

Prof. Ziaka Speaks about Intense American Interest in Muslim Studies

By Theodore Kalmoukos

BOSTON, MA – Dr. Angeliki Ziaka, Associate Professor of Religion at the School of Theology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, is deeply knowledgeable about Islam, which has come to occupy the center of global interest due to the identification of a segment of Islamists with the contemporary threat of terrorism.

She has specialized in Islam, Muslim Theology and History, Arabic-Islamic Culture and Interreligious Dialogue at the University of Strasbourg, at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI-Rome) and at a Vatican State Scholarship and at Amman University in Jordan.

This semester she is teaching as a short term visiting scholar at the Middle East Institute at Columbia University in New York City.

She spoke with The National Herald regarding Islam, Muslim theology, and American interest in Muslim studies.

As to whether there is any interest in Muslim theology at Columbia, Dr. Ziaka said it is “very substantial and is evincing in the foundation of a separate Middle East Institute that dates back several decades. Inter alia, research topics at the Institute include the political, cultural and social influence of Islamic religion in countries where Islam is a majority religion. Islam features in the research of other University Institutes and Faculties, such as the Union Theological Seminary.”

She said “as a whole, American students are citizens of the world, and, in this sense, their understanding of and attitudes toward the world are different from those of people of other religions cover quite a range. Those who specialize in Islamic studies focus on learning the

necessary languages which are the tools they will be using in their research and subsequently in their respective fields of specialization. These fields also cover quite a range, because the university offers a number of possibilities including Palestinian, Jewish, and Iranian-Shiite studies, but also an option investigating the role of the mass media in presenting Islam, among other things. I would say that the spirit of students in New York is open and extrovert with a quick turn of mind, reflecting the style of the city where they live.”

She was attracted to Muslim theology and history “initially by a need to understand our neighbors and later, on the level of scholarly research, by the investigation into the transformations and interpretations of Islam’s biblical background and the diversity of theological interpretations, schools and trends of thought that were generated within Islam.” She emphasized that “Islam is our close neighbor with whom the Christians and Jews of the East coexisted for many centuries in both conflict and dialogue.”

She emphasized that “it was the Byzantine theologians who first offered humanity a rich literature on Islam, in Greek and mainly apologetic in style; the first of these theologians was St John Damascene, who also held office at the court of the Omayyads in Damascus. In this sense, communications between the two parties and the continual renewal of the knowledge of the present and the past through education in order to achieve harmonious co-existence and cultivate a spirit of shared understanding are of pre-eminent significance. This is the main objective of the newly founded undergraduate program in Muslim Studies in the



PHOTO BY ANGELIKI ZIAKA

Prof. Angeliki Ziaka giving a paper on religious education and the Thrace project at the Department of Theology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

School of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the first study program in Greece to specialize in the Muslim religion.”

In explaining Islam, Ziaka said that “it is the third Abrahamic religion. It appeared at the beginning of the 7th century AD in Mecca. It accepts the validity of the divine revelation that was given to the Jews and Christians but, according to Islamic teaching, it comes to seal the initial revelation. For Muslims, this initial revelation is to be found in the Quran, which is the word of God and the guide of every faithful Muslim.”

Some of the basic tenets of Islam include a “strict monotheism and the absolute unity of God, faith in the Prophets including Jesus, and the expectation of the last days. The faithful is obliged to abide by correct practice, which is in, many ways, reminiscent of Judaic casuistry. The faithful bases his be-

havior on the Quran but also on the ethos and morality of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, which has been recorded in the so-called Muslim traditions (Sunna). These are the fundamental sources of Islamic Law.”

As to the Islamic concept of God and creation, she said that “it is biblical. God is the creator; man and the creation are His creations.”

She expounded on the fact that “one of the great theological issues that arose in Islam from the very beginning and caused many disagreements between Islamic intellectuals is that of divine predestination and freedom of will. Today, many Muslims become witnesses to a violent Islam, thus articulating their understanding of divine predestination in the most extreme and inhuman manner.”

We asked her how many different gradations of Islam are there and more specifically, how

does Islam in Saudi Arabia differ from Islam in Iran for example, she was keen to stress that “as we have already mentioned, there are many interpretations, which, in combination with the pre-existing cultures in the countries where Islam became dominant produced a range of gradations.”

Thus, the Muslims of Saudi Arabia belong to the movement of Wahhabism, which is a more recent movement in Sunni Islam, and inhabit the area that is the historical cradle of Islam, the “empty quarter” of the Ara-

bia peninsula, whilst the Muslims of Iran believe that they are descended from Muhammad’s immediate family and constitute the branch of Shiism, and more particular of duodecimal Shiism, inhabiting a land with a rich pre-Islamic past. These are the reasons that have led a number of scholars, mainly anthropologists, to speak of ‘many Islams.’”

Is there a clash of religions on the world stage? And how to explain the suicide missions of Islamic fundamentalists? “Religion may become a crucial factor in making and implementing policy but it can also become a mere political tool. The potential negative predisposition of religious believers to world religious and cultural diversity should be attributed to the religious education and instruction they receive but also to the political priorities of each country,” she said.

“Any form of religious education that focuses on the constitution of religious identity through the rejection or the fear of the other may, indeed, lead to conflict, militancy and fundamentalism, especially in adverse social, political and economic conditions. To a great extent, this is what is happening in our own times and, hence, the role of both religious leaders and adherents of religions as a whole in shaping the future of mankind will be anything but negligible.”

Christos Marinou Talks to TNH about Music and Inspiration

By Eleni Sakellis

NEW YORK – Christos Marinou, Greek pianist, vocal coach, music researcher, and Staff Accompanist at New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, was recently the music director for two operas produced by the NYU Classical Voice Collective.

Le Portrait de Manon by Jules Massenet and Riders to the Sea by Ralph Vaughan Williams – based on the iconic play of the same name by John Millington Synge – played to a full house over three performances. Marinou spoke with The National Herald about music, inspiration, and his upcoming projects.

TNH: Where in Greece are you from originally?

CM: I was born in Athens. My family came from my mother’s side, and partially from my father’s, comes from the island of Andros.

TNH: Did you always want to be a musician?

CM: It is something that came naturally over the years. Music has always been part of my family’s life; there was music playing in our home, my parents would take me to concerts, and I would listen to music on the radio with my grandfather from a very young age. In the meantime, we moved to New York and, thanks to my mother, I started taking piano lessons. So, playing the piano became something I do every day, since for nearly 30 years now. When I was 16, I “invited” my parents to a family meeting. I remember how serious and determined I was about what I had to tell them. “I won’t be pursuing a career in science, so stop paying for the extra private math, chemistry, and physics lessons. I want to study music and become a professional musician.” That was one of the most important decisions of my life.

TNH: What inspires you as an artist?

CM: Life and real pedagogues, with the Greek definition of the word. A teacher must make you think, make you question yourself, and must teach you to search for answers rather than provide you with them. I have been very fortunate in my life to have had inspiring teachers, who not only taught me music, but also gave me life lessons. One of them was George Hadjinkos, who passed away in 2015 at age 92. He was a pianist, conductor, pedagogue, author, and a music philosopher. Hadjinkos experienced the most crucial sociopolitical and artistic changes in 20th century Europe, and it was unbelievably interesting to hear him talk about his cosmopolitan life, not to mention hearing him perform. He knew Richter, Rostropovich, Offenberg, Hindemith, Xenakis, Seferis, Hadjidakis, and so many other historic personas. I studied privately with him for ten years. I would visit him almost daily at his apartment and stay there for about 12-14 hours. We would discuss, write, play for each other, listen to recordings, and go for walks. He was my mentor. We traveled in Greece and

abroad, and spent much time together. George really taught me about critical thinking. He was a true inspiration! Most of what I have achieved is owed to him and his sister, Pia Hadjinkou-Angelini. Although I can name many other inspiring teachers, I would like to mention my professor during my graduate studies at NYU, who is a great friend now, Grant Wenaus. He, too, is a pedagogue who makes you think. He would never demonstrate anything on the piano for me or give me an answer to a “why” question. He would simply ask me, “Why?”

TNH: What are the challenges of working on an opera as opposed to other types of performance?

CM: From a music director’s point of view, the challenges usually vary depending on the opera itself, the cast, and the number of rehearsals one has. In general, I would say the greatest challenge is to make the text and the music “work” for every performer vocally, musically and

I have been very fortunate in my life to have had inspiring teachers...

dramatically, to help them connect with the character they are portraying and with the rest of the cast. Just the musical score will be difficult to learn and memorize. Last month, the NYU Classical Voice Collective produced two operas and I was in charge of music direction. We had five full weeks of rehearsals and had the time to study both operas in depth. One of the two, Riders to the Sea, was musically challenging. In the end, everyone did a superb job. We had a full house for all three performances.

The singer-pianist combination is quite special and cannot be compared with any other. Singers have a unique relationship with their instrument and because of this their psychology has an essential impact on their performance. An important aspect of the vocal coach’s job is to know how to handle different types of personalities, foresee their thoughts and reactions, and use the appropriate directions which will make each singer reach the peak of his potential.

TNH: What upcoming projects can we look forward to?

CM: In April and May, I am playing five graduation voice recitals at NYU. In June, I will be in Thessaloniki, at the University of Macedonia, where I am curating and participating in a day dedicated to the memory of George Hadjinkos. Following that, I will be in Alexandroupoli, where I will give a lecture on Greek Art Song, a masterclass, and a recital with my wife, Antigoni Gaitana. In July and August, I will be in Pelion where I will participate in the Horto Summer Festival, this year as a curator, music director, and performer.

More info about Christos Marinou and his music is available at christosmarinou.com.

An Interview with Professor Angelos Chaniotis

By Eleni Sakellis

NEW YORK – Co-curator of A World of Emotions: Ancient Greece, 700 BC – 200 AD at the Onassis Cultural Center, Professor Angelos Chaniotis is a Greek historian and Classics scholar in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. The distinguished professor is an expert in the society and culture of the Hellenistic World and the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, examining subjects related to historical memory, identity, the social dimensions of religion, the atriality in public life, emotions, war, and the relevance of Classical studies in the modern world. His most recent books are War in the Hellenistic World: A Social and Cultural History (2005) and Theatricality and Politics in the Hellenistic World (2009). He has received many awards, including the Baden-Württemberg State Award for Research (2009), the Greek State Award for Literature, in the category Essay (2010), and the Annelise Maier Award of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (2014).

Prof. Chaniotis took time from his busy schedule to talk with The National Herald about the writing of the exhibition catalogue that accompanies A World of Emotions.

He told TNH, “the aim of the catalogue, which is written for a non-specialized readership, is to provide basic information on the exhibits (type of object, provenance, representation) and to, directly or indirectly, explain why the object has been included in an exhibition dedicated to emotions in the Greek world. In the catalogue entries, exactly as in the labels that I wrote based on the catalogue entries, we also try to allow the objects to tell the viewer a small story: how were the objects used? What is their background? What do they show?”

Depending on the object, we have three types of entries in the catalogue: long entries for com-



COSTAS PICADOS

Professor Angelos Chaniotis, co-curator of A World of Emotions at the Onassis Center in New York.

plex objects (250-400 words), short entries (ca. 150-250 words), and single-line entries for objects that belong to large groups. In the latter case, the significance of the entire group is explained, in order to avoid repetitions.

“Precisely because we were concerned with the accessibility of the objects to a general, non-specialized audience, we avoided technical terms and tried to have headings that not only briefly describe the object but also briefly refer to the underlying emotion(s) (e.g. Achilles’ Rage in Battle, Dedication to Dionysus who listens to prayers).”

The descriptions of objects from Greek museums were written by Greek archaeologists working in these museums. The descriptions of the international loans were written by Dr. Roberta Casaragrande-Kim, Assistant Manager of Exhibitions and Publications at the Onassis Center. All entries were reviewed by the three curators and editors of the

catalogue, Nikolaos Katsas, Ioannis Mylonopoulos and me. The descriptions provide the basic elements of the representation, narrative, or myth. We place emphasis on facts, especially on facts as well as essays dedicated to the exhibition, not on interpretations. The viewers/readers are left enough space to develop their own thoughts.

The main body of the catalogue is general essays about emotions in antiquity, the middle ages and modern neuro-sciences, as well as essays dedicated to the main sections of the exhibition (The World of Emotions, the Spaces of Emotions, Conflicting Emotions, and Pathos). In addition to essays by the three curators and two Greek collaborators (Mimika Giannopoulou and Antini Diplos), for the general essays we were fortunate enough to have at the exhibition three leading figures in the field: David Konstan, a leading scholar in the study of emotions in Greek Antiquity, Barbara Rosenwein, who has coined the

term ‘emotional communities’ and has studied emotions in Medieval Europe, and Joseph LeDoux, a leading scholar in the neuro-sciences. All essays, again, have been written in a manner that makes them accessible to the general audience. The authors tried to build bridges between past and present, associating the subject of the exhibition with modern phenomena.

“Instead of having a catalogue of objects at the end of the book, we decided to have small groups of objects following the relevant essay.”

When asked about how long it took to put the project together, Chaniotis said “the invitation to the authors was sent in June, and the essays were submitted between August and November. The time was limited, but since we had as authors experts who have worked for many years on related subjects, we have in the catalogue essays that present in a clear, often witty manner, very good overviews about general phenomena.”

The professor offered this final remark about the catalogue, “Naturally, the selection of objects was to some extent determined by various practical considerations: the availability, size, and weight of objects, the space available at the Onassis Cultural Center in New York, the sometimes complex requirements of museums. For this reason, important areas in which Greek culture was present in the period covered by the exhibition, such as the area of the Black Sea, Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Near East, are not represented with exhibits. And yet, the catalogue has given us the possibility to include references to texts and images of objects from these areas in the chapters of the catalogue.”

A World of Emotions is on view through June 24 at the Onassis Cultural Center in New York. The exhibition catalogue along with Prof. Chaniotis’ previously published books are available online.



JOHN ACKERMAN

Bishop Demetrios of Mokkiss at the podium for the free public screening at Wheaton College.

Bishop Munib Younan, Congregresswoman Anna Eshoo, Father Dahdal, Reverend Stan Davis, and Rabbi Michael Balinsky, among those interviewed in the film. The documentary is available at www.freechristian.org.

Broadcast Ministries and the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago and has been aired on The Live Well Channel 7.2 each Sunday throughout March. The documentary is available at www.freechristian.org.

Wheaton College Hosts Free Screening of Documentary

TNH Staff

WHEATON, IL – The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago was honored to join with Wheaton College to offer a free public screening of the new documentary Modern Christian Martyrs on March 29, at historic Blanchard Hall on the college campus. A Question/Answer session followed featuring Greek Orthodox Bishop Demetrios of Mokkiss, Antiochian Orthodox – Father Nicholas Dahdal, and Robert Swiese of the Chicago Chapter

of In Defense of Christians, all of whom appear in the documentary.

The event was hosted by Wheaton College’s Department of Politics and International Relations, the Center for Urban Engagement and the World Christian Fellowship together with the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago.

The documentary concerns the ongoing Genocide of the Christian minority population of Syria, focusing on the Alkhouiri family of Chicago and featuring Bishop Demetrios of Mokkiss,