



THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF BYZANTINE STUDIES
(Registered Charity no. 289207)

The Executive Committee of the Society is the British National Committee of the Association Internationale des Études Byzantines

Department of History,
The University of York,
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22nd February, 2010

Professor Jan Palmowski,
Head of School of Humanities,
King's College, London,
Strand,
London, WC2R 2LS

Dear Professor Palmowski,

I write on behalf of the Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies (SPBS) to express our extreme concern at the proposals for the dispersal of the Byzantine and Modern Greek Department at King's College. The Department has long been one of the world centres of excellence in Byzantine Studies and has been staffed by scholars of the highest calibre; one need only cite Arnold Toynbee, Cyril Mango, Donald Nicol, Averil Cameron, Roderick Beaton, Judith Herrin and Charlotte Roueché. The strength of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at King's is, however, far more than simply the achievement of individuals, however distinguished. Rather, it lies in a unique synergy between the study of Byzantine history and culture on the one hand, and the Greek language on the other, which has proved so important in maintaining both halves of the subject and in contributing to the growth of Byzantine studies nationally. It is no accident that King's has been responsible for training many who have gone on to academic achievement in Byzantine studies, in Britain and internationally, for the structure of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, as a discrete and interdisciplinary unit, has been vital to its success. The current re-structuring proposals would put this success at risk.

Byzantinists at Kings have long been at the centre of academic activity in the subject both nationally and internationally. The highly successful 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies held in London in 2006 was hosted at King's, as have been symposia of SPBS. The Runciman Lectures and seminar series in collaboration with the Centre for Hellenic Studies continue to attract not only scholars in the discipline but considerable numbers of the wider public. The recent Royal Academy Exhibition on 'Byzantium' saw King's Byzantinists in the forefront of media coverage and the organisation of public events associated with the

exhibition. New approaches to Byzantine Studies have also been a feature of the King's department. The Prosopography of the Byzantine World, now an indispensable electronic resource for Byzantine Studies is based at King's in association with the Centre for Computing in the Humanities. The digitisation of epigraphical material from Aphrodisias and Cyrenaica has made much new and important material accessible to scholars worldwide.

One of the most remarkable – and enviable!- achievements of BMGS at King's has been the ability of members of the Department to attract outside funding, from the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust and, most recently from the Schilizzi and Leventis Foundations. A substantial anonymous donation from a member of the London Hellenic community, to establish a new series of Byzantine Texts in Translation has recently been obtained through the good offices of Judith Herrin. It is surely the case that private donors are far more likely to contribute generously to departments that reflect their own specific interests and in which they can feel a sense of participation and ownership. There is a very real danger that loss of the Department's identity would damage the potential to obtain grants and donations to further Byzantine Studies. It might well deter foreign students from coming to King's to pursue graduate studies at a time when it is of paramount national importance to forge stronger links between the UK and Greece, Turkey and other nations in the Balkans, Russia and the Eastern Mediterranean which share a 'Byzantine' past.

The SPBS strongly urges you to reconsider the proposals and to recognise and preserve the integrity of Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies at King's as one of the most academically distinguished and forward-looking departments in the country.

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Morris, M.A, D.Phil, FRHist.Soc.
Chair, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies.