

Title: “The usage of Scriptural Nativity Motifs in early Greek and Slavonic hymnography”

Abstract:

During my research stay at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oslo under the supervision of Professor Stig Ragnvald Frøyshov, I had the chance to study some of the oldest Greek hymnography, the so-called *kata stichon* (stichic) hymns, as well as their Slavonic translation. Concretely, in one of them we observed how several typical Nativity motifs from the Gospels were employed in order to praise the figure of Jesus Christ, such as the star, the cave, the shepherds, the *magi* and King Herod.

However, it was rather surprising to find also an apocryphal motif belonging originally to the *Proto-Gospel of James* (19-20): a mention of the midwife that was called by Joseph to help the Virgin Mary to give birth. Despite its absence in the canonical Gospels, this motif has been very widespread in medieval art, not only in the Eastern Christian churches but also in the Western Romanesque depictions.

The identification of all those Nativity motifs in one of the *kata stichon* hymns gave me the idea of comparing them with their usage in other hymnographical works in both their Greek and Slavonic versions: the well-known two hymns (“kanons”) that were sung at the Vigil for the Nativity of Christ, written by the renowned hymnographers of the eighth century, St. Cosmas of Maiuma and St. John of Damascus, as well as the famous *kontakion* hymn of the Nativity that would have been composed by St. Romanos the Melodist in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. Besides, I enlarged the comparison of such motifs to one of the earliest South Slavonic original hymnographical compositions: the liturgical service devoted to St. Nahum of Ochrid that would have been written in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. short after the saint’s death on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 910.

This way, in this lecture I am intended to make a survey on the usage of the Nativity motifs from canonical and non-canonical scriptures in some of the most representative Greek and Slavonic hymnographical works.