



Dumbarton Oaks, II. The Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine studies

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II. THE DUMBARTON OAKS CENTER FOR BYZANTINE STUDIES

Ernst Kitzinger

The Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection was founded by Mr. and Mrs. Bliss as a center of scholarship "in the Byzantine and Mediaeval humanities." As other activities developed in and near Dumbarton Oaks in the early 1960's — when the Pre-Columbian Collection and the Garden Library were added and Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies was built on an adjacent hill — it was decided to define the institution's primary concern more clearly by designating the Byzantine library, collection, and research institution as the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies.

Byzantine studies, particularly in art, have flourished in America for over two generations. The Department of Art and Archaeology of Princeton University which has promoted, or helped to promote, major projects, such as the archaeological expeditions to Syria, Sardis, Antioch, and Sinai, the Index of Christian Art, the corpus of Greek illuminated manuscripts of the Septuagint, and the *Studies in Manuscript Illumination*, has long held a leading position in this field. During the same years in which Mr. and Mrs. Bliss built up their collection, Thomas Whittemore founded the Byzantine Institute, and began to uncover and publish the mosaics of Saint Sophia and other Byzantine monuments. Dumbarton Oaks, while also having a primary focus in the visual arts, has had special opportunities through being limited in its work neither by conventional departmental boundaries nor by a commitment to a particular task of salvage or discovery; and has become a center for an integrated study of Byzantine civilization as a whole. Researches in history, literature, theology, liturgy, music, and law have been carried on side by side with studies in art and archaeology, and wherever possible opportunities have been sought for the various disciplines to throw light on one another.

The period with which the Center is specifically concerned begins with the founding of Constantinople in 326 and ends with the fall of the city to the Turks in 1453. Byzantium's antecedents in the Hellenistic and Roman periods are also considered as directly relevant.

Geographically, the field of interest is not confined to the political boundaries of the Eastern Empire, but includes the entire sphere of Byzantine cultural influence in the Slavic and Near Eastern countries, as well as in the Latin West. In fact, it is the aim of Dumbarton Oaks to comprehend the contribution and achievement of the Eastern Empire within the framework of medieval history and civilization as a whole. The collection and the library, the programs of research and publication, and the academic staff have been formed in accordance with these principles.

Within its special field the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Center offers to the student what are undoubtedly the most complete and comprehensive research facilities in the world today. Its two most important resources — the library and the collection — will be described below in separate sections. Other research tools are a card index listing every title in the bibliographies of the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* and of Krumbacher's *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur* (arranged by authors, with a second copy gradually being developed into a comprehensive subject index, parts of which will soon be published in book form); a photographic copy of the Princeton Index of Christian Art; a steadily expanding file of photographs of works of early Christian, Byzantine, and medieval art and architecture; and, distinct from this, a census of objects of early Christian and Byzantine art in the United States and Canada, comprising photographs and descriptive data. Available to all qualified persons, these facilities attract scholars, both American and foreign, even aside from those who hold regular appointments at Dumbarton Oaks.

Because of its physical separation from Harvard the Center cannot combine research with instruction in the normal manner of university institutes. A small permanent faculty is supplemented each year by a number of visiting scholars, temporarily invited, and by others who hold special appointments. Dumbarton Oaks seeks to contribute to the raising of a new generation of Byzantinists primarily through a fellowship program, under which advanced graduate and postdoctoral students are enabled to spend periods, normally of one or two years, at the library in pursuit of their work. But the core of the Center's activities is research, discussion, and publication.

This is not the place to give a complete survey of research projects in which the institution as a whole or individual members have been or currently are engaged. There are several major projects in art and

archaeology, with mosaics and mural paintings, on the one hand, and architectural monuments, on the other, forming principal foci of interest. Field work in Istanbul and elsewhere, which Dumbarton Oaks has been carrying out since the early 1950's (first on behalf of the Byzantine Institute and more recently under its own auspices), provides a steady and continuing impetus for studies in these subjects. Mention must also be made of Mr. R. L. Van Nice's architectural survey of the church of Saint Sophia in Istanbul, a monumental enterprise of which the first installment was published in 1966; and of the catalogues of the Dumbarton Oaks collections of art objects and of coins, of which five volumes have so far been issued. Concurrently the Center has endeavored to promote the study and publication of Byzantine texts. For this purpose it has joined a long-term international effort to produce a new *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, of which the first volume was published by Dumbarton Oaks in 1967. Source publications, however, are not considered an end in themselves, but rather a basis for historical research. Many of the studies carried out at Dumbarton Oaks bring into play the different disciplines represented by its scholars. There has been, and continues to be, considerable interchange of ideas and information between art historians, historians, philologists, and theologians as well as specialists in other pertinent fields such as numismatics and epigraphy. Among the topics which have proved particularly notable rallying points for different scholars are Byzantine iconoclasm and the phase of Byzantine political and intellectual history centered in the figure of the Patriarch Photius.

Discussion and interchange are, indeed, a major function of the Center, even aside from formalized research projects. The workings and effects of these exchanges are no less important for being to a considerable extent intangible. They take place between individual faculty members, between them and the Fellows, between residents and visiting scholars. An annual series of public lectures—mostly by visitors from other institutions—also provides opportunities for the interchange of ideas and information. Dumbarton Oaks further promotes debate on major problems in its chosen field through its symposia, the topics of which usually are chosen in such a way as to be of interest to representatives of various disciplines and to provide opportunities for a meeting of minds operating in different specialized fields. The focal point may be a monument, a place or area, a period,

a sector or aspect of Byzantine civilization, or Byzantium's relation to an adjoining culture. A regular annual feature of the institution's program almost from the beginning, the symposia are henceforth to be replaced every other year by colloquia of a more specialized character with a more restricted attendance.

The principal *raison d'être*, however, of the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Center, as of any research institute, is publication. A substantial portion of the work done by Dumbarton Oaks scholars is printed under other auspices. Its own publications, though primarily vehicles of work actually done at the Center or by scholars associated with it, also from time to time provide hospitality to authors who have no connection with Dumbarton Oaks. The series of *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* was started in 1941 with a volume containing the lectures held at the inauguration of Dumbarton Oaks as a Harvard institution the previous year. At first issued at irregular intervals, the series has been published annually since 1953. The *Papers* can accommodate writings of substantial length that normally would not find room in a periodical. Since 1956 the *Papers* have functioned as a vehicle for the publication of the field reports of the Byzantine Institute, and more recently, of the field work carried out by Dumbarton Oaks itself. They also serve to publish under one cover a portion of the papers read at one of the symposia. Larger works that warrant individual publication in book form are issued in another series known as *Dumbarton Oaks Studies*. Other series — already mentioned — are the *Dumbarton Oaks Texts*, the catalogues of various parts of the collections, and the bibliographies now in preparation.

It is an aim of historical studies in our time to achieve an integrated picture of the past, to view together the political, social, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual forces that shaped it and to understand their interaction. The Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies has set itself this task for one particular civilization. In a sense its work is a test tube experiment in modern *Kulturgeschichte*, carried out under exceptionally favorable conditions. They are favorable, not only because of the external circumstances which have been mentioned, but also because Byzantine civilization lends itself to, and indeed calls for this integrated approach to a quite exceptional degree. It is a highly centralized civilization, not only in the political sense, but also in the sense that a single ideology, a creed of remarkable vitality and staying power which undergoes relatively little change

through the long centuries of the Empire's existence, pervades all aspects of Byzantine life. Hence the correlation of these aspects is particularly fruitful. The fact that the visual arts are so much in the foreground of activities at Dumbarton Oaks is, to be sure, due to the circumstances in which the institution was born and developed. But it is significant also in terms of Byzantine civilization itself, to whose ideological core the arts stand in a peculiarly intimate relationship. They not only are among Byzantium's major creative manifestations, but they are also a key leading directly to its vital, spiritual center. It was, in fact, inevitable that a concern with Byzantine art should lead to a study of the Byzantine humanities. The aim of Dumbarton Oaks, however, is to study Byzantine civilization not only as a self-contained phenomenon but also in its medieval context. It seeks to promote the understanding of the Middle Ages by placing proper emphasis on what was in the Middle Ages' own terms a hub of political and cultural life. Without overstressing Byzantium's role, Dumbarton Oaks seeks to counteract the forces of Western parochialism which undoubtedly exist in historical scholarship. This approach, it must be admitted, involves a potential conflict with the search for an integrated view of Byzantine civilization as such. It calls for an exploration of the links between Byzantium and the world around it in particular areas of human activity, and to this extent is apt to detract from the synoptic study of Byzantium as an organic entity. It is, so to speak, centrifugal, while the other approach is centripetal. Individual studies necessarily will tend either in one direction or the other. They can rarely proceed in both. But a certain state of tension which results from the presence of both tendencies and their respective demands is one which the institution as a whole can, and should, live with.

There is, of course, a third dimension, namely, Byzantium's influence on the post-medieval history and civilization of Europe — and Eastern Europe especially — down to our own age. Dumbarton Oaks does not specifically carry out investigations in this area. It believes, however, that by seeking a fuller knowledge of Byzantium itself and of its medieval context, a contribution can be made also to the understanding of the contemporary world.

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