

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies

Lecture

**Christmas in Constantinople:  
Gregory of Nazianzus and the Performance of  
*Theoria* in Late Antiquity**

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Respondent: Emmanuel Bourbouhakis, Classics

The orations of Gregory of Nazianzus on the major feasts of the Christian calendar ranked among the most popular and most widely translated works of literature in the Byzantine world. However, before being canonized as Saint Gregory the Theologian, Gregory was an Athenian-trained teacher of Classical Greek literature and as such learned to produce orations for public festivals within the ripe literary tradition of epideictic rhetoric. During his short tenure as Bishop of Constantinople (379-381), he produced a series of orations for Christian festivals that represent a crucial point in the reception and transformation of rhetorical theory, Platonism, and Imperial Greek oratory. In his oration for the Feast of the Nativity, Gregory draws on a tradition stretching from Plato's *Phaedrus* to the Second Sophistic to offer a rhetorical performance of *theoria*, the philosopher's contemplation of the divine.

**Byron MacDougall** specializes in Greek literature of the Late Antique and Byzantine periods. Between studying Classics at Harvard (B.A., 2007) and Brown (Ph.D., 2015), he was a secondary school Greek and Latin teacher. He has held research fellowships at Dumbarton Oaks and at the University of Vienna, and his publications include studies on the Cappadocian Fathers, the Ancient Greek and Latin novels, and the reception of Plato from the Second Sophistic to Byzantium.

**Wednesday, October 18, 2017  
4:30 p.m.  
Scheide Caldwell House, Room 103**

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