

The Museum of Byzantine Culture, on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary, has organized in 2014 a temporary exhibition, which presented the work of donors and sponsors, who generously enriched its collections and facilitated its work. Hence it paid tribute, once again, to all those who have contributed to the enrichment of its collections, accomplishing thus one of its goals, that is to rescue, document, promote and make them available to the broader public. The donations continued in the years that followed, both by individuals and by the Museum of Byzantine Culture, which in its turn purchased artefacts of particular historical and artistic interest.

In this exhibition, the Museum presents to the public the new acquisitions that were added to its collections recently, integrating them into a broader context in terms of their type, functionality, interpretation and history. Engravings, icons, miniature artefacts, coins, as well as photographs and archival material of particular historical interest, become the stimulus to narrate stories.

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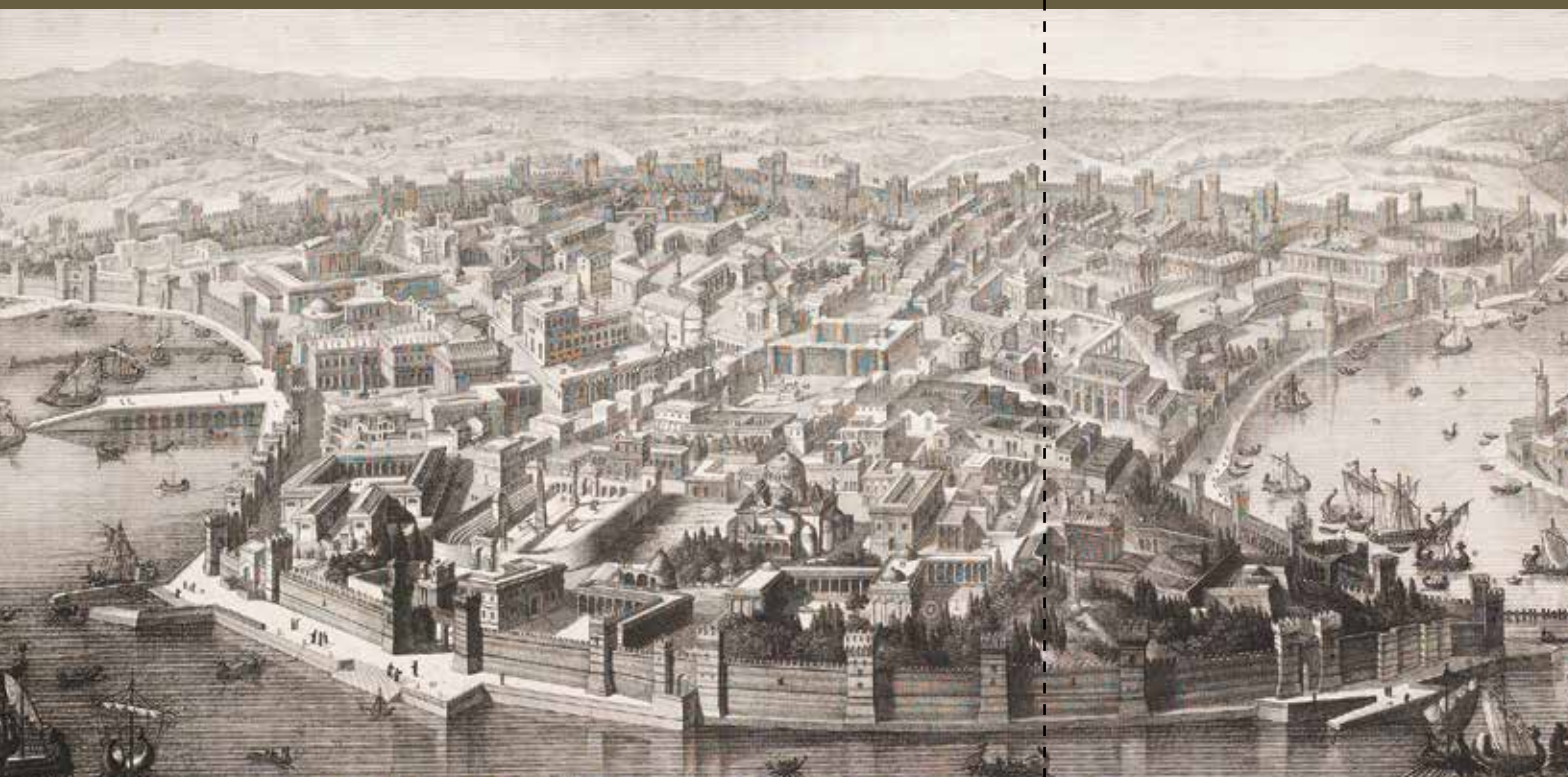
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Panoramic view of Constantinople
in the time of Constantine.
Engraving by Luigi Castellari.
Georges Kiourtzian donation.

Gifts

Short stories on new acquisitions

In memoriam of Georgia Papazotou



Topographical map of Constantinople, engraving, 1742. Georges Kiourtzian donation.

Engraved narratives

Engravings are the printed images on paper or fabric made of copper, stone or wooden engraving plates. Depending on the material of the plate on which their theme of the work was drawn, they are called engravings, lithographs, and woodcuts. The art of engraving developed after the invention of printmaking and allowed the production of many copies of the same subject.

The Orthodox Church has adopted this new artistic medium since 17th century. With the care of enlightened Greeks of the Diaspora, engravings or paper icons, were first printed abroad, where important Greek communities developed in the years that followed the Ottoman conquest, such as in Venice and Vienna. From the 18th century onwards, the art of engraving has started to flourish in the great monastic centers of the East, and mostly on Mount Athos.

Common themes of the Orthodox engravings were the general views of monasteries, narrative scenes from the history of their founding, miracle scenes, depictions of Virgin Mary and Saints, or even memorial themes. The wide circulation of engravings has been a means of communicating the history of the monasteries to all Orthodox believers and at the same time a means of encouraging donations and sponsorships.

In the struggle of faith

During the Ottoman occupation the afflictions of the Orthodox faith was reflected in the revival of monasticism, but also in the emergence of pilgrims who martyred for their religion, the well-known neomartyrs.

Saints who associated their name with the establishment of important monasteries emerged as great figures of monasticism. Saint Theonas

founded the monastery of Saint Anastasia Pharmakolitra, Saint Nikanor the monastery of Zavorda on Mount Kallistratos and Saint Dionysius the monastery of the Holy Trinity on Olympus. These new monasteries, along with the older ones that survived the Fall of Constantinople, have been the core that preserved the religious faith and spiritual cohesion of the enslaved Greeks throughout the period of the Turkish occupation. In the icons the saints - monks are depicted holding models of the temples of which they were founders.

Martyrs for their faith during the Turkish occupation, the neomartyrs were sanctified by the Church and honored at local and popular events. In religious painting, the neomartyrs are depicted dressed according to their attributes, in folk costumes the secular and in the clerical vestments the clergy. They are presented in front of the city where they martyred, usually accompanied by scenes of their martyrdom.

At the iconostasis

Icons of private worship are considered those that mostly due to their size, shape and iconographic theme were intended for private spaces – houses, in which small iconostases were constructed. It was there where the icons of the Saints were placed, a custom that survives up to this day. Private worship icons include diptychs, triptychs and multiptychs, which have been preserved entirely or partly. Usually Virgin Mary with Mary, Crucifixion, Deesis or other popular Saints are depicted in the central part of a triptych.

“...The image is a memorial, just what words are to a listening ear. What a book is to the literate, that an image is to the illiterate. The image speaks to the sight as words to the ear; it brings us understanding.”

Saint John of Damascus, On Holy Images



The Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos. Engraving “by Nicholas Chionakis, Moscow January 4, 1849. By the hand of Monk Gennadios, 1845”. Georges Kiourtzian donation.



Saint George of Ioannina, 19th century. Ioannis Tsiobanos donation.



Triptych. In the center: Virgin Mary of the Unfading Rose. On the left: Saints Spyridon, Athanasios of Alexandria and George. On the right: Saints Nicholas, Charalambos and Dimitrios, 18th c. Efstratios Doukas donation



Iron sword with silver, gold-plated handle, mid or late Byzantine times. Ioannis Tsiobanos donation



Gold hyperpyron of John III Duke Vatatzis (1222-1254), Mint of Nikea. Purchase of the Museum of Byzantine Culture by the rightful owner Vasiliki Zagli

Archaeological finds / collectible artefacts

The archaeological finds of a methodical excavation are valuable witnesses of the past and provide information on the social, economic and political context in which they were constructed. On the opposite side, artefacts from private collections are placed. Cut from their excavation context frame, these objects contain elements of randomness and primarily reflect the aesthetics of the collector, as well as the content and character of the collection.

But despite the fragmented nature of private collections, any object that ends up in the Museum, no matter how humble it may seem at first, it can make a significant contribution to enriching its collection. Thus, a sword with an elaborate silver and gold plated handle, but also everyday objects or coins give us their own information, providing new insights into the interpretation of the culture of the period.

A new collection is born

The Museum of Byzantine Culture received a very significant donation from George Kiourtzian, a Byzantine scholar and epigraphist working at the Bibliothèque byzantine, in Collège de France, Paris. It is an extremely interesting archive set in seven boxes, consisting primarily of photographs, postcards and documents from the entire 20th century.

A series of seventeen large-scale photographs is distinguished in this collection; these photographs depict the catastrophes caused by the Civil War to the Kremlin monuments in October 1917. As research has shown, this photograph comes from the personal archive of Thomas Whittemore (1871-1950), a Byzantine scholar, restorer of the mosaics of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and founder of the Dumbarton Oaks Research Center. Whittemore published part of it in his 1918 article in the National Geographic in the context of anti-Bolshevik propaganda.

The entire Kiourtzian Archive has been photographed and recorded, constituting thus a new category in the collections of the Museum of Byzantine Culture and is now available to enrich the new exhibitions planned by the institution.



Photographs depicting the destruction at the Kremlin monuments during the October Revolution of 1917. Silver-prints mounted on cardboard, 1917-1918. Georges Kiourtzian donation.