ONASSIS INTERNATIONAL PRIZES

LAUDATION
For the
Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Postbyzantine Studies of Venice, Italy
By
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A vibrant memory of the Greek world, the Venice community finds pride for over half a century in the presence and work of the city's Hellenic Institute. Under the shade of the historic belfry and the roof of San Giorgio dei Greci, Greek researchers, philologists, historians and archaeologists can find there ideal conditions for intellectual and scientific work as they promote knowledge not only about the work and history of the community, which already during the first years of the nation's slavery was able to preserve the splendor of the Greek letters, but have also expanded the field of research to areas and issues that go beyond purely Byzantine or Hellenic interests (such as for example the composition and organization of the groups- secular or religious and ecclesiastical – that defined the Renaissance context both in Italy and in the other parts of Europe). Their proximity to the Biblioteca Marciana and the numerous museums and scientific institutions (I will just mention indicatively the Fondazione Cini) and their excellent collaboration with foreign colleagues, Italian and others (in Venice there many other European foundations) offer to Greek scholars the invaluable opportunity of benefiting from outstanding foreign expertise and thus have their work compete in quality with that of their most distinguished colleagues.

The Venice Institute is therefore a breeding ground for the future teachers of the history of an as yet unexplored facet of Hellenic cohesion and continuity (I mean the dissemination of the Byzantine feat to the West, as well as the transplantation of the foreign legacy to the Venetian-ruled Greek territories); at the same time, the Institute is also a laboratory where conditions are created that will lead Greek academic researchers to the highest positions in similar European institutions and this at a time like ours when total interdependence among the cultures of continent Europe has become a common experience. The proof of this is to be found not only in the outstanding progress of the Institute's graduates here and elsewhere but most particularly I would say in their continuous presence in international bibliography thanks to the scope and quality of their scientific performance. Much more than art, science needs today prestige and recognition, at world level I would say, in any of its disciplines or branches. This is the aim so brilliantly achieved, as we are all aware, by

the Venice Institute since its inception, under the inspired guidance of directors like its founder, Sophia Antoniadis, the unforgettable teacher Manousos Manousakas, Nicolaos Panagiotakis and its current Director, distinguished Chrysa Maltezou whose multifaceted scientific achievements have spread well beyond the confines of the institution she runs.

The evolution of Venice has been a milestone for the history of the Mediterranean and for the Medieval Greek Empire in particular (I mean Byzantium). It has been said, and probably rightly so, that Venice is the second Byzantium, without however forgetting its pivotal contribution to the looting of the empire during the 4th Crusade in 1204. The venerable relics that presently adorn Saint-Mark's treasury (let me mention indicatively the Pala d'Oro and the icon of the Nicopoia Virgin), as well as the galloping horses on the Venetian cathedral's frieze all come from the sacking of Constantinople and reveal the Serenissima's role in the events that determined Hellenism's fate: "Master of one fourth and a half of the whole empire of Romania" – meaning Byzantium - the Doge would consolidate his domination of the Cyclades, Sporades, Methoni, Koroni, Crete, Euboea and later make his presence felt in Tenedos, Rhodes, Cyprus, Corfu, but also in Athens for a while as well as Patras and Thessaloniki (1423/40) making his country, precisely because of the osmosis with Byzantine culture, the safest refuge for the Greeks persecuted by the non-believers. The metropolitan see of Venice is called Philadelphia, sister to the Asia Minor city of the same name that was the last to surrender in 1931 to the Turcoman invaders. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Greek fugitives bought the land on which the church of Saint George would be built, the home today of the laureate Institute. Before the end of that same century, the Greek fraternity would establish a school and put together a library as a first step towards the Flanginiano Frontistirio, which began its operation in 1665 and continued its educational activity until the end of the 18th century. The list of teachers and students who distinguished themselves as scholars in the letters and in the Church is indeed a long one. I wanted to tell you this in order to underscore, incidentally, the benefits that result from the bequests, such as for example the Flanginio school, or from the recognition of achievement like the distinction that the Onassis Foundation has chosen to offer to the Venice Institute.

The Onassis Foundation continues the Greek tradition of social solidarity for the attainment of national goals. The outstanding activity of the Hellenic Institute in Venice recalls the significant work of inspired Teachers. Just one quick look at its periodical publication "Thesavrismata" (the 36th volume is being prepared) with the exceptional contributions of its members, as well as cognizance of their doctoral theses and studies, in the process of being completed or published, show the scope

and breadth of scientific research generated at the Hellenic Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies of Venice.

I will conclude by saying that the encounter of the two Institutions today, the Onassis Foundation and the Venice Institute, brings honor and glory to both and represents for them an encouragement to continue their magnificent efforts.