



# 15th Day of Byzantine Studies

## Abstracts

Adam Kuvik (Masaryk University, PhD Candidate)

### *Early Byzantine élites and the Court of Constantinople: Presentation of the thesis and the preliminary conclusions*

This thesis focuses on the interactions between the imperial court in Constantinople and Byzantine élites of the early Byzantine period (451-610). The time frame of is defined by the decline of the Theodosian dynasty (emperor Marcian), and two important dynasties: the Thracian dynasty (Leo I, Leo II, Zeno, Anastasius), and then the dynasty of Justinian up to the usurpation of Phocas.

Two sub-theses are followed throughout the thesis: first, and the most important, is the role of the Byzantine imperial court as a political, cultural and social institution that influenced the world of the Eastern Roman élites (and *vice versa*). Second, how these mutual influences, marked by the diverse backgrounds of power, status, and personal experiences of the aristocracy, brought about the slow but gradual privatization of Eastern Roman governance - a transfer from public into private hands. Within this line of inquiry, specific attention is paid to the shifting interests of dominant individuals, interests that would promote their own prestige rather than that of the state. Corrupt and unfair practices by senior state officials are also considered within this sub-thesis. It would also be interesting to include how these changes advanced or declined during the reigns of energetic and zealous emperors, such as Justinian and Heraclius, who are considered strong reformers.

This paper will present two sub-conclusions (out of three) focusing on the first part of the dissertation (from the reign of emperor Marcian up until that of Anastasius).

Jaroslav Říha (Masaryk University, MA Student)

*Monarchical exclusivity in Byzantine art: concept, characteristics, use*  
Byzantine emperors (and members of their family) reserved the most valuable and most unique materials, which emphasized their exceptionality and introduced a visible association of the artistic object with the ruler himself. There were prohibitions on the wearing or keeping of these rare objects by unauthorized persons. The function of the mentioned phenomenon was primarily to consolidate and strengthen power through that association, mainly against the pressures of the nobility and secondly to give monarch's majesty a visible exclusivity.



Osman Yuksel Ozdemir (Central European University, PhD Candidate)

### From Bible to Storyworlds: A Narratological Comparative Approach to the Annunciation Narrative in Romanos the Melodist and Jacob of Serugh

During the early sixth century, doctrinal divisions between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian factions created separate church hierarchies and liturgical divides. Amid these tensions, Romanos the Melodist (c. 485–560) and Jacob of Serugh (451–521) emerged in distinct liturgical contexts yet employed strikingly similar storytelling models. Romanos, a deacon in Constantinople, composed Greek *kontakia*, while Jacob, a *periodeutes* in the Edessa-Serugh region, authored Syriac *mimre*. Both expanded biblical narratives within feast-day liturgies, weaving imagined monologues and dialogues into their scriptural retellings.

Despite performing in different languages and traditions, Romanos and Jacob engaged with comparable poetic forms—metrical verse framed by doxological elements, marked by chanting rhythms, acrostics, and biblical expansions. Some studies have explored their formal similarities and intertextual connections, particularly regarding Romanos' possible influences from Syriac literature. However, these discussions often focus on source identification rather than broader literary traditions and training.

This presentation, based on my dissertation's first chapter, examines how Romanos and Jacob engage with Luke 1:24–38 to craft their own Annunciation narratives. Through a narratological lens, I explore their use of suspense and surprise, analyzing how their expansions and alterations of the biblical text reflect differing preferences for mimetic versus diegetic storytelling and dynamic versus stable characterizations. By situating Romanos and Jacob within a Late Antique milieu of storytelling and rewriting, this study moves beyond influence debates to highlight shared rhetorical and narrative techniques in their liturgical poetry.

Vladislav Knoll (Czech Academy of Sciences, Senior Researcher)

### Byzantine sources of grammatical theory in a 17th-century Slavonic textbook for Romanians

While preparing an edition of a mid-17th-century manual of Church Slavonic grammatical theory for Romanian speakers, I came across currently unusual grammatical concepts, such as seven grammatical genders or forgotten grammatical categories. The main source for the manual was the most influential Church Slavonic grammar ever written: Smotryc'kyj's grammar of 1619 (Vievis, Lithuania). So I assumed that there was plenty of bibliography on the subject. Strangely enough, this topic seems to have attracted almost no interest from scholars. In my paper I will look for the explanation of these concepts in the grammars of Manuel Moschopoulos, Constantine Lascaris and the Greek grammar of Philipp Melanchthon.



Pavla Gkantzios Drápelová (Czech Academy of Sciences, Reserarcher)

### Beyond the Stereotype: Bohumila Zástěrová's Approach to barbarians in early Byzantine Sources

The topic of the image of barbarians in written sources and the reliability of the information provided about them has been a subject of scholarly discussion for years. In both the past and the present, various approaches have emerged, ranging from those that tended to take information literally to those that approached the reliability of sources with great skepticism. Bohumila Zástěrová, a well-known Czech Byzantinist, whose 110th birth anniversary we are commemorating this year, began addressing this topic in the 1960s. Some of her works are still considered pioneering and continue to be frequently cited in foreign literature focused on early Slavs and Avars. This paper aims to present her main positions and demonstrate the originality of her research, highlighting how her studies can continue to enrich our understanding today.

Ian Randall (Masaryk University, Researcher)

### From the Mountains to the City: Romanitas, Slavic Ware, and Identity Formation in Early Medieval Thessaly

Maps of Early Medieval Thessaly are notoriously vague. Between the 6th and 9th centuries it is not exactly clear where imperial control ends and what are deemed Slavic areas begin. While it is true that northwestern Thessaly has the highest concentration of Slavic toponyms in Greece, just when this became the case is unknown, nor what the situation on the ground was like following the erosion of Avar power and active imperial neglect. This paper examines reflexive identity formation vis a vis material culture during these obscure centuries. By using the lens of 'communities of practice' a contextual definition of 'Romanitas,' based in the materiality of lived practice in Thessaly during these centuries, is approached and placed alongside that from other areas of the empire. Dining wares and cooking ceramics from survey and excavation in Thessaly are employed, as well as mortuary data from several sites in the Lower Balkans as well as traditionally identified Slavic material culture from the end of the Avar khagnate onwards. This 'bottom up' approach to identity practices serves to provide some clues as to what it meant to live, and enact, Thessalian identity and 'Romanness' during the transitional Early Middle Ages.