

To the *International Association of Byzantine Studies* (AIEB)

Proposal for the establishment of the *Commission for Byzantine Archaeology* (CBA)
within the framework of the AIEB

1. Introductory statement

Archaeology has developed into an independent and multi-disciplinary field. Methodological, scientific and technological breakthroughs have already established ways for a broadminded collaboration between archaeologists and other scholars of diverse specialisations and from different academic backgrounds. However, oxymora phenomena have swiftly developed over the past 20 years: although Byzantine Archaeology, a highly active branch of research in the field of Byzantine Studies, has been developing rapidly, regional and supra-regional socio-political disturbances and the global systemic crisis have had a negative impact in the future potential of the Humanities in general. Considering that our contemporary [digital] age presupposes effective and immediate communication between scholars and disciplines and can foster information transmission and collaboration across fields and specialisations, the abovementioned historical misfortunes create a challenge for the archaeological community engaged in the study of Byzantine material culture to counteract and establish the *Commission for [Byzantine] Archaeology* within the framework of the AIEB.

2. Aims of the CBA

More than 650 monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles have been published over the past 20 years, all related to the *archaeological* investigation of Byzantine landscapes and monuments and the typo-chronological and analytical study of aspects of Byzantine material culture. Moreover, many edited volumes have appeared and certainly more doctoral theses have been completed during the course of the past two decades, representing different fields/specialisations and methodological advances: from the meticulous study of individual excavated sites to landscape and settlement evolution through survey archaeology; from ceramic seriation to petrography and technology; from theory to digital approaches to 'space'. This authoritative activity means that Byzantine Archaeology has developed way beyond the academic and intellectual frameworks in which it was originally practised. Meanwhile, contemporary research trends and policies, including heritage management, the tourism industry, as well as the reception of *Byzantium* globally have led to the establishment of new fields of investigation in Byzantine Archaeology overall.

This plurality of projects, new specialisations, project results and the extensive geographical/national distribution of researchers and their existing variety of work languages (one of the 'problems' that Byzantine Archaeology currently faces) crave for a systematic collection and dissemination to the wider public and the scholarly community and urges for a closer collaboration between scholars and (academic or other) institutions. Thus, the primary aims of the proposed *Commission for Byzantine Archaeology* can be summarised as follows:

- a. Realise initiatives to raise public awareness of Byzantine Archaeology on both national and international levels,
- b. Endorse communication with existing *Commissions* in the framework of the AIEB,
- c. Establish a 'special session' in the framework of the *International Congress of Byzantine Studies* to communicate the latest developments in the main research strands of Byzantine Archaeology,
- d. Support the idea of archaeological projects investigating the Byzantine past being presented in larger *fora* (e.g. the annual Leeds *International Medieval Congress*, the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference* etc.),
- e. Create and/or sustain a digital platform (in collaboration with the *Development Commission* and/or through the Newsletter of the AIEB) for announcing activities and opportunities related to Byzantine Archaeology,
- f. Develop communication and collaboration between archaeologists specialised (or specialising) in Byzantine landscapes and material culture through the compilation of an online updated list of ongoing field projects and specialists in different (archaeological) research fields (with links to their respective webpages),
- g. Promote the dialogue with other fields of archaeology that address the medieval Mediterranean, European or Near Eastern world (like Western Medieval Archaeology and Islamic Archaeology), opening the channels for wider interregional studies,
- h. Investigate ways to raise funding to support outstanding doctoral students undertaking ground-breaking research in Byzantine Archaeology.

3. Means of achievement

Considering that the proposed CBA will probably not have its own funds, the achievement of its aims will rely heavily and primarily on its human resources (i.e. on the proposed list of 'members' below). For this to be achieved, the proposed members of the CBA are committed to cooperate in good faith in order to assure a fair distribution of efforts and to provide the necessary knowledge and expertise for serving the commonly acknowledged aims. Here follows a list of the practical means for achieving our aims:

- a. The CBA, in collaboration with a *National Committee of Byzantine Studies* (of a different country each year), to organise a public lecture where the aims and major advances of Byzantine Archaeology can be communicated to the wider (no-specialised) public. This venture would stress the link between the Byzantine past and our contemporary world. The public lecture, organised/coordinated by the CBA in collaboration with the *National Committee* of the country where the lecture is to be delivered each year, could take place in one of its major state academic institutions.
- b. The creation or sustainment of a digital online platform (either within the existing Newsletter or separately within the AIEB webpage) informing young researchers and students at all levels with a special interest in Byzantine Archaeology about field- and lab-work opportunities (to gain experience and/or specialise in the study of different materials/fields). Such ventures could run under the auspices of the CBA, after having secured the permission and collaboration of the project coordinators.

- c. Especially important for the strategic goals of the CBA is the general communication strategy. We suggest using different means for communication and publication of new and major research programmes, post-doctoral projects and doctoral theses. The central tool for this venture would be a special page for the CBA within (or linked to) the website of the AIEB, which can serve as a repository of the aforementioned information (with interactive links directing interested individuals to each project's website and/or academic institution for more relevant information). Thus, this online platform can also serve as an exchange-centre for 'Archaeological News and Announcements' and for helping to keep people in very different research, teaching or practical environments in touch and up-to-date with developments in the field and with one another's work.
- d. The compilation of a comprehensive emailing list is another, more direct, means for promoting promptly relevant 'News and Announcements' to interested individuals and parties directly involved with Byzantine Archaeology.
- e. The establishment of a dedicated Session in the context of the *International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, organised by the CBA. The Session would include specialised research and review papers updating Byzantinists about the latest activities, developments and results in all different strands of research in Byzantine Archaeology (i.e. major excavation projects, intensive surface surveys/landscape archaeology, analytical/laboratory studies of archaeological materials, the application of digital tools and approaches, heritage management, archaeological theory).
- f. Explore the possibility of the proposed CBA organising a *Theoretical Byzantine Archaeology Meeting* (equivalent to TRAC – *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference* or RAC – *Roman Archaeology Conference*) bringing together Byzantine archaeologists of all specialisations to talk about methods, the theory behind their methods, the application of digital tools etc. This would be aiming not so much to disseminate the work being undertaken, but rather to deepen our understanding of theory and method, and further discuss the specialised needs of Byzantine materials studies.

4. Epilogue

We strongly believe that the time is ripe for the establishment of the proposed *Commission for Byzantine Archaeology*. The proposed members of the CBA are determined to take on this historical responsibility to promote Byzantine Studies in general and Byzantine Archaeology in particular, to strengthen collaboration between scholars and contribute to fostering greater collegiality and creating a better research and job environment for the future generation(s) of bright scholars actively engaged in Byzantine Archaeology. The undersigned members of the proposed CBA will evaluate their experience and the results of their activities on a regular basis so as to adjust their aims and set new goals according to the necessities and changing conditions of our discipline.

The members of the proposed *Commission for Byzantine Archaeology* (in alphabetical order):

1. Effie Athanassopoulos (USA)
2. Marica Cassis (Canada)
3. Jim Crow (UK)
4. Owen Doonan (USA)
5. Sharon Gerstel (USA)
6. Fotini Kondyli (USA)
7. Sabine Ladstätter (Austria)
8. Platon Petridis (Greece)
9. Jean-Michel Spieser (Switzerland)
10. Christina Tsigonaki (Greece)
11. Nikos Tsivikis (Greece)
12. Myrto Veikou (Sweden)
13. Athanasios Vionis (proposal coordinator) (Cyprus)
14. Joanita Vroom (Netherlands)
15. Enrico Zanini (Italy)