Anatolia from a predominantly Christian into Muslim land, with new saints and new centres of pilgrimage.

Zarifa Alikperova is a third year DPhil student in Oriental Studies at Oxford. Her research topic is on the shrine of Rūmī in Konya, 1270s-1570s. She holds a BA degree in History and an MA degree in History of Art and Architecture from Bosphorus University, Istanbul/Turkey.

A Cycle of Apostolic Suffering in a Chapel over the Southern Pastophorion of the Hagia Sophia in Ohrid: Problems of Style and Iconography
Ivan Alekseev (Russian State University of the Humanities)

In my report, I would like to tell about an almost unknown cycle of apostolic passions in the St. Sofia cathedral in Ohrid. Separate scenes of the martyr’s death of the apostles are often present in the monuments of Byzantine art, but the cycles of apostolic suffering are very rare for the Byzantine world. As such, rare examples can be cited: Balkham Derssi and Belli Kilise in Cappadocia (tenth century), the church of the monastery Mateich (1356-1360), the Menology of Basil II (Vat. Gr. 1613. P. 68), a liturgical scroll from the State Historical Museum (1063, SHE Sin Gr. 9, 57), and homilies by Gregory of Nazianzus (SHE, Sin Gr. 61).

These monuments help us interpret the scenes in the Ohrid Chapel. In addition to the iconographic problem, the question of the dating of the painting is important. Since the discovery of the painting in the chapel in the 1950s, it has been dated variably between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Currently, the cycle of analogies in the Ohrid region has expanded significantly. I conducted field studies of the monument in 2015 and 2017. These circumstances make it possible to take a fresh look at the dating of the cycle of apostolic suffering in Sofia Ohrid, clarify its iconographic composition, and put forward a hypothesis about the potential customer of the chapel.

Ivan Alekseev is a PhD student in Art History at the Russian State University of the Humanities. Having received his BA from the same institution, he studied ‘History of Art Culture and the Art Market’ at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Currently, he serves as a research fellow at the Moscow Kremlin Museums. He is also engaged in the ‘Russian Kirshbaum’ project at the National Research University Higher School of Economics.
This study intends to offer a reconceptualization of two anonymous Armenian geographical texts from the seventh century, known collectively as the Ašxarhac’oyc’. It will assess the way in which each work constructed Armenia’s geo-political space and what insights they offer into the contemporary world in which they were produced. This study approaches these works in an original way by emphasizing the valuable content which they contain. It marks a divergence from previous scholarship, which is both sparse and primarily concerned with the provenance of each work. Based on evidence, the Ašxarhac’oyc’ appear to construct an image of Armenia drawn from the second-century geographical treatise of Ptolemy. These distinct constructs are pronounced insertions into two otherwise accurate expressions of the late-seventh-century world. It suggests that both texts were working to convey an image of Armenia in a prescribed way. It is my opinion that the Ašxarhac’oyc’ are expressions of pro-Byzantine Armenian discourse, specifically in response to the expansion of the Islamic caliphate. Each text drew upon Eastern Roman intellectual production to create a geo-political construct which could be used as a vehicle to stress Armenian ties to Byzantium. In doing so, the Ašxarhac’oyc’ communicate the way in which parts of Armenia reacted to the spatial and political dislocation of the seventh century. As a result, the Ašxarhac’oyc’ offer an exceptionally valuable expression of Armenian-Byzantine affinity and cross-cultural engagement during the seventh century.

Lewis Read is currently undertaking a master’s degree in Middle Eastern History and Arabic at the University of St Andrews and has graduated from the same university in 2019 with a Master of the Arts degree in Medieval History. Lewis primarily engages with Armenian material from the 7th-10th centuries, with a view to understanding the social, cultural and political developments of this ever-changing and diverse geo-political space.

How to Groom a Client

Or, Mleh the Armenian between Constantinople and the Byzantine-Abbasid Frontier

Lucas McMahon (Princeton University)

In the first decade of the tenth century a new thema was established in the no-man’s land between Byzantine Kaisareia and Abbasid Melitene. Mleh, an Armenian nobleman of the second rank, fought for Byzantium in Thrace against the Bulgars before becoming a freebooter in the east, eventually establishing himself at Lykandos. Constantine VII reports that he secured legitimacy from Constantinople, first as a kleisourarch and then as a stratēgos. The question of the integration of Armenians in Byzantium has been a fraught topic, with extremes ranging from Charanis to Kaldellis, but this paper proposes to take a different approach.

What Mleh and his retinue thought about themselves after they established themselves in the Byzantine hierarchy by seizing the area around Lykandos cannot be recovered, but some of what they were doing there can be examined. A text attributed to Nikephoros II Phokas, De Velitatione Bellica, purports to describe warfare from an earlier period, and what it describes broadly matches what else is known about the Abbasid-Byzantine frontier in the early tenth century. Using a GIS analysis of routes based on least-cost paths juxtaposed with known roads around the thema of Lykandos and its hinterland, this paper examines how Mleh and his group fought in relation to De Velitatione Bellica, and thus one aspect of their integration or lack thereof into the Byzantine art of war.

Lucas McMahon is a PhD candidate in history at Princeton University. His dissertation examines the movement and control of information of state interest in Byzantium in order to think about how empire was experienced on the ground. He studies this through the examination of the logistics of movement, Byzantine conceptions of security, and GIS mapping.

Christian Empire or New Sodom?

‘Liminal’ Byzantium in the 7th and 8th Centuries Viewed through Armenian Eyes

Stephanie Forrest (University of Cambridge)

Over the course of the transformative seventh century, the former Persian sector of Armenia was frequently a key point of contention for Byzantium. In the years that followed the collapse of the Sassanid Empire, the region occupied an uncertain place between Byzantium and the Umayyad Caliphate; though key Armenian leaders surrendered to the future Caliph Mu’awiyah as early as 651, seventh-century Emperors such as Constans II (r. 641-668), and Justinian II (r. 685-695, 705-711) seem to have engaged closely with the region, maintaining networks of contacts and sometimes occupying it militarily. Though the precise details of these engagements have been largely lost to history, various letters, histories, and other discourses produced by Armenian leaders in this period have been preserved. Most of these have been little studied, both from a textual and a historical perspective. Used carefully, however, they provide a valuable insight into attitudes towards Byzantium as maintained by Armenian ecclesiastical elites at the time, often expressed in eschatological terms. These insights are valuable not only for the information they provide on Armenian identity, but also for what they imply about Byzantine engagement with the region over time and Armenian interpretations of political change.

Drawing upon some key sources—including the so-called Narratio de Rebus Armeniae, an anonymous ‘aphthartodocist’ tract of circa 700, and a letter by Step’anos Siwneci’ to the Patriarch Germanos (715-730), along with the better-known history of Sebeos—this paper will consider Armenian perceptions of the changing role of Byzantium throughout this time of change.

Stephanie Forrest is a second-year PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge. She completed a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Classics at the University of Melbourne in 2013 and an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford in 2018. Her current research explores the relationship between Byzantium and Christian populations located in the eastern frontier zones between circa 660 and 720.
Patriarchal Drag
Disempowerment and Changing Roles in George of Pisidia’s Bellum Avaricum
Daniil Pleshak (Saint Petersburg University)

In his Bellum Avaricum, George of Pisidia described the events of the 626 Avar siege of Constantinople. The siege posed a real threat to the city, which was aggravated by the absence of the emperor and the army in the city. Nevertheless, after several days, the Avars suddenly retreated and the unexpected withdrawal was perceived as a miracle.

The Bellum Avaricum contains numerous instances where the description of the main characters transgresses social and gender boundaries. Thus, George equals patriarch Sergius with the Mother of God in labours (lines 130-137), using highly gendered language. In turn, the Mother of God is presented as a surprisingly bellicose figure, while the Emperor Heraclius’ role is limited to prayers, despite his activities as a military commander. All three principal figures are shifted and take each other’s typical role.

Constantinople had seen numerous riots and violent overthrows at the beginning of the seventh century. Heraclius was far away from the city and his rule was a disaster. So maintaining the hierarchy and downplaying the common people’s role in the defence must have been very important for George. Cross-dressing Heraclius, Sergius and the Theotokos provided a way to show the audience of the poem the unexpected way how Heraclius and his close friend Sergius influenced the battle.

Daniil Pleshak is currently enrolled in a PhD programme at the State University of Saint Petersburg, where he is working on his project about the seventh-century Byzantine author, George of Pisidia. Previously, Daniil has acquired BA and MA degrees in Biblical studies at the same university.

Eastern Splendour: The Cult of Saint Marina between Constantinople and Venice
Krisztina Ilko (University of Cambridge)

This paper explores the liminality of the cult of saints through the fluctuation of eastern relics and reliquaries between Byzantium and Venice. While the lavish and spectacular Byzantine reliquary seized during the Fourth Crusade and enshrined in the treasury of San Marco have attracted ample attention in previous scholarship, my research offers new avenues through the little-known example of St Marina the Monk. Marina was a cross-dressing female monk who lived in a monastery of the Kadisha Valley of Lebanon in the fifth century. My paper investigates the acquisition of her corpse and various relics from Constantinople by the Venetians in the early thirteenth century. I will examine how and why the cult of Marina the Monk was merged with St Margaret of Antioch, and pay special attention to an exquisite gilded Byzantine reliquary now in the Museo Correr. My approach is based on extensive field work and archival research in Venice, combined with the analysis of a neglected corpus of visual and written sources from across the eastern Mediterranean. Through the close analysis of the various relics, reliquaries, hagiographies, and the fine Coptic textile in which Marina’s body was hallowed, my paper will explore the re-appropriation of Marina’s cult in different spatial and ritual contexts between Byzantium and Venice. Ultimately, my talk will shed new light on the liminality of Byzantine saint cults across east and west and offer a new lens through which to re-examine key paradigms about the transformation of saint cults in the Mediterranean.

Krisztina Ilko is concurrently a PhD candidate at Pembroke College, University of Cambridge, and a Research Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Krisztina specialises in the intersection of sacred art, hagiography, and transcultural exchange across Byzantium and western Christianity. Her PhD thesis entitled ‘The Artistic Patronage of the Augustinian Friars in Central Italy (1256–1370)’ offers the first comprehensive research of one of the largest institutional patrons of art and architecture in Italy. Through large-scale interdisciplinary research, this thesis contributes to a major re-evaluation of the Augustinians’ artistic legacy, and explores how the friars used art to promote their unique hermit-mendicant identity.

‘Time Had Not Harmed His Beauty’
The Patron and Moses in the Bible of Leo the Sakellarios
Lora Webb (Stanford University)

Byzantine eunuchs inhabited a state between. They were criticized by writers such as Basil of Caesarea as fickle, neither man nor woman, and defended by others like Theophylact of Ohrid as capable of possessing virtue despite their liminal gender. The patron depicted in the middle-Byzantine Bible of Leo the Sakellarios (Vatican, Reg. Gr. 1) lived sometime between the end of the ninth and middle of the tenth century. He was one of the many eunuchs who came to play a greater role in the courts of the Macedonian dynasty. This paper explores how Leo represented himself in this period when eunuchs, though still mistrusted, regularly filled high government posts.

I argue that Leo’s donor portrait stresses his own role as an intermediary by drawing on the iconography of Moses receiving the Law illustrated later in the manuscript. Informed by Kathryn Ringrose’s idea of eunuch service and the widely-read fourth-century Life of Moses by the theologian Gregory of Nyssa, I compare images of Moses and Leo to argue that they were similar in their youthful appearance and roles as servants. Moses, a figure who mediated between the Israelites and God, was an appropriate touchstone for eunuchs like Leo who served Christ’s representative on earth — the emperor. Because Moses was not castrated, he has not been considered previously as an available model for eunuchs. My reading of Leo’s portrait opens up new possibilities for how eunuchs’ liminality was understood in relation to figures beyond those who merely shared their anatomy.

Lora Webb is a PhD candidate in the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University. Currently, she is completing a two-year Kress Institutional Fellowship at the Bibliotheca Hertziana — Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte in Rome. She received her BA from Oklahoma State University and her MA from Tufts University.
Beyond the Frontier
Chair: James Cogbill (Worcester College)
Saturday, 2:30pm 
Rees Davies Room

- Christian Conversion Among Turkic Nomads
  Benjamin Sharkey (Magdalen College, Oxford)

The Church of the East, sometimes called Nestorian, is well known for its missionary activity east of the Tigris. However, its presence in Central Asia, and particularly among the Turkic nomads, has received little attention. Several scholars have worked to establish the extent of the Christian presence among the Turkic nomads, but, as yet, no study has looked at the nature of their Christianity. This paper will examine the extent and depth of Christian conversion among these Turkic nomads, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, through their liminal experience of Christian religion.

Christian conversion amongst Turkic nomads was not characterised by political considerations. This study will re-evaluate the nature of early-medieval conversion, contrasting their conversion, to a dhimmi church, with conversions possessing more conventional political dimensions, such as those of the Anglo-Saxons and the Volga Bulghars. Comparisons with other conversions among nomads of this region will add further context. Texts by Syriac Christians and Islamic authors will be used, alongside archaeological and epigraphic evidence, to reconstruct the nature of their belief. The background context of shamanism will also be examined to provide an appreciation for the nature of their transformation.

Comprehension and conformity differed among these nomads. Simply articulated doctrines could be comprehended, but the conformity of practices was harder to achieve. Nomads have often been overlooked by historians, and this study will look at how, within their liminal experience of Christian religion, their lifestyle shaped their beliefs and practices into a particularly Turkic expression of Christianity.

Benjamin Sharkey undertook his undergraduate degree at the University of Birmingham, completing a dissertation comparing Christian responses to Muslim rule in eighth to ninth century Cordoba and Baghdad. Benjamin is now undertaking a Masters degree in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford. His main research interests include the history of the Islamic world and Silk Road, particularly the Nestorian Church of the East, but also the religious, cultural and nomadic history of the region more generally.

- Armenians and Byzantine Ecclesiastics in 11th-century Iceland
  Ólafur Haukur Árnason (Corpus Christi College, Oxford)

Three Old Norse writings attest to the presence of three bishops in Iceland, who are described as ermskír, an adjective traditionally interpreted as ‘Armenian’. From a reference to their quarrels with Latin-rite bishops, it may be inferred that the foreign clerics were active in Iceland sometime between 1056 and 1072. The first modern scholars to discuss the bishops believed that they were Paulician heretics, but still found it unlikely that they had traversed the continent from Armenia to Iceland. Prof. Magnús M. Lárusson attempted to solve this problem by proposing that the bishops were Eastern (Slavonic) rite clerics from the region of Warmia in present day Poland.

Lárusson’s theory has become widely accepted, although the idea that the bishops were Armenians has gained ground in recent years. In the first part of this paper I present a new argument to show that the bishops were simply Armenian Christians. A re-examination of the evidence brings to light an important textual problem in the manuscript transmission, which went unnoticed (or neglected) by Lárusson in his analysis and is only reasonably explained with reference to a lost Latin original. In the second part, I discuss the potential political and religious allegiance of the bishops and argue for the view that they were Chalcedonian Christians of the Armenian rite who made their way to Norway and Iceland in relation to king Haraldr Sigurðsson’s close connections with the Byzantine Empire and his quarrels with the Latin Church.

Ólafur Haukur Árnason finished his B.A. in Latin and Medieval Studies from the University of Iceland in 2009 and a Masters degree (cand. mag.) in Classical Latin from the University of Copenhagen in 2016. From 2013 to 2014 he worked at the Arnamagnæan Manuscript Collection of the University of Copenhagen on a research project about the Old Norse ‘Legendary Sagas’ (Forナルdursögur Norðurlanda), and from 2014 to 2017 at the manuscript department of the Royal Danish Library. He has been working on a DPhil in Classics at the University of Oxford since 2017, focusing on fragments and testimonies of Varro’s last work De philosophia in St. Augustine’s writings.

- Barbarians and ‘Imperialisation’:
  A Comparison of Liminal Identity Across Eurasia in Late Antiquity
  Raymond Ngoh (Keble College, Oxford)

While comparative history of Rome and China has become a popular tool in raising new scholarly questions on the study of ancient worlds, most projects do not address the period of Late Antiquity. Yet both the Western and Eastern halves of the Eurasian continent shared remarkably abundant similarities with how the collapse of imperial-state structure unravelled. In the West, the collapse of the western half of the Roman empire resulted in the creation of numerous ‘barbarian’ successor kingdoms while one half of the empire survived in the east. In the East, the collapse of the western Jin dynasty eventually led to a situation in which the north of China came under the control of various ‘barbarian’ dynasties while the remnants of the former Sinic communities established dynasties in the south.

This paper suggests the usefulness of comparing liminal communities, namely the ‘barbarians’ who traditionally lived along the borders of the empires, and of how they constructed new political communities in the post-imperial period. Particularly, it will examine how these new communities approached the issue of imperialism, namely styling themselves as the legitimate imperial successor to the former imperial state. The decision of whether to become an empire, even if it is purely in name, should shed more light on how the historical trajectory between medieval Europe diverges from East Asia. Through a comparison of the fate of the two post-classical empires in Eastern and Western Eurasia, it can raise new questions and paradigms for how we study the late antique world.

Raymond Ngoh is a first year DPhil student at Keble College, University of Oxford. He has recently received an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies from Oxford. Prior to Oxford, he studied History as an undergraduate in Singapore, Nanyang Technological University. Currently, he is working on the late Roman East.
My paper engages with the Trebizond's cultural identity. Transit and trading post which had strengthened the city's cross-cultural relations with the Italian and secondly on its role as a trading hub. The main argument concerns Trebizond's role as a cultural identity between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries based firstly on its geographical location exchanges too. The purpose of this talk is to present the formation of the empire of Trebizond's a liminal space from which not only traders and travellers would transit, but ideas and cultural with the rest of the world. This helped in shaping the city to become an important political, cultural and commercial centre.

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**Isabella Heinemann is a first-year MPhil student in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at Oxford University.**

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**Cosmopolitan Trebizond: The City of Cross-cultural Entanglements**

Sima Meziridou (University of Cyprus)

The port-city of Trebizond was an important trading and transit centre in the Black Sea interregional trade and the international Silk Road trading network in the period of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. The strategic location of Trebizond in Anatolia and in the south coast of the Black Sea designated it as an urban centre that contributed to the development of the Black Sea trade and linked the city more closely to the western and eastern cultures. While the city was enclosed by the Pontic Alps in the south, in the north the sea connected the port of Trebizond with the rest of the world. This helped in shaping the city to become an important political, cultural and commercial centre. In this talk, I will argue that Trebizond, thanks to its commercial activity, can be considered as a liminal space from which not only traders and travellers would transit, but ideas and cultural exchanges too. The purpose of this talk is to present the formation of the empire of Trebizond's identity between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries based firstly on its geographical location and secondly on its role as a trading hub. The main argument concerns Trebizond's role as a transit and trading post which had strengthened the city's cross-cultural relations with the Italian trading cities and the Turkish emirates, from which it had adopted some elements we trace in Trebizond's cultural identity.

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**Lorenzo Saccon is a first-year DPhil student in History at the University of Oxford. He has obtained a BA in History and Philosophy from Royal Holloway, University of London, and an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies from the University of Oxford. His research focuses on slavery in the late Byzantine empire.**
John of Ephesus’ portrayal of the Roman justice system is a key feature of his Ecclesiastical History, and acutely highlights the border position of Roman Miaphysites. John neither struggles to identify his Orthodoxy with groups of Romans, nor is he unwilling to situate the Syriac community within the Roman framework of government. Yet, beyond the fluid and intangible matter of Miaphysite identity, John provides evidence of moments of arbitration at the limen, where the imperial ὕπαρχος comes face to face with the holy man, the Chalcedonian with the Miaphysite, the Greek with Syrian, and all this in a legal space which was itself on the border of the Secular and the Christian. This paper will interrogate John’s presentation of an unchristian legal system by considering a selection of the cases he presents in comparison with other contemporary trials, particularly those mentioned by the legal scholar Evagrius Scholasticus, and with attention to Justianian’s Novellae.

William Bunce is studying for an MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at Wadham College. As an undergraduate, he studied Classics and Oriental Studies (Syriac and Aramaic) at Brasenose College. In the summer of 2019, he worked on the ‘Simtho project’, an upcoming online Syriac corpus and thesaurus.

Claudian and Christianisation: Fighting Religious Transformation at the Late Antique Court

Ben Kybett (University of Cambridge)

The end of the fourth century was a time of political and religious upheaval for the Roman Empire. Theodosius I, having unified the Mediterranean under the rule of one person for the final time, promptly died, leaving the empire to his sons, Honorius and Arcadius. At the same time, the process of Christianisation was gathering pace and, indeed, many scholars see the 390s as a crucial moment of transition.

I will look at this period through the works of the poet and orator Claudian. Claudian was a central figure at the court of Honorius, and his regent Stilicho, in Milan and Rome, delivering a number of panegyrics between 395 and 404. These took the form of classicising poems rich in mythological allusion, apparently without paying any heed to Christianity. Claudian was a pagan, but most scholars have regarded this mythological content as without any contemporary religious resonances. I will argue, however, that Claudian’s poems are an assertion of the right of paganism to exist in the political sphere, against those Christians, such as his rival poet Prudentius, who wished to transform the Roman Empire into a religiously monolithic society. I will show how Claudian does not shy away from controversies such as the altar of Victory debate and the battle of the Frigidus, but that his stance was tolerated by the Christian regime. My paper will contribute to our understanding of the end of the fourth century as a liminal moment at which the pagan past and Christian future collided.

Ben Kybett is in the third year of his PhD in Classics at the University of Cambridge. His thesis is entitled ‘Religion and Rhetoric at the Courts of the Theodosians, c.381-404’ and is supervised by Christopher Kelly. He received his BA in Ancient and Modern History from the University of Oxford in 2015, followed by an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies in 2017, supervised by Conrad Leyser and Phil Booth.