

Report of the Development Commission

prepared by Sergei Mariev on September 29, 2023

Part 1: Report on the Activities of the Commission

Between the Intercongress held in September 2018 in Athens and the 24th Byzantine Studies Congress in Venice and Padua in August 2022, the Development Commission of the AIEB embarked on various projects. These projects aimed to enhance the AIEB's international visibility, facilitate communication among Byzantinists, support younger scholars, and formulate innovative strategies, actions, and proposals for consideration by the International Bureau and the President of the AIEB. Successful implementation of these initiatives would position the AIEB as a more effective promoter of Byzantine Studies worldwide.

1. The Newsletter "Byzantine News"

One of the most notable achievements of the Development Commission is the establishment of the "Byzantine News" newsletter. This monthly publication is distributed digitally and has steadily gained popularity among scholars in the field of Byzantine Studies worldwide. The objectives, purposes, and guidelines for the newsletter are outlined in the "Mission Statement," which, following approval by the International Bureau, is accessible on the AIEB website. Consequently, the newsletter refrains from featuring announcements of recent publications, as this would significantly increase its size and potentially duplicate content found in other scholarly publications, such as the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*.

Furthermore, in correspondence between the International Bureau and the editor of "Byzantine News" dated February 15, 2021, it was established that the newsletter does not publish obituaries of prominent deceased Byzantinists. During the Byzantine Studies Congress held in Venice and Padua, the newsletter featured the following sections: "Opportunities," "(Online) Events," "Exhibitions," "Calls for Papers," "New Information Resources," and "New Research Projects." It is essential to emphasize that, during discussions with the International Bureau, it was stressed that the newsletter should strive to disseminate information relevant to scholars of Byzantine Studies worldwide with minimal restrictions. In practice, since the inception of the newsletter, only a few submissions have been declined by the editors, including announcements of recent publications and one obituary.

The December issue of the newsletter traditionally includes addresses from the President of the AIEB and the International Bureau. In addition to the regular monthly issues, a series of Special Issues have been published. These special issues are released when immediate dissemination of news or information within the scholarly community cannot wait until the next regular issue, or when a particular event necessitates prompt communication with the community of scholars.

The newsletter is currently published using the free version of the Mailchimp software, which, unfortunately, has a recipient limit of 2000. To expand the recipient list beyond 2000, either a paid version of the software should be adopted, or a migration to a new software version should be considered. Such a migration would also entail a redesign of the AIEB website, as the submission form used for providing information to the newsletter and the archive of past issues are currently hosted on the AIEB site. In other words, the operation of the newsletter is presently contingent on the design and functionality of the AIEB website.

By the time of the Venice Congress, the "Byzantine News" newsletter reached 1895 recipients worldwide, nearing the capacity limit of the free Mailchimp software. However, due to budget constraints and the interdependency between the newsletter and the AIEB website's design, no immediate measures have been taken to address this issue. This matter requires prompt resolution in the near future.

2. "List of Editions and Translations in Progress" and "Currently and Recently Completed PhD Projects"

In addition to disseminating pertinent news and information for scholars in the field of Byzantine Studies worldwide, the Development Commission, in collaboration with and with the endorsement of the International Bureau, has undertaken two additional projects aimed at transforming the Association of the AIEB's webpage and the organization itself into a hub for international information exchange.

One of these projects is the "Currently and Recently Completed PhD Projects" database. This database serves two primary objectives. First, by providing a comprehensive list of ongoing PhD research topics, it encourages discussions among younger scholars and facilitates the expansion of their scholarly networks. An international professional organization of Byzantinists is ideally positioned to fulfill this purpose, as scholarship and research should ideally transcend national boundaries. Thus, the new PhD projects are collected and categorized at an international, rather than national, level. Unlike platforms like Academia, which also disseminate news and information on ongoing research, the database of PhD projects in progress offers a more focused perspective on current research in our field. Furthermore, it helps showcase ongoing research in Byzantine Studies, shedding light on emerging trends and emphases. This, in turn, prevents unfortunate situations where research on the same author or subject is initiated in one country without awareness that a similar topic is already being researched elsewhere. While in some cases, duplicated efforts can be beneficial for research in general, in others, particularly when it comes to critical editions of an author chosen as a PhD topic, duplication can prove detrimental to the research and the career of a young scholar. It is important to note that the proper implementation of the PhD project database requires advanced programming skills.

The database is closely linked to the AIEB website, and any design changes or modifications should be synchronized with those made to the AIEB site. Much of what has been said about the PhD project database is also applicable to the "List of Editions and Translations in Progress."

Both projects are hosted on the AIEB website and necessitate ongoing attention and maintenance from the AIEB website's webmaster and/or an active member of the

Development Commission with the requisite programming skills, which extend beyond the typical computer skills possessed by regular philologists or historians.

3. "Opportunities Forum"

The third category of activities spearheaded by the Development Commission, particularly developed by Alessandra Bucossi and Sergei Mariev, is the creation of a new format known as the "Opportunities Forum." The concept behind this forum involves inviting representatives from various funding organizations across Europe and worldwide, relevant to our field, to the Congress of Byzantine Studies. The goal is to organize a series of workshops, meetings, and events during the congress that provide participants, especially young scholars, with insights into the diverse funding opportunities available globally for their research endeavors and career advancement.

Within the Opportunities Forum, representatives from different organizations share information on funding opportunities in the humanities. For instance, a representative from the European Commission may provide an overview of funding options like various ERC grants, while a German representative may discuss scholarships available through institutions such as the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), and the Gerda Henkel Foundation. The "Opportunities Forum" aims to inform individual researchers and potential collaborators at all career stages about available funding schemes in our field of study.

While educational fairs and similar events bringing together representatives of national and international organizations with potential researchers are relatively common at universities, at least in Germany, the Congress of Byzantine Studies, as seen in Venice and Padua, offers a unique opportunity. It brings together scholars from one discipline or closely related fields with potential funders. Such encounters can stimulate the formation of new research groups and consortia, generate fresh ideas, and build new networks.

The preparations and plans for the Opportunities Forum were well underway ahead of the International Congress initially intended for Istanbul. Collaborations with representatives from research organizations across Europe, particularly in Germany, were established for the Istanbul Congress. However, the change in the congress venue to Venice and Padua, along with the intermittent challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, made it challenging and, in some cases, impossible to realize the original plan.

Nevertheless, an Opportunities Forum successfully took place during the Congress of Byzantine Studies in Venice, largely due to the efforts of Alessandra Bucossi and the Research Office of the University of Ca' Foscari. The event received positive feedback from participants. The Development Commission recommends that this format become a regular part of future International Congresses and that the experience gained during its initial implementation be used to replicate and expand on this initiative.

4. Funding, Cooperation with UNESCO, and Legal Issues

As known, the AIEB's budget relies entirely on fees paid by the National Committees that are part of the AIEB. While this source of revenue is sufficient to sustain the organization's essential activities and provide some support for young scholars, having a larger budget would undoubtedly enable the AIEB to undertake more activities and fund additional projects. Since the AIEB has not received funds from the European Union or

other significant funding bodies in its recent history, it is essential to explore new avenues to potentially secure additional funding.

President Johann Haldon encouraged Sergei Mariev to attend the Congress of the Union of International Associations (uia.org) held in Brussels (15th Round Table Europe – 19 May 2022). During this event, Sergei Mariev participated in several workshops, such as the Workshop "Why is the United Nations relevant to YOUR Association?" by Cyril Ritchie, President of UIA, as well as "Achieving goals, finding partners: UIA's Global Civil Society Database" and "Revising Your Association's Statutes: How to get Started." These workshops, designed for international organizations like the AIEB, provided valuable insights into potential funding sources for international professional organizations based in Europe. They also explored ways to establish cooperation with UNESCO and addressed legal issues related to the statutes of international organizations, which may have been formulated some time ago and require revision to align with recent developments in European law governing the operation of such organizations.

Part 2: Membership Development:

The Development Commission has originally counted following members:

Alessandra Bucossi
Ioannis Eliades
Karsten Fledelius
Gerasimos Merianos
Ljubomir Milanovic
Angel Nikolov
Sergei Mariev
Johannes Preiser-Kapeller
Jean-Michel Spieser
Dionysios Stathakopoulos
Conor Whately
Marcin Wołoszyn

Alessandra Bucossi has resigned from this commission on January 19, 2018.

After consultation with the President of the AIEB during the summer of 2023 and several appeals via email to all listed members of the commission, the following list of active members has been established:

Ioannis Eliades
Sergei Mariev
Gerasimos Merianos
Ljubomir Milanović
Johannes Preiser-Kapeller
Conor Whately

Part 3: Suggestions Presented at the General Assembly During the International Congress in Venice and Padua

The following suggestions were presented by Sergei Mariev to the General Assembly during the 24th International Congress held in Venice in August 2022. In order to ensure the functioning of this commission and to maintain the same positive spirit of innovation and service to the international community of Byzantinists, the commission proposes inviting new members to join.

Each member who wishes to become a part of this commission should propose a new project that they believe would benefit the AIEB as a whole. This project should not be a mere suggestion that, if implemented by others, would greatly benefit the AIEB. Instead, it should be a realistic project that can be executed by the prospective commission member within a specific timeframe and with the available resources.

The proposals should be reviewed by the current members of the commission and the international bureau. Prospective applicants whose proposed projects are approved should then be invited to join the commission and work on their proposed projects.