In her room my grandmother, Stavroula Gouma, born in the southern Peloponnese in 1878, had a large case enclosed by glass doors in which were images of the Virgin, Christ, and various saints. She called it her iconostasis, and in front of it she kept an oil lamp burning day and night. To these images she prayed several times a day, crossing herself, genuflecting, and kissing them. For her the icons were living presences identical with the saintly figures whom they represented.

to discuss the problem of the lacuna of comparable information in the study of the Byzantine architectural tradition. Both trained as architectural historians with a great passion for Byzantine art, our discussions eventually led to a two-pronged pursuit of the problem, on both sides of the Atlantic. In Princeton, I offered a graduate seminar in the fall of 1996 entitled “Representations of Architecture in Byzantine Art,” while in Greece Dr. Hadjitryphonos conducted research and submitted a project proposal to the Board of EKBMM with the idea of organizing an exhibition.

Our efforts yielded two important, broad revelations: 1) documents pertaining to the process of architectural design and to the process of actual building construction in the Byzantine world are scarce; and 2) representations of architecture in Byzantine art display characteristics that do not follow conventions that could be understood as having documentary value. These observations, however, led to an equally significant realization that architecture, as a genre, was frequently depicted in Byzantine art, but that these representations have a very different appearance and meaning from what we might have expected. Thus, a new intellectual challenge presented itself—discovering why Byzantine artists presented works of architecture the way they did, and how this fitted into the aesthetic objectives and theological underpinnings of Byzantine artistic output. This led us to frame a new proposal in 2001 that was enthusiastically received by the Princeton University Art Museum and by Princeton’s Department of Art and Archaeology and the Program in Hellenic Studies, calling for an exhibition to be organized jointly by Princeton University and EKBMM.

From this point our efforts shifted to the task of defining the actual scope of the exhibition and its organization, with teams in Princeton and Thessaloniki working independently but in close collaboration. The ultimate checklist was eventually formed after long negotiations with potential lenders including last-minute discussions on site with lenders in Armenia, Georgia, and Russia in the spring of 2008. The exhibition opened to great acclaim at the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki on November 6, 2009, with widespread positive press coverage throughout Greece.

Differing cultural frameworks, institutional backgrounds, and general outlooks on the subject matter presented the Greek and U.S. teams with numerous challenges throughout the many years during which this project has evolved. Despite or perhaps because of these, the ultimate results became enormously gratifying and reflect what is likely the first collaborative art exhibition project between an American academic institution and a Greek research center. The resulting international exhibition involving twenty-nine lenders from eleven different countries, with a clearly articulated intellectual theme whose contribution will have a ground-breaking impact in Byzantine studies and beyond. We at Princeton can take great pride in this project as a testimony of Princeton’s unique commitments to internationalism and excellence.

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Icon of Saint Demetrios. Crete (?), late 16th–early 17th centuries. Tempera on wood, 108.0 x 82.5 x 2.2 cm. Museum of Antivouniotissa, Corfu, Greece.

Kivotion (reliquary). Transylvanian workshop (?), 1685. Hammered silver, chiseled, hatched and gilded; polychrome enamel, h. 28.0 cm., w. 16.0 cm., l. 24.0 cm. National Museum of Art of Romania, Bucharest (14086/M 1449).