

The 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Sofia, 22-27 August 2011
(reprinted, with permission, from the Newsletter of the SPBS)

Since the programme of the conference can still be found on the web, it does not seem worthwhile to offer a blow-by-blow account of the many and varied sessions that took place through the week. Instead I shall offer a few impressions of the congress. The papers took place in the buildings of the university St Kliment Ohridski close to the city centre, within easy reach of many, if not all, hotels. The university rooms varied greatly in quality: some had recently been refurbished, others featured benches that might easily deposit the unwary on the floor, and others again were far too small for the sessions that had been scheduled there. The opening ceremony was packed; many had to stand. Throughout the conference the weather was hot and sunny, with the result that some rooms grew unbearably warm in the afternoon.



From Eastern Europe, thousands of people, most of whom were present, as became clear when it became necessary for others to read out their papers. While the mornings were reserved for plenary sessions, the afternoons featured parallel sessions, with similar topics being grouped together each afternoon. This was frustrating, since it meant a large number of clashes, which could have been avoided. Nevertheless, the papers gave a good opportunity to meet fellow scholars, to make contacts, and of course to hear useful contributions on a wide range of topics. There were a number of exhibitions and receptions organised during the week, the highlight of which was the event at the National

Museum of History, the former presidential palace, at which the current president addressed the assembled Byzantinists.

As the Canadian representative of the AIEB - and indeed, as far as I could tell, the only Canadian present - I also had the opportunity to visit Samokov, a small town some 60 km from Sofia, where the assembled delegates were treated to a tour of several interesting sites, including a Justinianic hilltop fortress (right). As for the deliberations that took place, I have offered some comments on this at the start of the newsletter.



Overall, I have to say that I enjoyed this congress more than some earlier ones, perhaps because I knew more of the people there. The compact nature of the city, where good restaurants were plentiful and within easy reach, undoubtedly helped matters. Although there were problems with certain aspects of the organisation these did not overshadow the event as a whole and I am left hoping that I shall have the opportunity to visit Bulgaria again.

Geoffrey Greatrex

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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