Self-Representation in Late Antiquity & Byzantium
Self-Representation in Late Antiquity and Byzantium

Self-representation is a process by which historical actors – individuals, communities and institutions – fashioned and presented a complex image of themselves through various media. Referring to Byzantine portraits, Spatharakis claimed that this “form of representation cannot be divorced from its purpose and the requirements of the society in which the given visual language gains currency”. Equally, self-representation provides an original way to interpret the past, because this artificial and reflected image cannot be divorced from the cultural, social, economic, religious and political context of its time. As a methodological tool, it has received increasing attention in the field of Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, following the interest it has created in neighbouring fields such as Western Medieval or Early Modern studies.

The present conference aims to explore the cultural outputs of the Late Antique and Byzantine world – e.g. architecture, material culture, literary works – which conventionally or unconventionally can be understood as acts of self-representation. The Late Antique and Byzantine world was filled with voices and images trying to present and represent an idea of self. Some of the most famous examples of this are the lavish mosaics sponsored by imperial and aristocratic patrons, whose splendour still dazzles their observers and gives an idea of the kind of self-fashioning that they embody. Urban elites, such as churchmen, bureaucrats and intellectuals, constructed idealised personae through their literary works and the careful compilation of letter collections, while those of the provinces displayed their power through images on seals and inscriptions. In monastic typika, the founders presented themselves as pious benefactors, while donor epigraphy in rural churches secured the local influence of wealthier peasants. However, self-representation is not only a matter of introspection but also of dialogue with the “other”: such is the case of spolia, used to reincorporate a supposed classical past in one’s self-portrayal, or to create an image of continuity by conquerors. It is the conscious use of Byzantine motifs in Islamic architecture, the fiction of Digenes Akritas, or the religious polemics of late Byzantium, pitting Muslim, Jews and Christians against one other. Through depicting what they were not, historical actors were (consciously or unconsciously) shaping their own identity.

This conference seeks to join the ongoing dialogue on self-representation in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies by providing a forum for postgraduate and early-career scholars to reflect on this theme in a variety of cultural media. In doing so, we hope to facilitate the interaction and engagement of historians, philologists, archaeologists, art historians, theologians and specialists in material culture.

This conference was conceived and organised by the OUBS Committee:

Lorenzo Saccon (President)
Alberto Ravani (Secretary)
James Cogbill (Treasurer)

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Bamberger Gunthertuch (Byzantine silk tapestry)
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Graphic Design: Katerina Vavaliou for the OUBS
Welcome

The Committee of the Oxford University Byzantine Society wishes you all a very warm welcome to our 23rd International Graduate Conference, *Self-Representation in Late Antiquity and Byzantium.*

We hope the next three 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 would like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues, who helped with the organisation of the Conference:

Arie Neuhauser  Josh Hitt  Raymond Ngoh
Benjamin Sharkey  Julian Wood  Savannah Tudlong
Callan Meynell  Kaiyue Zhang  Thomas Laver
Dan Gallaher  Katerina Vavaliou  Tom Alexander
Frederick Bird  Kelly McClinton  William Bunce
Giulia Paoletti  Paul Ulishney  William Neubauer

We are grateful for the support of

- Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research
- Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity
- Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies
- Arts and Humanities Research Council
- Oxford Medieval Studies
- The Oxford Research Centre for Humanities
- History Faculty, University of Oxford

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

Best wishes from the OUBS Committee,

Lorenzo Saccon (President)
Alberto Ravani (Secretary)
James Cogbill (Treasurer)
1. Self-Representation in Early and Middle Byzantine Religious Writings

10:00-11:40
Chair | Callan Meynell

Paul Ulishney (Christ Church, Oxford)
References to Islam in Anastasius of Sinai’s ‘Hexameron’

Blake Lorenz (KU Leuven)
Psalm 78 and the Self in Pseudo-Methodius

Arie Neuhauser (St Cross College, Oxford)
Negotiating Legitimacy Between a Rebel and Lazaros of Mount Galesion

Cristina Cocola (Ghent University-KU Leuven)
A Repentant Sinner: Representing the Self in Nikephoros Ouranos’ Katanyktic Alphabet

2. Representing Power and Legitimacy from Late Antiquity to Middle Byzantium

12:00-13:40
Chair | Raymond Ngoh

Matt Hassall (University of Cambridge)
Devolved Networks of Self-Representation and Propaganda during the Reign of Justinian I

Silvio Roggo (University of Cambridge)
The Self-Portrayal of Eutychios of Constantinople as Legitimate Patriarch, 577-582

Zhang Kaiyue (St Stephen’s House, Oxford)
The Lawgivers and the Idol-Breakers: Self-Representation of the Isaurian Emperors as Old Testament Kings

Tom Alexander (St John’s College, Oxford)
A Prince of Armenia between Byzantium and the Caliphate: T’ēodoros Ṛṣhtuni as Depicted in Seventh- and Eighth-Century Armenian Historiography

3. Ut Pictura Poesis: Representing Art, Literature and Self

15:00-16:40
Chair | Kelly McClinton

Julian Wood (University College, Oxford)
‘For This Does not Define Peter Only, but Also Paul and John’: Theodore of Stoudios on Representing the Unique Self

Ana C. Núñez (Stanford University)
Lost Mosaics and Religious Chant: Fashioning Royal Power in the Kingdom of Jerusalem

Joshua Hitt (St Hilda’s College, Oxford)
‘I Scrape off the Old Age of the Painting’s Colours’: The Rhetoric of Restoration in Twelfth-Century Byzantium

Dorota Zaprzalska (The Jagiellonian University)
Composite Icons as a Means of Presenting and Interpreting the Past

17:00 Keynote

Professor Cecily Hilsdale (McGill University)
Genres of Imperial Self-Representation in Later Byzantium
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<td>Let’s Talk About Me: Dialogue and Self-Representation in Emperor Julian’s Writings</td>
<td>Elia Otranto</td>
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<td>Frederick Bird</td>
<td>Regent’s Park College, Oxford</td>
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<td>Negotiating Identity within and outside Late Byzantium</td>
<td>Christina Nicole Conti</td>
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<td>Heir to An Ancient Empire and the Illusion of Power: The Examination of Imperial Propaganda Under Alexios III of Trebizond in the Greek 'Alexander Romance' Codex gr. 5</td>
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<td>Francesca Samorì</td>
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<td>Bella Radenović</td>
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<td>Buildings, Images and Patrons</td>
<td>Kelly E. McClinton</td>
<td>Merton College, Oxford</td>
<td>Elite Identity and Self-Representation in Domestic Spaces in Rome: Redecoration in Late Antique Houses</td>
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<td>Veronika Poláková</td>
<td>National Autonomous University of Mexico</td>
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<td>Maria Elisavet Samoili</td>
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<td>Alevtina Tanu</td>
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7 Society and its Representation in Middle and Late Byzantium
9:30-11:10 Chair | Joshua Hitt

Emma Huig (Christ Church, Oxford) *Dynamics of the Identification of Female Characters in the Slavic and Greek 'Digenis Akritis'*

Zuzana Mitrengová (Masaryk University) *Self-Representation of the Female Protagonist in Late Byzantine Romances*

Michael Kiefer (University of Heidelberg) *What to Wear in Byzantium? On the Portrait Habitus of Middle and Late Byzantine Elites*

Anna Adashinskaya (New Europe College) *Pious Offerings to Meteora Monasteries (1348-1420s): Between Political Representation, Family Belonging, and Personal Agency*

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8 Beyond the Border and across the Sea: Constructing Identities around Byzantium
12:00-13:40 Chair | Benjamin Sharkey

William Neubauer (Balliol College, Oxford) *The 'Fourteenth Sibylline Oracle': Eschatology and Identity among the Jews of Seventh-Century Alexandria*

Valentina A. Grasso (University of Cambridge) *Kingship, Self-Representation and Cross-Cultural Assimilation: A Reading of Late Antique pre-Islamic Arabian Epigraphic Testimonies*

Fermude Gülsevinç (Bilkent University) *'We Are Pilgrims in an Unholy Land': Christianizing the Seascape of Naxos and Chios in the Late Antiquity (Fourth to Sixth Centuries)*

Prolet Decheva (University College, Dublin) *An Abstract Way of Self-Representation: Personified Virtues in Late Antique Mosaics and Beyond*

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9 Self-Representation in the Socio-Economic Sphere
14:30-16:10 Chair | Thomas Laver

William Bunce (Wadham College, Oxford) *Roman Law as Roman Self-Representation: A Case Study in Holiday Law*

Gemma Storti (The Ohio State University) *Mismatched Eyes, Penny-Pinchers, and Eaters: Byzantine Nicknames and Self-Representation*

Carlo Berardi (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) *A Lion, not an Angel: Heraldic Devices and Dynastic Identity in the Frescoes of Saint Pantaleimon, Nerezi*

Yunus Doğan (Bilkent University) *'S(igillum) Felicis (Fran)Corum Exercitus in Rom(a)nie F(..) Bus(?) Comorantis': Seal of the Catalan Company*

17:15 Keynote
Professor Stratis Papaioannou (University of Crete) *The Literature of the Self in Byzantium*
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<td>Ut Pictura Poesis: Representing Art, Literature and Self</td>
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Friday 26 Feb 2021
Sessions 1-3
Anastasius of Sinai (fl. 670s to 700s) stands out as a unique witness to the development of Byzantine Christianity under the earliest phases of Arab rule in Egypt and Palestine. He belonged to the first generation of Christians to live under the Caliphate, and his main works were either composed or edited during the last two decades of the seventh century. As such, they occur during two crucial transitions during this period: the decline of the Chalcedonian Church in Egypt, and Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik’s Islamicising reformations of the Umayyad Caliphate in the aftermath of the Second Fitna (c. 692). Within this context, Anastasius composed one of the longest extant treatises on the Hexaemeron, the six-day creation story of Genesis. It contains, however, many cultural and polemical references that reflect the social realities Anastasius and his community experienced under a new regime. Many questions surrounding the text remain, such as: why, in the midst of a burgeoning Chalcedonian schism in the late seventh century, did Anastasius dedicate an enormous amount of energy writing a work on cosmogony and cosmology? The answer to this question lies in the conference’s theme of self-representation. This paper will argue that the Hexaemeron utilized polemics against Muslims and Jews in order to shore up the identity of the fragmenting Egyptian Chalcedonian community in direct opposition to the increasingly Islamicised Umayyad Caliphate and the patronage of the rival Miaphysite church under the new Muslim governor of Egypt, ‘Abd al-Aziz.
Psalm 78 and the Self in Pseudo-Methodius

Blake Lorenz (KU Leuven)

Though often difficult to understand and define as a genre, Byzantine apocalyptic literature has increasingly been made popular through recent studies in the field by individuals such as Christopher Bonura, Andras Kraft, and Stephen Shoemaker. Following the tradition of the late Paul Alexander, their primary concern has often been focused on the dating of events and texts by deciphering cryptic passages within the literature. Little is usually said about the author of these texts due to their anonymity. However, like the esoteric references that occasionally reveal context about an event or date, these enigmatic excerpts can provide additional information about the author. One of the more famous apocalyptic stories attributed to St Methodius, though the true author remains unknown, centres upon the climatic struggle between the Muslim and Byzantine forces during the seventh century. At the height of the fight, the author unveils the champion of the Byzantine armies who will eventually drive back the children of Hagar and restore order. To set the stage for this narrative, the author relies upon Psalm 78, which bears the title of an instructional psalm, created to reprimand and instruct the children of Israel in times of oppression. As the Byzantines increasingly understood themselves as the new Israelites, God’s chosen people, the allusion to this passage reveals undertones about how the Byzantines presented themselves and their oppressors and even differentiated among each other, as holy and unholy. It is my object to examine this biblical passage within the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius in order to provide a more complete understanding of how the author wanted to be represented, as perhaps prophet or sage, and how the calamities which befall the Byzantine Empire in this period were interpreted by clerics.

Blake Lorenz is currently pursuing a PhD in Classical Studies at KU Leuven, focusing on apocalyptic figures in the Byzantine and Islamic world. He previously completed an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford. His primary research interests are in religious history, specifically eschatology and apocalyptic texts and imagery in Late Antiquity.
Negotiating Legitimacy Between a Rebel and Lazaros of Mount Galesion

Arie Neuhauser (St Cross College, Oxford)

This paper will analyse an episode in the *vita* of Lazaros of Mount Galesion. Through this analysis, I will explore the negotiation of legitimacy between a holy man and a political figure who attempted to present himself as divinely ordained to be emperor. I will also explore how this attempt at self-presentation is rejected by Lazaros, and how this rejection serves the characterisation of the saint in his *vita*. A stylite saint of the eleventh century, Lazaros maintained an extensive political network from his pillar. Prominent figures contributed to his monasteries on Mount Galesion and consulted with him in times of need. Constantine Barys, a prospective rebel, attempted to receive a favourable prophecy from the saint in return for a bag of gold and silk cloth. Lazaros rejected the gifts and refused to give an indication of the future. The episode ends with Barys failing in his rebellion and losing his tongue. It is well known that emperors and rebels sought prophetic affirmations of their right to power. In this context, it was natural that Barys appealed to Lazaros. The words of a holy man would be viewed as evidence for divine will and were thus a powerful instrument for legitimising imperial power. However, this process of affirmation has been studied mostly from the viewpoint of the secular political figures. As my paper will show, Lazaros’ *vita* offers important perspective on how holy men negotiated with attempts at self-presentation as legitimate emperors.

*Arie Neuhauser is a MPhil student in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford. His focus is on Byzantine political and social history during the tenth and eleventh centuries with special emphasis on Byzantine provincials and their interaction with the government in Constantinople. He is also interested in the literature of those centuries and its reflection of and participation in Byzantine political culture.*
A Repentant Sinner
Representing the Self in Nikephoros Ouranos’ Katanyktic Alphabet

Cristina Cocola (Ghent University – KU Leuven)

For Byzantines, penitential poetry was a rich source of models of self-representation. In this paper I will analyse the poetical strategies and literary motifs through which Nikephoros Ouranos (tenth-eleventh centuries) shaped the ‘Self’ in his katanyktic alphabet. Katanyxis, ‘compunction’, was a vital emotion in Byzantium. It generated a vast literary production, most of which in verse, and it was one of the rare genres in Byzantine literature which consistently employed the first person. Also, it provided a literary framework for the expression of emotions: it aimed to arouse repentance, displayed by tears, and instilled fear of the Final Judgement in Christian believers. Its main purpose was to shape the image of the Christian ‘Self’ in Byzantium as that of a repentant sinner. To achieve this, katanyktic poets employed several literary strategies. In this paper, I will explore those used by Ouranos. First, I will investigate Ouranos’ way of expressing the so-called ‘collective I’. In this regard, I will highlight the strong influence of the Psalter. Secondly, I will focus on the intertextual strategies employed by Ouranos to model his self-representation, such as his identification with scriptural sinners (Judas, the Good Thief, the Sinful Woman, the Prodigal Son) and the presence of biblical metaphors (the ‘I’ as a beast and as mud). To conclude, I will discuss to what extent Ouranos’ poem can be considered ‘personal’ and in what relationship it is placed with the other texts belonging to the genre of katanyktic poetry.

Cristina Cocola is a PhD candidate in Byzantine Literature at the University of Ghent and KU Leuven. In her doctoral thesis, she aims to study the influence of the Psalms and Biblical Poetry on the Byzantine penitential poems called κατανυκτικά, most of which are still unedited, and require in-depth investigations. In particular, she wants to demonstrate in which way, and with which intensity, Byzantine katanyktic poetry drew from the Psalter, also by outlining the peculiar elements related to self-expression and compunction that the κατανυκτικά share with the Psalms.
Devolved Networks of Self-Representation and Propaganda during the Reign of Justinian I

Matt Hassall (University of Cambridge)

This paper presents new models of the Late Antique propaganda state and the relationship between self-representation and literary production during the reign of Justinian I. It raises the still-relevant question of why those outside the formal infrastructure of the state willingly participate in reproducing its propaganda. I am building on recent work into the source material of Procopius, Agathias and Malalas, who all used self-representative bureaucratic documents like diplomatic reports and battle citations. Hence, generals who played up their successes in their reports for Justinian had their positive self-representation incorporated into published literary works. I am arguing that this devolved reproduction of self-representative texts, whose composers were aware of the potential for public literary dissemination, was a large-scale, politically contested process in which numerous actors, including the Justinianic state, consciously participated. The ‘propaganda resources’ of the Justinianic state, like architecture, epigraphy, and the Novels, were limited in terms of their responsiveness, cost, and accessibility. In addition to this direct propaganda, Justinian relied on non-state actors like Romanos Melodos to dramatise and disseminate his propaganda in more widely accessible ways. In doing so, these ‘independent propagandists’ also encountered opportunities for recontextualising the material they disseminated. The model that results is of devolved propaganda networks whose participants were relatively autonomous and reproduced or repackaged the self-representation of others in ways that served their own political and cultural agendas. This model helps us to rethink the rules of effective self-representation in Late Antiquity and the discursive relationship between the state and its subjects.

Matt Hassall is a third-year PhD student at the University of Cambridge. He has a BA in History from Cambridge and an MA in Classical Languages from the University of Chicago. He is writing a thesis on political debate in the sixth-century Byzantine empire, with particular focus on intertextuality and propaganda networks.
The legitimacy of Eutychios of Constantinople remained contested throughout his patriarchate. Having been patriarch from 552 to 565, he was deposed and sent into exile until 577. Yet Eutychios never acknowledged his successor John Scholastikos as patriarch and perceived him merely as a usurper. After John’s death, Eutychios was called back and again made patriarch until his own demise in 582. Immediately after his return to Constantinople, Eutychios embarked on a campaign against the memory of John Scholastikos and demanded that all his pictures be destroyed, and his name removed from the diptychs. According to the Ecclesiastical History of John of Ephesos, this caused severe tensions in Constantinople and even resulted in conflicts between Eutychios and the emperor Tiberios. My paper explores the strategies used by Eutychios to denigrate the memory of his predecessor and to re-establish himself as the legitimate patriarch. It has not yet been noted in scholarship that Eutychios did more than just demand the removal of the name and the pictures of John Scholastikos: he even took issue with a number of hymns that had been introduced in the time of his exile, and he tried in vain to abolish these. In the end, Eutychios’ attempts to present himself as the patriarch who had restored order after the chaotic and lawless years under John Scholastikos failed, and despite the claims of the eulogistic Life of Eutychios written shortly after his death, he never was the universally accepted leader of the Constantinopolitan church.
Facing military defeats on all sides and the breaking down of familiar socio-political fabrics, what remains of the Eastern Empire was embattled amid spiritual crisis during the turn from the seventh century to the eighth century. The Byzantines saw their natural counterparts in the Israelites and the large-scale crumbling of their political order as the repetition of Old Testament history as punishments for their sins. It was upon this eschatological sentiment that the Isaurian emperors turned to the experience of the Old Testament kings to seek means of absolution, for their example provided the sole divinely attested paradigms for mimesis and propitiation. Through official legislation, imperial letters (though interpolated) and other efforts, they embarked on a project that depicted themselves following the steps of Moses, the lawgiver, and Hezekiah, the idol-breaker. As Moses, they re instituted the laws of God on the Israelites, and their supporters among the clergy praised them for upholding the ‘eternal’ laws of Moses when cited for refutation in the Council of Nicaea of 787. This paper will study the importance of the Old Testament in the first Iconoclastic period and the imperial self-representation as the Old Testament Kings through close reading of the Ecloga, the Nomos Georgikos, the Nomos Mosaikos, the letter of Pseudo-Gregory and other iconophile treatises, and I will argue that this self-representational scheme is in concert with the reforms on religious and legislative levels as a grander blueprint of ideological re-organisation to avert annihilation under a typological perception of contemporary history.

Zhang Kaiyue is currently pursuing an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies in the University of Oxford. His interests lie primarily in Byzantine history from the sixth century to the end of Iconoclasm. As an undergraduate at Nanjing University, he worked on Middle English literature and Byzantine-papal relations.
A Prince of Armenia between Byzantium and the Caliphate
Tʻēodoros Ṙshtuni as Depicted in Seventh- and Eighth-Century Armenian Historiography

Tom Alexander (St John’s College, Oxford)

Tʻēodoros Ṙshtuni, presiding prince of Armenia during the first Muslim incursions into the Caucasus region, is referred to in the seventh-century History attributed to Sebēos (Pseudo-Sebēos) both as ‘pious and valiant prince’ and as having ‘contracted an alliance with hell’. The former has been seen as reflecting laudatory biographical material that is included by Pseudo-Sebēos and the latter as a rare editorial intervention denouncing his submission to Muʿāwiya (Greenwood 2002; Howard-Johnston 2010). This paper seeks to explore these contradictory portrayals through examination of material relating to Tʻēodoros in the eighth-century History of Löwond, as well as through comparison with biographical material regarding other naxarars in Pseudo-Sebēos and elsewhere in Armenian historiography. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that both Löwond and Pseudo-Sebēos use laudatory biographical material connected with prominent naxarars to flesh out chronological frameworks taken from other sources. Therefore, Tʻēodoros becomes not only a useful case study for assessing Pseudo-Sebēos’ editorial schema, but a window into how this biographical material portrays its subjects. The vast majority of surviving medieval Armenian historical texts are explicitly connected to individual princely families. Moreover, the biographical material connected to Tʻēodoros shows how a naxarar decisively involved in the capitulation of Armenia to Muʿāwiya was represented by such texts. Such representations contradict the apocalyptic tones of Pseudo-Sebēos and Löwond and can contribute towards recent reassessments of the period of early Muslim rule as characterised by continuity and regional autonomy rather than destruction (Garsoian 2012; Vacca 2017).

Tom Alexander is an MPhil student in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at St John’s College, Oxford, where he previously completed his undergraduate degree. His interests include imperial representation in Middle Byzantine historiography and more broadly Syriac and Coptic texts from the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods.
Abbot Theodore of Stoudios (d. 829) wrote amid crisis. In 815, the arguments of the Council of Nicaea of 787 had been demolished and iconoclasm was re-instituted by the emperor Leo V. Exiled to Bithynia, Theodore, unlike fellow iconophiles, understood that the only way to meet challenges to icon veneration was to defend it in entirely new terms. In particular, he appreciated the importance of the respective hypostases of Christ and his saints, hitherto neglected by the iconophiles, honing in on the physical individuality of each to justify the presence of unique, immanent selfhoods that could be depicted and venerated. This paper explores the ways in which Theodore understood and utilised the notion of individual ‘selves’ within holy iconic representations. Close textual analysis of Theodore’s three Antirrhetici, the sermons countering iconoclast arguments, shall be combined with appreciation of the wider intellectual context that includes material from the Council of 787, from Maximus the Confessor and from earlier Church Fathers. This shall hope to suggest a hitherto-unappreciated aspect of Theodore’s place as a significant conceptual innovator: following the established practice of deriving theory from older precedent, but bypassing the Nicaea Council and its ideas in order to celebrate veneration of the individual ‘person’ of different holy figures. Finally, this analysis shall take into account recent scholarly strides in evaluating Byzantine notions of ‘lifelikeness’ in their artworks, especially those by Henry Maguire. This shall investigate how Theodore’s ideas may have related to worshipper praxis, and therefore served as a reflection of, rather than a break with, earlier Byzantine ‘iconophilia’.
Lost Mosaics and Religious Chant
Fashioning Royal Power in the Kingdom of Jerusalem

Ana C. Núñez (Stanford University)

In this paper, I argue that a visual and sonic appreciation of the now lost Tree of Abraham inside the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, reveals the mosaic image’s function as a declaration of Frankish power in the twelfth-century Kingdom of Jerusalem. More specifically, I trace the liturgical context behind this image, beginning in early eleventh-century Chartres where Bishop Fulbert (1006—1028) wrote his popular liturgical chant *Stirps Iesse*, which not only shaped monumental visual corollaries in twelfth-century Chartres (the more familiar visual motif, the Tree of Jesse), but also influenced the wider liturgy of Europe. Fulbert’s liturgical legacy would then arrive across the Mediterranean in the Latin East as European clerics, such as Fulcher of Chartres, established the Western church in the region after the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. It is the liturgy of the Latin East, infused with the thought of Bishop Fulbert, which informs the Tree of Abraham inside the Church of the Nativity. Relying on pilgrim accounts to re-capture the mosaic’s visual details, as well as liturgical texts from the Kingdom of Jerusalem to illuminate the image’s unique meaning, I argue that the Tree of Abraham echoed crusader emphasis on the figure of Abraham as the paradigmatic pilgrim, lineage as the guarantor of royal power, and the inauguration of Christian eschatology after 1099. At a time of both personal conflicts and numerous failed ventures into Egypt, the Tree of Abraham bespeaks King Amalric of Jerusalem’s (r. 1163—1174) aspirational claim to firm power vis-à-vis Byzantium and the Islamicate world, through the medium of triumphant, glittering gold.

Ana C. Núñez is a PhD candidate at Stanford University, having previously studied at Pomona College and the University of Cambridge. Her current interests lie in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin East, and she is increasingly drawn toward methodologies that operate at the intersection of history, art history, and liturgical studies.
The act of restoration functioned at many points in the Byzantine millennium as an effective mechanism by which a patron could represent him or herself publicly. In the twelfth century, the restoration of an icon was considered sufficiently important that the occasion was sometimes commemorated with a verse epigram. Around a dozen of these epigrams have come down to us in the manuscript record, preserving the name of the patron as well as the act of restoration itself. This paper analyses the language of restoration employed by this body of verse epigrams from the twelfth century. The motifs employed in these texts are best understood through comparison with wider contemporary literature. For instance, the encomia and ‘begging’ poems of Manganeios Prodromos together with the chronicles of Constantine Manasses and Niketas Choniates are shown to make use of similar literary *topoi* when representing decline and restoration. It is argued that in much of this material there is a tendency to express these concepts in terms of human ageing and rejuvenation. By positioning themselves clearly within this dichotomy, the icons’ restorers were able not only to insert themselves into the history of the icon but also to represent themselves as givers of new life.

Josh Hitt is in the second year of a DPhil in History at St Hilda’s College, Oxford. He graduated in 2016 with a degree in History and Ancient History from Exeter University, and from Oxford with an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies in 2019. His doctoral research is focused on the cultural significance of old age in twelfth-century Byzantium.
Composite Icons as a Means of Presenting and Interpreting the Past

Dorota Zaprzalska (The Jagiellonian University)

This study focuses on a rare category of paintings called ‘composite icons’, in which one icon is inserted into another. This fascinating phenomenon is interpreted mostly as a conservation method employed to keep the smaller image in good condition by adding a larger panel. However, it creates at the same time a hierarchy of a more holy and significant space within a single piece of art, and the two panels are separated not only visually, but also conceptually. Some Byzantine composite icons are still in the possession of monasteries, where the inlaid icons are associated with significant events or the monastic foundation and are treated as ‘relics of the past’, emphasising the continuity of the monastery’s tradition. It seems that the main motivation behind reusing older panels in the case of composite icons was not so much protection as drawing attention to the smaller image and creating a sense of the importance of the object inside, despite its smaller size. The shaping of a unique monastic identity may be the key to answering the question of the purpose of creating composite icons. The study can provide a better understanding of the use of images in the creation of identity by certain groups and bring us closer to understanding the status of icons in Byzantine culture and their roles in various social contexts, as well as in the present day.

Dorota Zaprzalska is a student at The Jagiellonian University’s Doctoral School for the Humanities based in Kraków. She obtained her BA and MA in Art History from The Jagiellonian University and during her studies spent one semester at the School of History and Archaeology of the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki and two semesters at the School of History and Archaeology of the National and Kapodistrian University in Athens. Her academic interest is directed toward the reuse of icons.
Saturday
27 FEB 2021
Sessions 4–6

Session 4 11:00-12:40
Chair
Arie Neuhauser
Self-Representation in Late Antique Literature

Session 5 14:00-15:40
Chair
Lorenzo Saccon
Negotiating Identity within and outside Late Byzantium

Session 6 17:00-18:40
Chair
Katerina Vavaliou
Buildings, Images and Patrons
Self-Representation and Fictional Portraits of a Key Figure in Late Antiquity Sidonius Apollinaris

Filomena Giannotti (University of Siena)

Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 430—486) is a key figure in Late Antique Gaul. He witnessed the fall of the Western Roman Empire and died as a subject of the succeeding barbarian kingdom. Besides having all the traditional markers of the Roman élite (an aristocratic birth, a classical education, and a good marriage to the daughter of the emperor Avitus), he also experienced the main turbulences of his age: he became bishop of Clermont-Ferrand during the collapse of the Empire and was imprisoned because of his military and cultural resistance against the Visigoths. This paper will analyse how Sidonius fashioned and presented this complex image of himself through his literary works and especially his epistolographic collection. Secondly, it will chart how a significant number of authors have recently rewritten Sidonius’ story from different perspectives influenced by the modern-day reception of the representation of historical actors: with a hagiographic approach or a genuine love of the common country (Auvergne), in two fictional experiments with narratological innovations, as the component of a fictional character, as the author’s alter ego and within a monumental fresco of fifth-century life. Sidonius’ difficult and eventful life made him a popular figure in historical and narrative fictions insofar as it was influenced by the historical Western conceptions of Late Antiquity as a critical but fascinating period. He has sometimes been perceived even as a contemporary of ours: fictions shatter temporal barriers and stretch out into a continuum that brings ancient and modern times close together.

Filomena Giannotti completed an MA degree in Classics and a PhD in Reception Studies and Classical Tradition and was awarded the ‘National Scientific Qualification’ as an Associate Professor of Latin Language and Literature. Currently, she is a Research Fellow of Latin Language and Literature and a Teaching Fellow of Latin Language at the University of Siena.
How could a pagan praise a Christian emperor? Was it possible to present one’s own religious identity within the highly formal context of Late Antique court ceremonial? And why is the corpus of fourth-century panegyric predominately classical rather than Christian in style, often delivered by pagan orators? Recent theories of epideictic rhetoric, of which imperial panegyric is an important example, emphasise its role as a unifying force, part of the ritual expression of a social and political community, emphasising consensus and commonly held values, as Pernot writes, it ‘instantiates a moment of communion’. The skilled orator avoids potentially controversial material. The question remains however, how such a community could be brought together in a religiously divided society such as that of the fourth-century Roman Empire? The modern solution in similarly ‘epideictic’ contexts is to avoid questions of religion, but this is certainly not the approach taken by panegyrists of the fourth century, whose orations are filled with references to pagan religion. I take the example of the fourth-century philosopher and orator Themistius to demonstrate how the use of religious ambiguity and ambivalence could allow an orator to represent their religious identity in their panegyric, while still fulfilling their fundamental epideictic purpose to unite. I show how Themistius leaves open the opportunity for a religious interpretation to his words, the opportunity for the pagan members of his audience to ‘activate’ their religious identities, while still delivering panegyrics that were entirely acceptable to Christian emperors and the Christian court.

Ben Kybett is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge. He is preparing for submission a doctoral thesis entitled ‘Religion and Rhetoric at the Courts of the Theodosians, c. 379-404’, which focuses primarily on the orators Themistius and Claudian. Previously, he received a BA in Ancient and Modern History and an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies from the University of Oxford.
This contribution aims to study the emperor Julian’s strategies for self-representation in his writings. Self-reference is one of the most frequent and important aspects in his production, which has received much scholarly attention in the past decades. To achieve this objective, this contribution will focus on the last pagan emperor’s works of dialogical nature, such as epistles and passages from some of his orations (e.g. Or. 7.232a—b), which includes the ‘presence’ of an interlocutor in the communication process. For these reasons and given the wide presence of autobiographical references, the corpus of study of this contribution will include especially letters and, to a lesser degree, ‘periautological’ works like his last oration, the Misopogon. The reason of this choice is that self-representation cannot be understood just as a unidirectional operation, but as a cooperative exchanging of information between the sender of the message and his reader and especially his over readers. As recent studies have pointed out, an emperor’s letters were usually written with the intention of publishing them or with the idea that someone other than the addressee would read them. Related with the possibility of a wide circulation of his correspondence, Julian’s letters are written with a high care for the epistolographic style that must be analysed by both literary and metaliterary points of view. Following theories about the rhetoric of visuality and semiotic of communication systems, this paper will demonstrate how Julian uses self-representation strategies as a media for messages of a propagandistic and pedagogical dimension.

Elia Otranto received a BA in Classics at the University of Granada with a dissertation on the rhetorical structure and literary devices used by Julian in his Misopogon. He is interested in approaching the figure of the emperor Julian from different points of view, such as through Rhetoric, Literary and Reception studies theory. Currently, he is working on his MA dissertation on Julian’s communication and self-representation strategies in his works of dialogical nature.
The ‘Dead Self’ in Byzantine Sepulchral Epigrams

Frederick Bird (Regent’s Park College, Oxford)

This paper unravels the concept of the ‘dead self’ as presented in Byzantine sepulchral epigrams in the *Greek Anthology*. The epigrammatists bestow upon their deceased subjects the qualities necessary for them to be properly regarded as ‘selves’. These individuals (i) share personal characteristics with others, thereby forming ‘society’, (ii) respond to their changing environment, and therefore (iii) are, in a sense, alive. The reader can identify as the dead personae of those portrayed and therefore remembered in the sepulchral epigrams. This is true whether the dead personae are speaking or being spoken to, and whether they are a different gender, age, class or even species to the reader. Thus, the reader explores first-hand the identity of others, bridging the gap between life and death. This paper analyses both classical and Byzantine poetry from the *Greek Anthology*. Since the Anthology was in part a Byzantine creation, the classical poetry within it has an important Byzantine context, and is as essential to our understanding of Byzantine thought as poetry written in Byzantine times. The paper examines Byzantine memorialisation and considers how sepulchral poetry in particular presents the Christian belief in life after death, alongside – and in light of – the classical ideal of achieving immortal *kleos*.

*Frederick Bird received his undergraduate degree in Classics from the University of Cambridge. He is currently reading for an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at Regent’s Park College, Oxford.*
Heir to an Ancient Empire and the Illusion of Power: 
The Examination of Imperial Propaganda under Alexios III of Trebizond in the 
Greek Alexander Romance Codex gr. 5

Christina Nicole Conti (Independent Researcher)

The Greek Alexander Romance Codex gr. 5 of the Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and 
Post-Byzantine Studies in Venice is one of the finest examples of Byzantine illuminated 
manuscripts. It recounts the saga of Alexander the Great (323-356 BCE) and was commis-
sioned for the emperor Alexios III of Trebizond (r. 1349-1390) in the fourteenth century. 
Trebizond, which was once part of the Byzantine Empire, became an independent empire 
in 1204. In this paper, I examine and analyse Codex gr. 5 from a comparative perspective 
of imperial propaganda, numismatics and diplomacy. I theorize that Alexios used Codex gr. 
5 not only as a form of imperial propaganda and a tool of political discourse, but also as a 
legitimising and powerful image of himself as heir to Alexander the Great’s empire. Alexios 
was an astute political operator; he understood the precarious position of his rule and 
Trebizond’s existence as an independent empire. Codex gr. 5 acted as a tool of diplomatic 
and imperial propaganda meant not only to promote and legitimize Alexios as a great and 
powerful emperor but also to establish him as heir to an ancient empire. The analysis of 
select miniatures and iconographic elements presented in the manuscript along with key 
historical details supports the thesis of Codex gr. 5 as more than a gift of courtly splendour; 
it also reveals Codex gr. 5 to be an artistic instrument of imperial propaganda employed to 
create the illusion of power.

Christina Nicole Conti is a recent graduate from the University of California at Santa Cruz. 
She holds a BA in History of Visual Arts and Culture and a BA in Politics. She is currently ap-
plying to graduate school. Her recent scholarly activities include participation in the Mack-
sey Symposium 2020. Her research interest includes Byzantine visual culture and Trebizond.
Shaping History for an Autobiographical Outline
The *Historia Dogmatica* of George Metochites

Francesca Samorì (University of Padua)

George Metochites (1250-1328), a deacon of the Great Church of Constantinople and supporter of the Unionist patriarch John XI Bekkos, took part in the religious conflicts that broke out after the Union of Lyon (1274) and its rejection by the Byzantine clergy and populace (1282). Metochites, in spite of the condemnations that were imposed upon him – he was first exiled and then confined – continued to support the Union of the Churches and the Latin theology on the procession of the Holy Spirit until the end of his days. I am currently preparing the first critical edition of Metochites’ *Historia Dogmatica*, his most important work, which is transmitted in three autograph manuscripts. In this work, Metochites offers a general survey of the main events that created a fracture between East and West in the past; he then focuses on his own time and explains from his point of view how and why he and his colleagues (John Bekkos and Constantine Meliteniotes) were unjustly prosecuted. In my paper, I will reconstruct the role Metochites played in the events that he relates, using the many autobiographical sections of the *Historia Dogmatica*. At the same time, I will explain how he willingly distorted contemporary historical events in order to demonstrate the righteousness of his behaviour and to convey a specific image of himself as a martyr of the faith.

Francesca Samorì is a second-year PhD student at the University of Padua. Her research project in Byzantine Philology aims to prepare the first critical edition of George Metochites’ *Historia Dogmatica*, accompanied by an Italian translation and a commentary. From the same university, she obtained a master’s degree in Classical Philology and Ancient History (2019), with a dissertation in Greek Palaeography concerning the manuscript tradition of the works of George Metochites. She had previously obtained a bachelor’s degree in Classical Studies, with a thesis on the codex Parisinus graecus 2939, which belonged to the humanist scholar Ermolao Barbaro.
Benjamin Sharkey has a BA in History from the University of Birmingham, having completed a dissertation on Christian responses to Islamic rule in eighth- to ninth-century Cordoba and Baghdad. He is now in the second year of an MPhil in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at the University of Oxford. Having completed projects on Christian conversion among Turkic nomads and the Baghdad Patriarchate, he is now undertaking thesis research on connection and continuation among non-nomadic Christian communities in Central Asia.
Artistic Self-Representation in Medieval Georgian Metalwork

Bella Radenović (Courtauld Institute of Art)

Byzantine sources, such as The Book of Eparch of Constantinople, contain important information concerning attitudes towards metalworkers and regulations that govern their trade, revealing a rich terminology applied to different categories of smiths and metalworking techniques. Yet, there are few surviving examples of Byzantine goldsmiths fashioning and presenting images of themselves through their craft, be that by recording their names in epigrams or representing themselves visually. Out of almost one hundred craftsmen known to us through Byzantine texts and epigrams and published in The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, only a handful refer to metalworkers. Whilst Middle Byzantine inscriptions containing metalworkers’ names are extremely rare, the names of fifteen goldsmiths from the same period are recorded in inscriptions found on surviving icons, gospel covers and crosses from neighbouring Georgia. Traditionally regarded as insipid and formulaic, academic interest in these inscriptions has been limited. Yet, as words which feature prominently in central and spiritually significant areas of religious objects, they were clearly meant to be noticed and engaged with. This paper examines the Georgian corpus of metalworkers’ inscriptions from a non-positivist angle and interrogates their visual rhetoric, from the way they are executed and placed in relation to donor inscriptions and sacred figures, to their scale and legibility. I will argue for the broad historical significance of these epigrams as examples of the self-representation of metalworkers which act as surrogates for their portraits and reveal important insights into the social status enjoyed by goldsmiths in medieval Georgia.

Bella Radenović received a BA at the University of Cambridge and an MA at the Courtauld Institute of Art. She is currently a third-year PhD candidate at the Courtauld, looking at the production, veneration and patronage of medieval Georgian icons.
Kelly E. McClinton’s research focuses on Roman art and architecture, the perception of ancient spaces, and the archaeology of Roman houses. She is particularly interested in how ancient material and visual evidence, as well as literary sources, can help us to more fully understand how ancient people actually lived in and experienced the art and architecture around them. She recently completed a doctoral dissertation on the application of computational methods to the study of Roman domestic space. At Oxford, Kelly is now working on a DPhil project that considers the aesthetic maintenance of domestic spaces in Late Antique Rome.
Self-Representation as a Marian Devotee
A Comparison of Donor Portraits in Byzantine and New Spanish Paintings

Veronika Poláková (National Autonomous University of Mexico)

The eleventh-century icon preserved in the Monastery of Mount Sinai includes a portrait of a donor at the feet of the enthroned Virgin. Unlike other Byzantine and medieval examples, he is surrounded by four more Byzantine Marian images. Why did the donor choose to present himself as a Marian devotee though the association of several images of the Virgin? Why was one not enough? Moreover, since this self-representational strategy reappears in early modern art, this paper will question how it has been adapted to serve a society different to that for which it was produced. Thus, in order to analyse this strategy and its adaptation, I suggest a comparison on two cases over time and space. Specifically, I will compare the donor’s strategy of self-representation in the aforementioned Sinai icon to that used by the brothers Torres Tuñón in the mid-eighteenth century. The Torres Tuñón were depicted in New Spanish painting as watching the declaration of Our Lady of Guadalupe as patroness of New Spain by Pope Benedict XIV (1754) and the scene was framed by ten different advocations of the Virgin Mary. Based on the findings, I contend that despite different needs and ideas about self-representation in each society, in both it was desirable to be seen as a devotee of multiple cult images, even if those represented the same person, in this case the Virgin. Furthermore, I explore how this strategy functioned in such different contexts.

Veronika Poláková is a third-year PhD student in the Art History Graduate Program at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Her doctoral research investigates the Virgin Mary in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century visual productions of the Kingdom of Bohemia and of the Viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico). Her dissertation focuses on early modern cross-cultural exchange and circulation of ideas between Central Europe and the Americas.
The three-aisled basilica of Agioi Anargyroi (Holy Unmercenaries), located in the city of Kastoria in northern Greece, is dated back to the late tenth/early eleventh century. What distinguishes the church is the astonishing quality of its lavish wall paintings, painted in two layers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively. Worthy of remark are the Komnenian frescoes of the twelfth century and the portrayal of the founder Theodoros Limniotis, his wife Anna Radini, and their son Ioannis, who sponsored the church’s renovation in 1170—1180. For the first time, in contrast to imperial examples, the whole family is represented. The most remarkable element of the composition is the fascinating and luxurious portrayal of Anna Radini, who was connected with the homonymous aristocratic family of Constantinople. As discussed in this paper, she probably had become the bearer of the new perceptions expressed in the twelfth century by the women of the Constantinopolitan elite about their role in the social and political development of Byzantium. External features that gave a more spiritual mood to the portrayal (luxurious covers and additions of black monastic headcovers) are useful for drawing conclusions related to the life and activity of the Limniotis family. Supporting this statement, of particular interest is another donor portrayal, that of the monk Theophilos Limniotis, painted in a later phase and identified by some scholars as Theodoros Limniotis himself. How were the donors connected to each other? Was the aristocratic founder couple exiled to Kastoria, and did they become monks? Founders’ portrayals and dedicatory inscriptions are a direct echo of the life of the people of the past, still in place after so many centuries, inviting us to read their stories in a fraught, constantly shifting landscape.

Maria Elisavet Samoili obtained a bachelor’s degree in Archaeology and History of Art from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She earned a joint master’s degree in Archaeological Materials Science from the Sapienza University of Rome, the University of Evora and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She also holds an MA in Historical Research from the Ionian University of Greece, defending her thesis in the material culture of the coastal area in northern Ionia from prehistory to Late Antiquity.
Two Examples of Comparison of Royal Women to the Theotokos in the Eastern Orthodox World

Alevtina Tanu (Independent Researcher)

In this study, I address two medieval images: a Byzantinising enamel and a fresco from Serbia which borrow the common iconography of Marian feasts and model secular royal figures on the figure of the Theotokos. I argue that this comparison of the royal figures to the Mother of God was made in order to enhance their image of power or to demonstrate their royal motherhood, that is, their ability to give birth to an earthly king who symbolised Christ in Heaven. The presence of Christ and His Mother at Anna Dandolo’s funeral, and the fact that the angel holds her soul, not only serve as confirmation of her salvation, but also imply that she will be placed among the saints in the Kingdom of Heaven. Just as depictions of the members of the ruling Bagrat’ioni dynasty on wall paintings in Georgian churches suggested that the rulers had very close links with the Heavenly world, so does the Dormition-style representation of Anna Dandolo in the Sopoćani narthex give her ‘quasi-saintly status.’ Similarly, in the Khakhuli enamel the female figure, be it Bagrat’s mother Mariam, the Byzantine empress Zoe, or some other royal woman, also assumes a holy status. Whilst she does not have a halo, her proximity to Gabriel speaks of her prestige: only worthy Christians can communicate directly with saints and angels. She does not wear the robe of the Mother of God, but the composition suggests she is depicted in her stead. By showing the royal woman conversing with the Archangel and making a visual allusion to one of the most iconographically recognisable Marian feasts, her image is elevated and her authority, on earth and beyond, strengthened.

Alevtina Tanu holds a BA from Moscow State University and has undertaken graduate study at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Courtauld Institute of Art. She is currently undertaking independent research and preparing for a PhD focusing on Palaiologan Macedonia.
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Dynamics of the Identification of Female Characters in the Slavic and Greek *Digenis Akritis*

Emma Huig (Christ Church, Oxford)

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the depiction of female characters in the narrative of the Greek and Slavic versions of Digenis Akritis. The texts are approached from a narratological perspective, focusing on how characterisation is developed by the way women are identified in these texts. Recent publications on gender in both the Slavic and Greek Digenis Akritis tend to focus on behavioural norms of men and women (Garland 1990; Ekdawi, Fann and Philokyprou 1993; Goldgof and Shelton 2017/18). The narratological approach of this paper therefore promises to shed new light on the texts. I first assess the way female characters are described, asking whether they are identified by their own personal characteristics, or rather in relation to their (male) family members. Secondly, I will analyse the use of proper names for female characters. The extent to which women have proper names and carry individuality affects the level of subordination of these characters in the text (Bal 1987; Bal 2017). I therefore aim to analyse the dynamics behind this subordination by assessing the way in which female characters are identified. Here, I respond to a recent call to analyse Byzantine texts through this methodological approach (Kinloch 2020).
Self-Representation of the Female Protagonist in Late Byzantine Romances

Zuzana Mitrengová (Masaryk University)

The aim of my PhD thesis is the narratological analysis of the couples of protagonists in the Late Byzantine romances. One of the tools I have chosen to do so is focalisation, which is a narration affected by the emotions and feelings of the person who tells the story. The focaliser provides his or her insight into events which, under his or her impression, he or she may relate differently or in a different temporal order than they actually happened. The focaliser thus uses his or her point of view-focalisation, to complete the impression that the narratee has from the text, to better imagine the scenery in which the story takes place, or to take a stand on the characters. Sometimes the focaliser even shows or reveals to the narratee something that is unknown to the character. In my paper, I will focus on the characters of the female protagonists of the romances. I will pursue the first-person speeches, where the heroine speaks about herself and compare them with the information given by the other characters of the romance and the narrator about her. By comparing what we learn through internal and external focalisation, we get a picture of how the main character sees herself, how the others look at her and present her, and whether and what difference is in their depiction.

Zuzana Mitrengová is a third-year PhD student of Greek Studies at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. The topic of her dissertation thesis is ‘Love couples in the Byzantine literature with a focus on Late Byzantine romances’. She spent the autumn semester of 2019 on an Erasmus stay at the University of Vienna.
Dress is one of the easiest and most widespread ways to modify the human body. Beyond its use as protection against the elements, it plays an important role as a medium of communication. Through dress, the body which it clothes becomes culturally readable, capable of expressing a variety of different identities like gender, class, and ethnicity. For medieval Byzantine elites, as elsewhere, the choice of clothing therefore became a vital mode of self-representation. Our premier visual sources for these choices are the various portraits with which the Byzantines commemorated religious donations or marked the graves of their deceased. Unlike most other Byzantine art, they are much more likely to give us a hint at what styles of dress were fashionable at the time of their creation. Yet they are more than just mere snapshots of what people back then looked like. They again are the results of conscious choices, made by their sponsors about how they wanted to present themselves or their loved ones. How did the elites of the medieval Roman Empire dress for the occasion of being portrayed? Which of the different social roles they filled throughout their lives did they emphasize, and which were ignored? Answering these questions provides valuable insights into how social elites were constructed in Byzantium.

Michael Kiefer is a PhD student at the University of Heidelberg. His research interests focus mainly on the self-representation of Late Roman and Byzantine elites, the transcultural linkages of the Late Roman / Byzantine Empire with its respective neighbours, and on Byzantium in a global context.
Pious Offerings to Meteora Monasteries (1348-1420s)
Between Political Representation, Family Belonging, and Personal Agency

Anna Adashinskaya (New Europe College)

The present paper analyses the strategies of donors’ self-representation in various royal and private donations to the monasteries of Meteora from 1348 to 1420s. By focusing on the evidence of different media (e.g. church inscriptions, icons, manuscripts’ colophons, donation documents, and references in the Life of St Athanasios of Meteora), it examines how patrons shaped their identity on different levels and how they conveyed their social status, ethnic origin, family belonging and political affiliation. In the complex and ever-changing context of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, two strategies of social and ethnic self-representation can be identified. The donation deeds and dedicatory inscriptions commissioned by the Serbian nobility and ruling house reflect their struggle for legitimacy and public recognition by the population of the region. Consequently, they underline their spiritual ties with the acclaimed members of the monastic community as representatives of divine benevolence and promote the new political ideology of Thessaly as a state of both ‘Serbs and Greeks’. On the other hand, the private gifts received from Greek nobles and commoners strove to reaffirm the ties with those family members who entered the Meteora monasteries, and to arrange common commemorations for the entire family. By regarding the liturgical functions of the donated objects, as well as their dedicatory inscriptions, this paper enquires into the agency of these works of art as the donors’ representatives. Royal and noble gifts often served as reminders of the patrons’ overall generosity. However, in the case of female gifts on behalf of deceased relatives, the objects completely substituted the donors’ presence as – according to St Athanasios – no woman, ‘whether dead or, even worse, alive’ could enter the holy territory of Meteora.

Anna Adashinskaya is a postdoctoral research fellow at New Europe College in the ERC project Art Historiographies in Central and Eastern Europe: An Inquiry from the Perspective of Entangled Histories. She has an MA in Medieval Studies from Central European University and a Specialist Degree in Art History from Moscow State University. She completed her PhD in Medieval Studies (2020) at Central European University. Dr Adashinskaya’s research focuses the historical anthropology of Late Byzantine patronage and analyses artistic and pious practices across the medieval Balkans.
The Fourteenth Sibylline Oracle
Eschatology and Identity among the Jews of Seventh-Century Alexandria

William Neubauer (Balliol College, Oxford)

The Fourteenth Sibylline Oracle is a little-studied source originating in the Jewish community of Alexandria shortly after the Arab conquest of the 640s. As part of the Jewish oracular tradition, there is no ‘author’ as such, but the supposed prophecies of an ancient Jewish sibyl function as a narrative for representing the identity of a community both Egyptian and Jewish. ‘Sacred’ Egypt itself figures prominently, ‘a land bounteous in gifts of food to men’, watered by the Nile, but consequently a focus of competition between the great empires of Rome, Persia and Arabia. As a result, its people are subject ‘again and again’ to endless bloodshed and the ‘yoke of bondage’, most especially from the Roman Lion, who, ‘stretching forth his spear against mankind, bathes in the blood of the (Jewish) lamb’. Through the oracular device, however, this suffering becomes a tool for self-representation and identity: the realisation of these foretold tribulations only serves as proof of the uniquely privileged oracular tradition of the Sibyl and her people, whilst the unending (and justly inflicted) cycle of human violence ultimately spares none, not even the Roman Lion. The coming of the Arabs introduces the Oracle’s eschatological culmination, as conflict and wickedness are finally ended, ushering in the long-prophesised rule of the ‘holy nation’ of the Jews over all the world. The Oracle thus provides remarkable insight into a community that is often obscured, as well as for the fashioning of self-identity in times of conflict and upheaval.

William Neubauer is an MSt student in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies. He is interested primarily in the social and cultural history of the Near East in and around the rise of Islam, and wrote his undergraduate thesis on encounters between conquered and conqueror in seventh-century Egyptian papyri.
Kingship, Self-Representation and Cross-Cultural Assimilation
A Reading of Late Antique pre-Islamic Arabian Epigraphic Testimonies

Valentina A. Grasso (University of Cambridge)

Modern scholarship often depicts pre-Islamic Arabians as being at the mercy of Rome and Iran until the Muslim conquests, when they gained a clear identity linked to Islam. This view is the result of a lack of Arabic literary sources securely dated to pre-Islamic times, and the resulting reliance on ‘external sources’. However, a small corpus of epigraphic testimonies composed by the Arabian rulers and elites of this period calls into question these ‘external’ representations by shifting frontiers and returning the fringes of Late Antique empires to the centre of the discussion. This paper aims to articulate a narrative of Late Antique Arabia in which Arabians themselves are the main actors, exploring the Konfliktbeziehung (conflictual relation) between empires and local dynasties, and the impact of foreign forces in the cross-cultural assimilation and propaganda of the Arabian elites. As Muhammad was notoriously not a king, the royal conduct of the Umayyads was the subject of harsh criticism. Accordingly, the paper will take into consideration the key issue of kingship in relation to the self-representation of pre-Islamic northern Arabian dynasties allied with Rome and Iran, and the southern kingdom of Himyar, conducting a comparative analysis of the way in which these groups represented themselves in relation to each other as well as other Late Antique political entities.

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The history of the Aegean Sea resonates with the concept of insularity: its islands, as any land surrounded by sea, can rhyme with isolation and remoteness, as well as connectivity and resilience. Indeed, insularity partially rests on a concept of seascape that is defined by Ina Berg as ‘a myriad of histories, experiences, skills, and relationships’ of importance for those who traverse it and live on or near it. It moulded perceptions and representations of insular territories on the part of its inhabitants. With this in mind, this paper will discuss the architectural and ideological dynamics of the Christianisation process in the Aegean islands by focusing on two key studies: Naxos and Chios. While Naxos provides us with a progressive process, which resulted in projecting a Christian image into the sea in order to tame it, Chios presents a different trajectory that was more related with its proximity with Constantinople. Archaeological evidence and material culture will be therefore paired with local hagiographies and literary sources to show that the Christianisation process on the abovementioned islands had inherent characteristics and qualities peculiar to an insular environment. Indeed, it pulsated with the dichotomy of connectivity-insulation, as well as with the concept and perceptions of seascape regarded as main backcloth against which material and imaginary self-representations are projected.
An Abstract Way of Self-Representation
Personified Virtues in Late Antique Mosaics and Beyond

Prolet Decheva (University College, Dublin)

How does one express their generosity and yet remains in the background? In the Villa at Yakto, it is Μεγαλοψυχία (‘Magnanimity’) who offers the games taking place in the floor mosaic around her, and in the East Church at Qasr el-Lebia Κτίσις (‘Foundation’) and Κόσμησις (‘Embellishment’) dedicate the ‘New City of Theodoria’. Although reminiscent of donor portraits, as in the church of SS Cosmas and Damian in Gerasa, they are not the benefactors themselves. Κτίσις alone appears in numerous religious and profane floor mosaics in the fourth to sixth centuries, sometimes together with Κόσμησις and Ἀνανέωσις (‘Renewal’), identifiable only via Greek labels. Thus, the philoktistai express their virtue, without explicitly stating it. Yet sometimes they come forward more clearly, as in Kourion, where the dedicatory inscription emphasizes that Eustolios first built the baths, where Κτίσις is depicted, or as in Edessa, where Κτίσις wears a golden chlamys reminiscent of the clothing of a Byzantine official. The relationship between benefactor and personified virtue can also become explicit: Μεγαλοψυχία and Φρόνησις (‘Prudence’) flank Anicia Juliana in her Vienna Dioscurides portrait. Further personifications are also a fitting mode of self-representation as, for example, testified by a twelfth-century seal of an anonymous member of the Lychnites family with the personification of Ἀλήθεια (‘Truth’) on the obverse. These go beyond the medium of mosaics and the period of Late Antiquity.

Prolet Decheva has undertaken undergraduate and graduate study in Communication Studies, Art History and the History of Late Antique and Byzantine Art at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. She has also studied in Udine, Bonn and Rome. She is currently working on a PhD project on personifications of abstract ideas in Late Antique and Middle Byzantine art at University College Dublin. She is also taking part in the project Modularität in der Spätantike in the Department of Christian Archaeology at the Rhenish Friedrich Wilhelm University of Bonn.
Roman Law as Roman Self-Representation
A Case Study in Holiday Law

William Bunce (Wadham College, Oxford)

The influence of Christianity on Roman law was not revolutionary. Nevertheless, there were changes in areas of the law that were undeniably the result of Christianisation. A series of laws in the Theodosian and Justinianic Codes prohibiting public games and spectacles on Sundays, even those on which the emperor’s birthday fell, provides one unambiguous example of such a change. These acts of self-defining legislation attempted to change Roman identity in three ways. Firstly, they disrupted civic life through the ring-fencing of calendar time. Secondly, they provided a legal necessity that Christian worship should displace reverence of the emperors. Finally, they marked a change in the concept of dies festi, from days on which most legal activity could not take place, to days suitable only for Christian worship. This paper will address how legislation could operate as a reforming source of self-representation by challenging ancient elements of Roman identity. In addition, by exploring the response of individual cives to the laws of the empire, a group in fact defined by their access to the ius civile, we gain insight into how differing relationships with the law enabled a multitude of Roman self-representations in a time of ideological flux.

William Bunce is a first year DPhil student at Wadham College, Oxford. His research focuses on the development of Late Roman law from Constantine to Justinian. He previously studied at Oxford for an MSt in Late Antique and Byzantine Studies and a BA in Classics and Oriental Studies.
Gemma Storti is a PhD candidate at The Ohio State University. She earned her BA and MA from the University of Turin and is currently researching the role played by ethnicity in Byzantine politics and social expectations regarding imperial rulership.
Coats of arms are almost ubiquitous in Western Europe, starting in the mid-twelfth century and reaching the first peak in the following decades. The reason for the success of these devices is generally understood as deriving from their privileging role as a form of iconic self-expression for the laity, the military aristocracy at its head. Byzantium, however, is still believed to have taken no part in the development of heraldry, a foreign custom introduced to the Empire in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade and only sporadically adopted by local elites. To counter this narrative, I will focus on one striking example: the depiction of two warrior saints in the church of Saint Panteleimon, Nerezi, whose frescoes were commissioned by Alexios Angelos Komnenos in 1164. They bear distinctively heraldic animals on their almond-shaped shields, which very closely resemble coeval French coats of arms. I argue that the implications of this artistic choice are twofold. Firstly, they reinforce the political message conveyed by Nerezi’s program as a whole, declaring the patron’s allegiance to his relative, the emperor Manuel I Komnenos, who is evoked through the representation of his patron saint, St Theodore Tiro, and the lion rampant on his shield. More importantly, they allow us to observe up close a shift in the mentality of the Komnenian aristocracy, with its increased focus on values such as ἀνδρεία (manly courage) and εὐγένεια (noble descent), helping us to understand the aspirations and values that Alexios shared with his peers.

Carlo Berardi received both his BA (Cultural Heritage Studies, 2015) and his MA (Medieval Archaeology, 2017) from the University of Pisa, and a specialized diploma in History of Art and Archaeology from the Scuola Normale. He is currently a PhD Candidate at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor). His dissertation project explores the cross-pollination of ideas surrounding strategies of aristocratic self-representation and the reframing of the visual and literary discourse around martial values in the twelfth-century Mediterranean, with a special focus on Byzantium and on the relationship between the Komnenian elites and their Christian neighbours.
As stated by the historians Philippa Hoskin and Elizabeth New, ‘[t]he study of seals and sealing practices is the study of representation and identity, of ideas and semiotics, and of administrative and legal developments’ (2020). In this light, the seal of the Catalan Company, issued in 1305, provides us with an outstanding example of self-representation and a complete picture of the socio-politic, economic, cultural and ideological context of both the Byzantine Empire and the Mediterranean world at the beginning of the fourteenth century. On the one hand, the aforementioned seal, which features a depiction of St George and a Latin inscription, not only transmits the religious and ideological message of the crusaders, but also provides a detailed way of interpreting the political situation in the Byzantine territories, helping us better understand the political and military tensions between the Byzantine Empire and the Catalan Company. On the other hand, it opens a gate to the fourteenth-century Mediterranean, to analyse the relations between Catholics and Orthodox, West and East, Christianity and Islam. Indeed, as the multidimensional links reflected by the seal of the Catalan Company provides us a model to examine the complex construction of self-representation, this paper will use both literary and material sources, to point to the creation of a hybrid and complex socio-political, religious and cultural environment in the Byzantine Empire and in the Mediterranean throughout the fourteenth century.

Yunus Doğan graduated from the Department of History at Middle East Technical University. He then completed his master’s degree in the Department of History at Bilkent University with a dissertation on ‘The Transformation of an Itinerant Army: from the Catalan Company to the Catalan Duchy of Athens and Neopatras (1303-1388)’. Currently, he is a PhD candidate in the same department where he studies the Taifa of Dénia in the cross-cultural, economic and political context of eastern and western Mediterranean world in eleventh century.
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For joining instructions, please contact Dr Tim Greenwood.