

Research on the Ancient Manuscripts of Lesvos

Thanks to the generous support of the Dover Fund, provided by the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, I was recently able to travel to the island of Lesvos in order to study ancient manuscripts in the various collections preserved in the island's monasteries. I travelled in the last of week of July, 2017, and during that time I was able to visit the Monastery of St. John the Theologian, Ypsilou and the Leimonos Monastery, both famed for their collections of manuscripts in almost pristine condition. This was truly an incredible experience. I have studied manuscripts *in situ* at libraries, and I have received copies from institutions all over the world. However, I don't think I have ever seen so many codices so well preserved as at these two monasteries. The pages were as white as any page today, though they were over a thousand years old. At the Monastery of St. John, for example, there was only one codex with slight water damage, and that had happened only a few years earlier.

In addition to the excellent collections of manuscripts, each monastery also displayed a wider collection of ecclesiastical and historical artifacts for visitors to see. Unfortunately, the Leimonos Monastery does not allow photography in its museum, so it must suffice for me to say that the collections were excellently preserved and of immense historical value. Anyone studying the texts, or the history more generally, of the Middle to Late Byzantine empire should most definitely make a trip to the island of Lesvos.

The gracious support of the Dover Fund also gave me the ability to explore the other treasures of the island, as well. For example, I visited the remains of the Byzantine castle in Mytilene, which when it stood was by far larger than any European castle ever was. Now, the peripheral walls remain to give visitors an idea of its past grandeur. Mytilene also offered a museum of Byzantine Art, which contained icons of breathtaking beauty and pathos. Moreover, the small village of Agiassos, one of the few on the island that has maintained its traditional architecture and way of life to a large degree, was the home to a cathedral erected on August 15, 1173 by the emperor Manuel I Komnenos. I was also able to visit the Byzantine castles in Sigri and Molyvos. Finally, the Museum of Ancient Greek Art in Mytilene displayed artifacts of the characteristic quality, beauty and attention to detail, which Byzantinists can easily discern in later artifacts, as well. Overall, my trip to Lesvos was a hands-on tour de force of Byzantine history, art and architecture. The island is full to the brim with hidden treasures everywhere you look, and it was the magnanimous and benevolent support of the Dover Fund and the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies that made all of this possible. I am truly grateful for the gift of this wonderful, instructive and memorable experience.

