ONASSIS INTERNATIONAL PRIZES

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Established in the city that used to boast once that it was Byzantium's beloved daughter, the city that has been appropriately described as practically another Byzantium, the Institute of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies is Greece's only scientific research centre abroad. Dedicated to the study of the past and the management of historic memory, it is also the heir to invaluable treasures, monuments, art works, archives and documents that were created and collected with devotion, perfect taste and energy in Saint Mark's city by Greek refugees after the fall of Constantinople. If legacy, as Arnold Toynbee says, is a current bank account in which deposits and withdrawals are continuously recorded, then the Institute in the course of its scientific progress is steadily operating the spiritual account opened centuries ago at the cultural bank of Europe by the Greeks who settled in the lagoon. Taking over from the formerly flourishing brotherhood of Venice, the Institute is pursuing the dialogue initiated by the Greeks and the Venetians since the time when the city of the doges was a Byzantine province.

A gateway to Greek science in Europe today, the Institute covers a very wide range of research topics, relating in particular to the period of Venetian rule. During this important period of Greek history, the Greek areas under Venetian rule became a crossroads where Byzantine humanist thinking was able to come in daring contact with the movements in Renaissance Europe. It is precisely this phenomenon of a fertile encounter between Greek culture and Western sources and the successful communion of Byzantine and Western tradition that the Institute is studying, providing through its systematic research activities a better insight into the social conditions that determined Hellenism's historic evolution over time.

Even more important is the Institute's contribution for the preservation, conservation and management of the cultural treasures of the Greek Diaspora and for the promotion of Byzantine and post-Byzantine legacy. From its inception until today the Institute is striving to enhance and promote the unique collection of icons, which are exhibited in its Museum, the valuable archival items, the rare books of its library and the monumental complex on the so-called Square of the Greeks.

The decision of the Alexandros Onassis Public Benefit Foundation to award this prize to the Institute for its work represents an important milestone for the centre's scientific progress. The Institute's symbol is a burning lantern surrounded by the opening words of the evening prayer "ETERNAL LIGHT" as its emblem. With this honorary distinction, the Alexandros Onassis Foundation is significantly contributing to keeping this light alive and eternally burning and the Byzantine and post-Byzantine legacy for ever present in the Serenissima. On behalf of the Institute I express most warm and sincere thanks to the President and Members of the Board and to the Institute for its 50th anniversary the old Byzantine wish "Πολλὰ ἐτη εις πολλά".