

## **Angela Constantinides Hero at Queens College**

Elena Frangakis-Syrett

“Angela Hero enriched the lives of hundreds of Queens College students by introducing them to the enormous importance of Byzantine history and culture. Her scholarship and fine teaching illuminated the contribution of Byzantine culture to Western political, intellectual and artistic life; moreover, she did this when this aspect of history was largely ignored in undergraduate institutions.”<sup>1</sup> This is how Martin Pine, Professor of History, Emeritus expressed his recognition of the role of his colleague Professor Angela Constantinides Hero in the mission of the Department of History of Queens College where she spent most of her teaching career. In doing so, he noted the twin pillars of a successful teacher – a deep knowledge and understanding of one’s subject, as a result of scholarly expertise in it, combined with an innate ability and desire to share such knowledge with one’s students to allow them to be enriched in the same measure as oneself. A true scholar in the long-standing tradition of the Humanities, acquires command of his or her craft by meticulous and detailed work over many years and countless hours, with the express intent of sharing it, not only with the world, but in the classroom, through the special bonding that takes place between teacher and student. Professor Hero encapsulated this tradition.

Angela Constantinides Hero was born in Athens, Greece and came to the United States on a full scholarship from the University of Nevada in 1946. She earned her M.A. in Byzantine History under Professor Ihor Ševčenko at Columbia University and her Ph.D. under Fr. John Meyendorff at Fordham University. In her early research and publications she focused primarily on the editing and translating of unpublished sources pertinent to the study of religious, social, and intellectual history of the late Byzantine period, thirteenth-fifteenth centuries. She subsequently enlarged her research interests and work to include a time period that spans from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries of Byzantine history. Her outstanding scholarly and linguistic abilities and her deep and highly nuanced understanding of the texts allowed her to make original and meaningful contributions to the field. This was already evident in her first monograph, *The Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, which was published in 1983.<sup>2</sup> It is a reproduction and translation of the surviving correspondence of Gregory Akindynos—one of St. Gregory Palamas's most dangerous adversaries—and a primary source for the last of the major theological controversies that shook the Church. *Speculum* heralded its publication as a major scholarly contribution to our knowledge of fourteenth-century Byzantine Hesychasm: "It is indeed a pleasure to acknowledge and salute Professor Hero's achievement. Scholars will remain in her debt for a long time to come [...This is] an indispensable and invaluable addition to the growing literature on Byzantine Hesychasm."

Angela Hero continued to be drawn to complex intellectual and spiritual issues relating to the political affairs and theological disputes of the late Byzantine era especially within the context of an individual's quest for spiritual self-understanding. The latter became the subject of her second book, *A Woman's Quest for Spiritual Guidance*, published in 1986, which constitutes the only surviving correspondence

by a Byzantine woman.<sup>3</sup> Since its appearance it has been of special and keen interest to both medieval and women's studies scholars and to students making the work a contribution to the Humanities at large concerning the still largely unknown role and position of elite Byzantine women. Angela Hero continued her intellectual interest on religion in society as well as the role of women in the spiritual life of Byzantium and in particular the contribution of the nuns in the emerging monastic movement in Europe with her following book, *The Life and Letters of Theoleptos of Philadelphia*, published in 1994.<sup>4</sup> The work is based on the letters that the metropolitan sent to his spiritual daughter, which she preserved together with the homilies that he delivered to the religious in her monastery.

Her on-going and active research in Byzantine history allowed her to keep bringing fresh insights into her teaching in a deeply thought-out and generous manner. In the process she brought to life Byzantium and allowed students with diverse backgrounds to access it and to be fascinated by it. These sentiments have been aptly voiced by Stuart Prall, Emeritus Professor of History and Chair of the Department during part of Angela's teaching career at Queens College, "A truly gifted teacher! Angela Hero has made Byzantine History a centerpiece in the offerings of the Queens College History Department. What a wonderful combination of scholarly learning and a warm and welcoming friendship for her students. As her chair I heard the reports from her students, one of whom was my own son. Angela Hero was among the stars in our department."<sup>5</sup>

In a college-wide lecture at Queens College in 2000, Professor Hero spoke on the status, accomplishments and challenges experienced by Byzantine women. She noted the high degree of autonomy and prominent roles that elite women held in politics and society as well as in the religious and intellectual life of the empire, as exemplified by the fact

that the most important historiographical work written by a woman in the Middle Ages was by a Byzantine empress. Whilst there are fine examples of poetry written by women in medieval Western Europe, there is no example of a history written by a woman. Despite such high achievements, however, whenever women ventured into traditionally male pursuits, they were apologetic, a reflection of the ambivalent rather than disadvantageous reality they faced, Angela concluded. It was her ability to offer an elegant, carefully crafted and researched as well as multi-faceted and nuanced picture of the past, which made her such an effective teacher and communicator.

Together with Professor John Philip Thomas, Professor Hero has co-edited the *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*<sup>6</sup>. Published in 2001, in five volumes, it will become a major reference source for both Byzantine and European ecclesiastical history, for the *typika* or foundation documents are considered amongst the most important sources of the history of Byzantine monasticism illuminating almost every aspect of monastic life and its development from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries. The accomplishments of the editors are that they make available for the first time an invaluable source for the study of religious and social life in Byzantium and for ecclesiastical institutions in the Greek East as well as make possible a comparison between Greek and Latin monastic movements. The meticulously crafted edition of these documents culminates in an index, which is as thorough as it is inclusive, and for which the field will remain indebted to the editors for years to come.

In all her work Angela displayed an unswerving commitment to pains-taking and meticulous research. It takes determination and long-term perseverance to create thousands of entries, with multiple sub-entries to create a

complete and highly usable index of the kind found in the edition of the *typika*. It was her unswerving commitment to the hard work that is necessary in order to achieve such standards of excellence that have also made Professor Hero into such an inspirational teacher and mentor to her students throughout her career at Queens College. For a University Professor is above all a scholar who is a teacher, with equal commitments to both pursuits. The two elements are totally intertwined and so it was for Angela. Unswerving in her research, and equally unswerving in her commitment to her students, she was able to touch and empower, in her teaching career, countless number of students with her knowledge of Byzantine history, her enthusiasm for her subject and craft as well as generosity of spirit. Moreover, her courses on Byzantium were also taken by students who were History majors at large, not only those who specialized in Byzantine history. At the same time, many of the students who had chosen Greek Studies as their special field of study were often drawn to the Byzantine era as a result of Angela's reputation as a teacher and mentor. Both these phenomena are testaments to her teaching and the way she approached students of diverse backgrounds and intellectual interests. As Professor Emeritus Jon Peterson and former Chair of the Department noted, "An outstanding scholar in the Byzantine field, Professor Hero covered an important area for the Department for years and helped countless number of students along the way. A fine and delightful person, as a colleague and teacher Angela was highly responsible and someone you could always rely upon, always."<sup>7</sup>

A former student of Queens College attests that, "Teachers are people, who we remember for the rest of our lives, especially if they leave a positive imprint on us."<sup>8</sup> Angela Hero certainly left a positive imprint on many of her students. She was always willing to help and was always generous with her time and knowledge as noted by Frank Warren,

Professor of History and Chair of the History Department who has stated, "During my period as chair, it was always a pleasure to work with Angela Hero. I knew her reputation as a scholar and soon learned her teaching strengths. These were only enhanced by the cheerful and thoughtful way she interacted with her colleagues and me"<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, as her colleagues we consider ourselves fortunate to have enjoyed Angela's collegiality for so many years at Queens College; her students consider themselves privileged to have been taught and inspired by her. I was especially fortunate and privileged to have Angela as a mentor at the beginning of my career at Queens College. I salute her most warmly for her generosity of spirit, her humor, her understanding of human nature, and boundless kindness. I suspect I am not the only one to feel this way.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Martine Pine, Professor of History, Emeritus, Queens College, 15 Jan. 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Akindynos, Angela C. Hero (translator), *Letters of Gregory Akindynos. Greek Text and English Translation* (Washington, D. C.: Dumberton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Angela C. Hero, *A Woman's Quest for Spiritual Guidance: The Correspondence of Princess Irene Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina* (Brookline, Mass: Hellenic College Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Angela C. Hero, *The Life and Letters of Theoleptos of Philadelphia* (Brookline, Mass: Hellenic College Press, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Stuart Prall, Professor of History, Emeritus, Queens College and former Chair, History Department, 11 March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> John Thomas & Angela C. Hero, eds., *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* (Washington, D.C.: Dumberton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 5 vols.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Jon Peterson, Professor of History Emeritus, Queens College and former Chair, History Department, 25 Feb. 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Ms Susan Pfautsch, 4 March 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Frank Warren, Professor of History, Queens College and Chair, History Department, 15 March 2009.

## Recent Developments in the Byzantine Presence in America

Helen C. Evans

Angela Hero was a valued member of the team of Byzantinists who have worked over the last decade at the Metropolitan Museum on the creation of our two exhibitions on Byzantine art and culture – *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine era (843-1261 A.D.)* and *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*.<sup>1</sup> Without her, the Greek in the catalogues would have had far more mistakes, the quotations we found for the labels in our exhibition galleries would have been far less interesting, and our spirits at many times would certainly have been far lower. For me personally, Angela sets another standard, for I, like her, started graduate school long after finishing college. In looking for models to follow as a "late bloomer," I was encouraged by her success in making a serious contribution to the field of Byzantine studies to believe that I too could do the same. So first and foremost I wish to acknowledge her as a role model, even if one who was unaware of her significance.

The title of my essay immediately sets two issues into play. First, the question of what is "recent" and secondly, the question of whether recent developments in the field of Byzantine studies in America play any significant role in the future of the field. In looking for the appropriate starting date, I realized that Angela Hero provided a perfect selection,