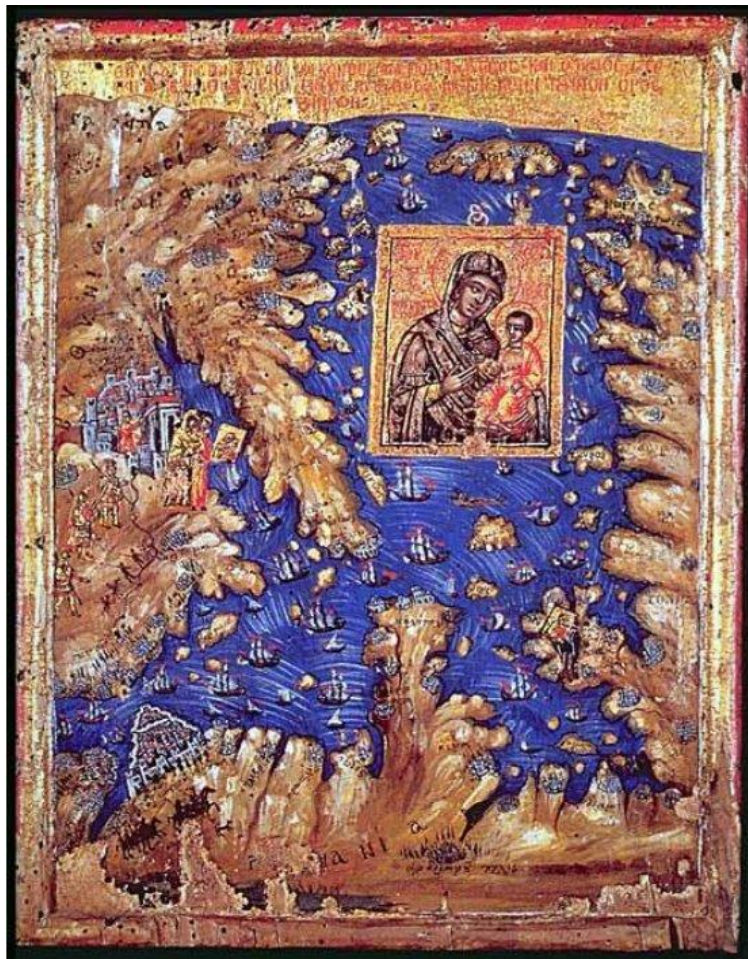


## **Sacred Mobilities in Byzantium and Beyond: People, Objects and Relics**



**2021 Virtual Byzantine Colloquium**

**1-2 June 2021**

**Senate House, University of London  
Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU**

Frontispiece: Icon of the 'wanderings' of the miraculous icon  
of Our Lady the Portaitissa (18th c.)  
© Holy Monastery of Iveron, Mt Athos

## **Sacred Mobilities in Byzantium and Beyond:**

### **People, Objects and Relics**

All religious belief implicates space; all religious practice makes geography. In the broad sense, the term 'sacred' indicates something 'different', 'set apart', 'other', as well as something invested with special meaning. Yet, where do the boundaries of the sacred lie? Is sacred space an ontological given, or is it a social construction? Is it a portion of territory or the product of a set of embodied practices? Is it permanent or ephemeral?

Over the past two decades, the construction, experience and use of sacred space have generated increasing scholarly interest in the humanities, including Byzantine studies—from Alexei Lidov's pioneering studies in hierotopy (2006) to more recent interdisciplinary initiatives (e.g., the 2019 conference 'Mapping the Sacred in Byzantium' at Newcastle University). Far from being understood as a fixed given entity, in these recent studies sacred space has intersected with issues of embodiment and performance, with environmental perceptions, attitudes and practice, with social mobility and identity, with the relations of private and public space, and with geopolitics and territorial imaginations. At the same time, the so-called 'Mobility Turn' (Sheller and Urry 2006) has extended from the domain of the social sciences to the humanities, prompting among historians, archaeologists and art historians new questions, approaches and understandings of issues of transport, movement and circulation of people, objects and ideas.

Our Colloquium aims at setting these two strands—sacred space and mobility—in conversation with each other, in order to gain further insight into Byzantine and post-Byzantine spiritual culture.

In addition to conventional sacred spaces such as churches, shrines and religiously significant topographical features (such as holy mountains or caves, for example), holy people, sacred objects and relics were frequently used to create or sanctify other public or private profane spaces in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world, and remain key to Orthodox worship. The mobility of certain sacra linked sacred sites with potentially new sacred destinations; it created new trajectories; it helped articulate and sustain the extra-ordinary within the ordinary. Sacred mobilities thus upset the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane as mutually exclusive. Examples of such mobilities include, but are not limited to travelling icons, processions, pilgrimages, the translation of relics, the reproduction of holy images and architecture.

Our speakers reflect on different types of sacred mobilities, including the use of sanctifying materialities, the duration of the transformation of sacred space, and the creation of ‘infra-secular geographies’ in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world.

Our Colloquium takes place via Zoom. To register please use the following link: <https://ics.sas.ac.uk/events/event/23337>

**Please note that in the programme below the time indicates GMT (London time). You would need to convert this into your local time.**

## Programme

### Tuesday 1 June

17.00	Welcome by GREG WOOLF, ICS Director
17.05	Opening remarks by CHARALAMBOS DENDRINOS RHUL Hellenic Institute Director
17.15	<b>Keynote address</b> Prof. ALEXEI LIDOV (Russian Academy, Moscow) <i>Sacred mobilities and the performative nature of Byzantine hierotopic phenomena</i>
17.50	<i>Tea/coffee break</i>
	<b>Session 1: Mobilities of sacred texts and holy images</b>
	Chair: Prof. VERONICA DELLA DORA (RHUL)
18.00	Prof. BISSERA V. PENTCHEVA (Stanford University) <i>The dynamics of prayer at Hosios Loukas</i>
18.15	Dr EKATERINE GEDEVANISHVILI (Giorgi Chubinashvili National Research Centre for Georgian Art History and Heritage Preservation) <i>Mobility of text: a key to understanding the murals of the Svipi façade painting</i>
18.30	Dr MARK GUSCIN (RHUL) <i>The translation of the Image of Edessa to Constantinople: politics, religion and dynastic ambition</i>
18.45	Discussion
	Closing remarks by Revd DAVID-JOHN WILLIAMS

## Wednesday 2 June

16:55	Opening remarks by Revd DAVID-JOHN WILLIAMS
	<b>Session 2: Mobilities of holy people and relics</b>
	Chair: Prof. ALEXEI LIDOV
17:00	Dr MIHAIL MITREA (Institute for South-East European Studies, Romanian Academy) <i>Mobility and sacred space in late Byzantine miracle collections</i>
17:15	Prof. ANDREW JOTISCHKY (RHUL) <i>A saint in motion: St Katherine of Alexandria and her relics in East and West (11<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> c.)</i>
17:30	Revd DAVID-JOHN WILLIAMS (RHUL) <i>Memory, translating sacra, and shared sacred spaces (5<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c.)</i>
17:45	DISCUSSION
18:00	BREAK
	<b>Session 3: Sacred mobilities beyond Byzantium</b>
	Chair: Prof. ANDREW JOTISCHKY
18:15	Dr CHRYSOVALANTIS KYRIACOU (Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation/RHUL) <i>Sacred mobilities and multiple identities: early modern Christians from Cyprus and the shadow of Byzantium</i>
18:30	Prof. REHAV RUBIN (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) <i>The proskynetaria map-icons of the Holy Land</i>
18:45	Dr MARIA LITINA (National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation) <i>Sacred mobilities and the metochia of the Holy Sepulchre in the Balkans (1845-1900)</i>

19.00	Discussion
19.15	Break
	Session 4: <b>Mobilities and assembling the sacred</b>
	Chair: Dr MARK GUSCIN
19:30	Dr LANA SLOUTSKY (Boston) <i>The sacred mobility of Thomas Whittemore's objects</i>
19:45	Revd ANTONIOS KAKALIS (Newcastle University) <i>Assembling a limen: the biography of an iconostasis</i>
20.00	Discussion
20.15	Roundtable discussion moderated by Prof. VERONICA DELLA DORA
20.45	Closing remarks by Dr CHARALAMBOS DENDRINOS

### **Organising Committee:**

Dr Mark Guscin, Revd David-John Williams, Prof. Veronica della Dora and Dr Charalambos Dendrinos

## Abstracts

Dr ALEXEI LIDOV

Director of the Department of Ancient Culture

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### *Sacred mobilities and the performative nature of Byzantine hierotopic phenomena*

The creation of sacred spaces, or hierotopy, is interpreted as a specific form of creativity and an independent field of historical and cultural studies. In the context of hierotopy the very concept of “spatial icons” was shaped, in the sense of images purposefully presented in space, not of some flat depictions or material objects. By using the notion “icon” not as a formal or ornamental term but as a conceptual one, we mark images-mediators designed to connect our world with the heavenly and earthly realms — this ‘medietivity’ makes all iconic images differ from common pictures on religious topics. The most important characteristic of spatial icons, and hierotopy, is their ‘performativity’. They are in constant movement, transforming as a living milieu formed with ritual gestures, light, aromas and even with the most active human perception which re-acts anew at the surrounding world. The paper discusses some significant examples of ‘sacred mobilities’, based on my recent historical reconstructions of little-known Byzantine phenomena and considers challenges to traditional methodology, the need for new terminology and a system of notions, including the ‘image-paradigm’.

Prof. Lidov’s contribution to the study of sacred space has been profound through his work on *hierotopy* (ἱεροτοπία), a term he coined, consisting of the Greek words *hieros* (sacred) and *topos* (place, space, notion), which defined a new area of research, namely the “creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of creativity, and a field of historical research which reveals and analyses the particular examples of that creativity”.



## NOTES

Prof. BISSERA V. PENTCHEVA  
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*The dynamics of prayer at Hosios Loukas*

The mosaics of the monastery of Hosios Loukas offer one of the most compelling programs from the Middle Byzantine period. The sheer beauty of the figural images and the opulence of marble and gold are in stark contrast with the surrounding mountain landscape and the modern sense of isolation. The artistic richness of the surviving artefacts confirms the monastery's original strong connections with Constantinople and Mediterranean trade and pilgrimage networks. The promotion of the cult of Hosios Loukas is deeply invested in the process of standardization of the ecclesiastical calendar in the Byzantine capital in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the completion of the large project of writing liturgical poetry and music for the Kanon. The paper explores how the cult of Hosios Loukas successfully mobilized many artistic channels in order to secure and promote the charisma of the patron saint: the writing of a *Vita*, the construction and decoration of an extensive figural program, and the composition of new poetry and music for the celebration of the saint's Feast. Hosios Loukas promoted the efficacy of prayer and this study uncovers how the saint's intercession is imagined, activated, and experienced at the site.

Prof. Pentcheva's work is informed by anthropology, music, and phenomenology focusing on the changing appearance of objects and architectural spaces. She relies on film to capture this temporal animation stirred by candlelight. Another important strand of her work engages the sonic envelope of the visual —music and acoustics— and employs auralizations that digitally imprint the performance of chant with the acoustic signature of the specific interior for which it was composed.

## NOTES

Dr EKATERINE GEDEVANISHVILI

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*Mobility of text: a key to understanding the murals of the Svipi façade painting*

The theme of sacred mobility in secondary literature mostly focuses on issues of the mobility of relics, objects and topography, while the importance of texts in this context is underestimated. The murals decorating the façade of St George's church at Svipi (12<sup>th</sup> c.) represent an example of the immediate influence of the 'mobility' of text on visual art. The façade painting depicts the scene of the Hospitality of Abraham with the images of the Holy Warriors. Among the Holy Warriors, St Demetrius of Thessalonica occupies a dominant place. The prominence of St Demetrius in the murals of a church dedicated to St George would appear quite unusual. The specificity of this choice can be explained by the presumable donor of the painting – the kind Demetre I (1125-1156), whose patron saint was his namesake St Demetrius (the trace of the royal donation in Svipi is variously attested). The unique subject matter of the scene – the Trinity and the representation of the Holy Warriors as an integral part of the Old Testament scene – can be traced in the 17<sup>th</sup> homily on St Demetrius written by Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886-912), illustrating the 'meeting' between St Demetrius and Abraham. The interlacing of text and image at the church of Svipi, located in the highest and most remote region of Georgia (Svaneti), attests in a rather interesting way to the 'boundlessness' of the 'globalized', 'mobile' medieval world.

Dr Gedevanishvili's research interests cover medieval art of the Christian East, the cult and image of holy warriors, the correlation of the text and image in medieval art. The research for this paper was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia and represents part of the grant "Cult and Image of Military Saints in Medieval Georgian Culture".

## NOTES

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*The translation of the Image of Edessa to Constantinople: politics, religion and dynastic ambition*

The Image of Edessa was an image of Christ which according to tradition was miraculously imprinted onto a cloth by Christ shortly before the passion and sent to Edessa, whose king, Abgar, had asked Christ to visit him to cure him of a skin disease. The Image is first documented in Edessa in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century and it remained there throughout the Iconoclastic crisis. In 944 the emperor Romanus Lecapenus (919-44) decided to bring the relic from Edessa to Constantinople in an attempt to give the impression of divine approval for his rule and dynasty. The attempt was a failure, as in the same year, Lecapenus' own sons removed him from power, and almost immediately the rightful heir, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-59), overcame them all and became emperor, appropriating the translation of the Image as divine approval of his own rule. In the *Narratio de imagine edessena*, written under his auspices, a passage is included in which a man possessed of an evil spirit prophesies (and was thereby cured), claiming that the translation of the image shows that Constantine was taking his rightful throne. The mobility of the sacred object was used (both successfully by Constantine and unsuccessfully by Lecapenus) to justify imperial authority, both politically and religiously. The paper also offers some modern examples.

Dr Guscin's research interests focus on the Face of Christ in art and hagiography, the Image of Edessa (Mandylion) and the Veronica, Byzantine history and iconography.

## NOTES

Dr MIHAIL MITREA

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*Mobility and sacred space in late Byzantine miracle collections*

Collections of miracles gather stories of healings, protection, punishments and other miraculous deeds holy men and women effected posthumously. These miracle tales convey and construct the image of communities united by their faith in the miraculous powers of certain holy persons, whose benefits they solicit by seeking their shrines. This mobility in search of saints' protection and delivery from worldly burdens assumes multiple forms, including dream visions, and traces the contours of saints' cultic spheres and areas of veneration. By selecting miracles for inclusion in collections, hagiographers arguably construct a spiritual area of influence for their heroes, usually radiating from their shrines, thereby contributing to an even broader reach of their cultic influence. The paper offers an analysis of late Byzantine miracle collections, including the posthumous miracles wrought by Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople (1289-93, 1303-9) and Gregory Palamas (1296-1357/9), looking at the geographical distribution of miracles, the mobility of the beneficiaries to the shrines of the saints and the proxemics and kinesics involved in stories of healing. Particular attention will be devoted to instances of imagined mobility, which include dream visions of visits to shrines or visitations by the saints.

Dr Mitrea's research interests focus on late Byzantine literature, hagiography, epistolography, theology, as well as Greek palaeography and textual criticism.



## NOTES

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*A saint in motion: St Katherine of Alexandria and her relics in East and West (11<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> c.)*

Relics of St Katherine of Alexandria are attested in relic collections and miracle accounts in western Europe, from the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, even before the earliest accounts of pilgrimage to her shrine on Mt Sinai. The Latin-speaking presence in the eastern Mediterranean as a result of the Crusades gave fresh impetus to devotion to the saint through pilgrimage to Sinai, and the widespread dispersal of the sacred oil from her bones. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, St Katherine became one of the best-known and most widely venerated saints in the West. Although the Latin version of St Katherine's life originally derived from the Byzantine calendar, the characterization of the saint, in Latin and vernacular texts and in visual culture and popular devotion, developed in markedly different ways in the West from her veneration in the Orthodox Church. The paper explores the dynamics of sacred mobilities by examining the movement of what was originally a Greek saint's cult to the West, and its re-import to the Crusader East, focusing on the transfer of hagiographical traditions based on questions of materiality: principally the identification of the shrine on Mt Sinai in the twelfth century, and the importance of oil-exuding bones as means of disseminating widespread veneration.

Prof. Jotischky's research interests lie broadly speaking in medieval religious history and culture; more specifically, in monasticism, pilgrimage and Latin-Greek Orthodox contacts and relations.

## NOTES

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*Memory, translating sacra, and shared sacred spaces (5<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> c.)*

Sacred spaces of the pre-modern Mediterranean became shared in a variety of ways. Spatial contestation, competition and varying degrees of tolerance account for the fact that one place often has multiple narratives. The construction of narrative and memory allows the hierophany associated with a sacred space to be reinterpreted in a way that accommodates various forms of spatial sharing. In the pre-modern Mediterranean we find the incorporation of Islamic elements into the foundation narratives of several prominent sacred spaces. This paper will explore the use of memory as an hierotopic device in the conversion of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and the Church of St John in Damascus into mosques. These Islamic narratives serve to move Islamic sacred objects, hagiography and geography into the history of the sacred spaces. In the case of Hagia Sophia, the sacred land of Mecca was made present in the mortar of the dome through the use of Meccan earth, water of Zamzam and the saliva of the Prophet. In the case of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, a repetition of the Byzantine narrative of the finding of the head of St John the Baptist featuring Caliph Al-Walid I (707-715) placed the relics firmly within an Islamic context.

Father David's research interests focus on Byzantine spirituality, sacred materialities, cross religious dialogue, shared sacred spaces and syncretism.

## NOTES

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*Sacred mobilities and multiple identities: early modern Christians from Cyprus and the shadow of Byzantium*

The Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1570/71 was a watershed in the history of the Mediterranean. For the Christians of Cyprus, including Greeks, Latins, Armenians, Copts, Jacobites, and Maronites, the island's incorporation into the multi-faith empire of the Ottomans was a moment of new beginnings, both in terms of their inter-confessional relationship, and in their encounters with the Muslim elites and the Western Christian world. The long experience of ethnic, cultural, and confessional co-existence in the geographical microcosm of Cyprus, already since Byzantine times, enabled historical agents to develop multiple identities, responding to the realistic need of everyday communication and exchange, while also preserving their sense of collective belonging in its various expression, such as language, faith, social bonds, customs, and dress among other. The paper traces the footsteps of two early modern Cypriot ecclesiastics: Giulio Stavriano, Armenian bishop in Cyprus (1561-71) and Catholic bishop of Bova in Calabria (1571-77), and Antonios Darkes (fl. ca. 1589–1645), a Greek priest of Latin descent who visited the Holy Land as a pilgrim in ca. 1589 and later published a poetic narrative of his pilgrimage in Venice (1645). By focusing on these two stories of sacred mobility as cases of “exceptional normality” we are able to understand more deeply the mechanics of identity preservation, negotiation, and conflict, especially with relation to the religious and cultural heritage of Byzantium in Italy, Cyprus, and the Holy Land.

Dr Kyriakou's research interests cover Byzantine and post-Byzantine history and culture in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly Orthodox Cypriot society, spirituality and identities under Latin rule (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c).

## NOTES

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*The Proskynetaria map-icons of the Holy Land*

Between the early 18th and the early 20th century, large icons were painted in Jerusalem and sold to pilgrims of the Orthodox communities as sacred memorabilia. These icons, known as *Proskynetaria*, *Hierosolymitike* or *Panagiotafitika*, were taken by the pilgrims to their home communities, where they were venerated. A special subgroup of these icons presented the holy places in the Holy Land in their geographical setting, thus creating a map-like image portraying the Holy Land as an Orthodox sacred space. They may, therefore, be defined as Orthodox map-icons of the Holy Land. These map-icons are oriented to the East, from the Mediterranean coast in the West (lower part) to the Jordan River in the East (top), and from the Galilee on the North (left) to Bethlehem on the South (right). In their centre an enlarged image of the Holy Sepulchre is portrayed, encircled by a detailed image of Jerusalem, its wall and its churches. These icons which the pilgrims brought back to their home communities, where used there repeatedly as an implement for virtual pilgrimage by the members of these communities. The paper presents this type of icons, discusses their contents as a reflection of sacred space and analyzes their purpose and messages both for their producers and the pilgrims who bought them.

Prof. Rubin's research interests lie in historical geography and the history of cartography and mapping, mainly of the Holy Land/Israel.



## NOTES

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*Sacred mobilities and the metochia of the Holy Sepulchre in the Balkans (1845-1900)*

The establishment of a network of *metochia* (dependencies) of the Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople and the Balkans between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries played a crucial role in consolidating the presence of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in regions outside its jurisdiction in the Ottoman Empire. Operating like embassies or consulates, the principal aim of the *metochia* was to secure financial support towards the Patriarchate's enormous debts in order to continue preserving and maintaining the Holy Shrines in the Holy Land, and defending the Patriarchate's privileges against territorial claims by other Christian denominations. Apart from their practical function the *metochia* also embodied the sacred space of the holiest of cities and the centre of Christendom, Jerusalem. They served as centres and staging posts for pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land and for monks travelling from the Holy Land who toured around towns and villages outside Palestine, carrying mobile sacred objects for veneration and worship, together with alms collection boxes for donations. At the same time pilgrims brought back to their homes *proskynētaría*, *synchōrochartia*, sacred objects, or simply water and soil from the Holy Land as blessing and proof of their physical presence in the holy places they had visited. The paper examines these aspects of sacred mobilities through evidence in unpublished letters and reports between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and its metochia in Constantinople and the Balkans in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Dr Litina's research interests focus on Balkan history and historiography (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c.), Greek-Bulgarian relations, and the presence of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Balkans.

## NOTES

Dr LANA SLOUTSKY

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*The sacred mobility of Thomas Whittemore's objects*

Thomas Whittemore (1871-1950) was a Bostonian philanthropist, scholar and founder of the Byzantine Institute of America, who famously helped excavate and preserve the mosaics of Hagia Sophia. In addition, he collected many portable sacred objects, including Russian and Byzantine icons, crosses, and reliquaries. These pieces, which greatly varied in chronology, geography, style, and material, were emblematic of Whittemore's erudition, diverse taste, and outstanding access to such objects. Initially part of his vast personal collection, many of these were later gifted by Whittemore or his estate to prominent cultural institutions, such as the Harvard University Art Museums, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. These pieces became integral parts of public collections and served to draw attention to the depth of Byzantine visual culture and help contextualize other artistic traditions. Today, the majority of these pieces are still prominently displayed in their respective museums, usually in galleries dedicated to European or broadly Mediterranean art. The paper presents Thomas Whittemore as a collector, connoisseur, and scholar of Orthodox material culture. By closely looking at several specific pieces in terms of their provenance and current display, issues of mobility will be brought to light. What was Whittemore's relationship to the recipients of his collection? Where did his collected objects originate? How did he acquire them? How are they currently displayed and what is their role in the museum? How has that role changed in the last century? These and other related questions will be addressed.

Dr Sloutsky's research interests cover Russian icons and women in Byzantine culture.

## NOTES

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*Assembling a limen: the biography of an Iconostasis*

*"[The Church] is a solid building that is going to be divided, (...) into the space for the priests, the holy place, and that for the laymen, the temple. However, it remains one in its existence (...) Moreover, referring to its unity are discharged from their nominal difference showing their sharing identity. And even if they mutually exist the one for the other, they still have a different meaning".* St. Maximus the Confessor vividly describes the mutual interrelation between the sanctuary and the nave of the church. This paper unpacks the liminal dynamics of the line between these two parts, a line that simultaneously divides and unites them. Traditionally connected with different structures, this boundary has been mostly inhabited in Church history by the Iconostasis (templon – τέμπλον), which is explored here as something more than just a screen; it is studied as a place that transforms a boundary into a phenomenon of liturgical inhabitation. The biography of the Iconostasis of the Orthodox Church of Saint Andrew in Edinburgh, Scotland unpacks the mobility aspects of Iconostasis in a rather dynamic way, as besides its embodied liturgical movements, it is also a materialisation of its transnational congregation. Liturgical movement is combined with an ethos of inclusivity that has been practiced by the community, since its establishment in 1948. Assembling stories of transborder movement, the piece is penetrated through ritual choreographies, sounds and odours, becoming a 'spatial icon' of the interconnection between the members of the Church and between them and the Divine.

Father Antonios' research interests focus on the conditions of embodied experience of the architecture and natural landscape with special emphasis on the role of atmosphere.

## NOTES

**We gratefully acknowledge the generous support  
we received towards the organising  
of this Colloquium from:**

Professor Greg Woolf and Mrs Valery James  
Institute of Classical Studies  
School of Advanced Studies  
University of London

Our speakers and moderators of sessions

The Hellenic Institute and the Centre for the GeoHumanities,  
Royal Holloway, University of London



**THE HELLENIC INSTITUTE**



**Centre for the GeoHumanities**

Back cover: Icon of St Christopher  
Painted by Georgi Chimev (21<sup>st</sup> c.)  
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