

## Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire

An international colloquium held at the Academy at the end of September 2000 commemorated a remarkable academic enterprise lasting over fifty years, and recognised over thirty years of direct Academy support. **Professor Averil Cameron FBA**, Chairman of the PBE Project Committee, reflects on the past and recent achievements of prosopographical scholarship.

The first Academy grant (of £50) was given to PLRE in 1950. It was adopted as a Major Project in 1970.

The PBE was adopted as an Academy Research Project in 1989.

It is fifty years since Professor A.H.M. Jones launched the idea of a prosopographical lexicon of the Later Roman Empire, a massive work which would list in alphabetical order all persons known to have held office or otherwise left a mark on late Roman history, with the primary sources for the main events of their lives. The idea of a Roman prosopography was not new. The great German scholar Theodor Mommsen had conceived and begun a continuation of the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* (Prosopography of the Roman Empire) into the Late Roman period, but this had been interrupted by the two World Wars. Jones's scheme was therefore to take up Mommsen's project and cover the period from AD 260 to the death of Heraclius (AD 641). The work was therefore complementary to his own great history of the period, published in 1964 as *The Later Roman Empire. A Social, Administrative and Economic Survey* (Oxford), which immediately established itself as the fundamental study for English-speaking scholars.

Jones began working on the prosopography with two of his pupils, John Morris, of University College London, where Jones had been Professor of Ancient History, and John Martindale, and the first volume of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (PLRE), covering the years 260–395, was published by the Cambridge University Press in 1970, the year of Jones's death. The Academy, which had already substantially financed the project, then adopted it as an Academy Research Project. Its future pattern of work was already clear. John Martindale continued to work as editor and compiler together with John Morris until the latter's death during the final stages of preparation of PLRE II (395–527), which appeared in 1980. The third and final volume appeared under Martindale's name alone in 1992. PLRE was therefore a success story, and has become an institution.

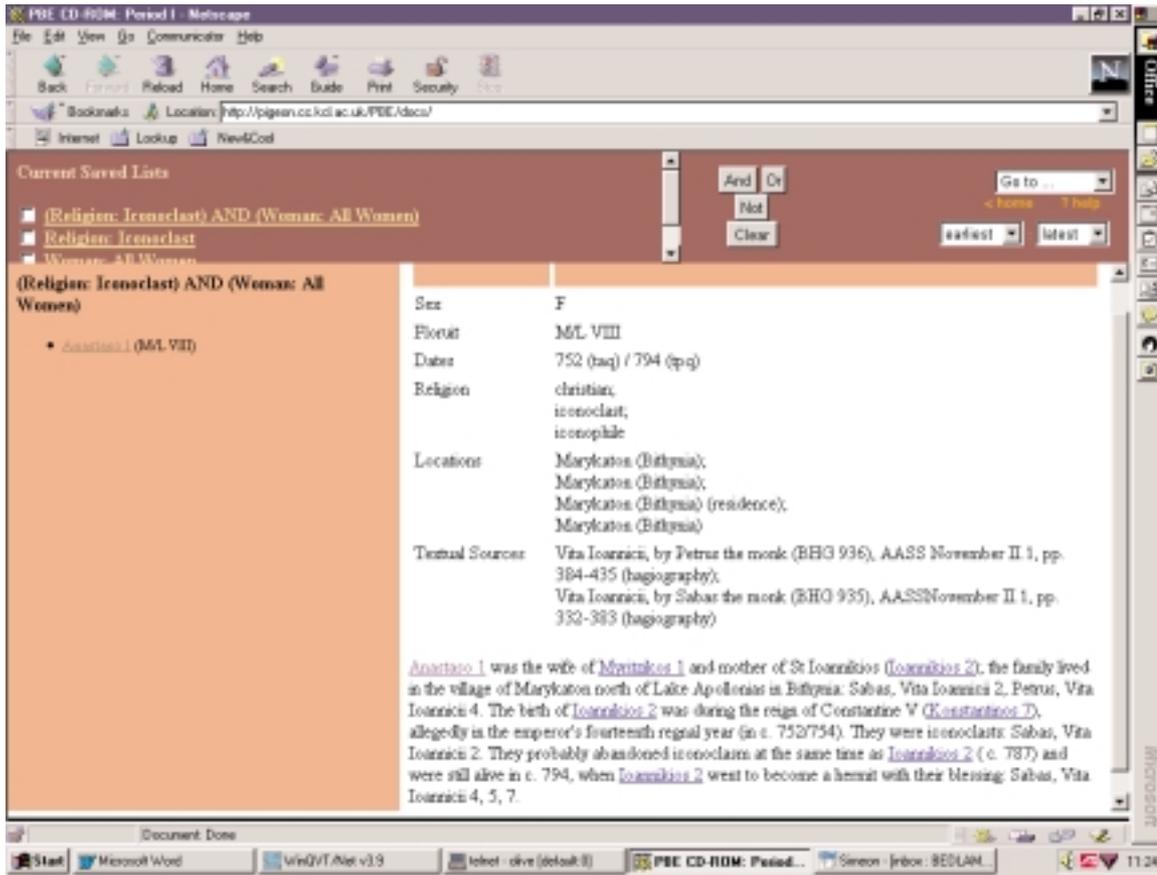
The methodology adopted in these three large volumes was not without its difficulties. In the first place issues of international collaboration or rivalry led to an agreement that Christian subjects would be mainly left to the French Christian prosopography initiated by Henri Marrou. There

was also the delicate matter of Mommsen's files, but John Morris was able to negotiate their loan from the Berlin Academy. In this pre-computer age slips sent in by volunteer readers were stored in the famous shoe boxes, a filing system not to be despised even today when computers crash and databases fail to perform. In time the shoe boxes moved with John Martindale to a room in the new History Faculty building at Cambridge, and the work continued there until the end of the project. Academy committees and chairmen came and went, but John Martindale remained the linchpin. Although PLRE had become a committee venture, those were still the days of the single scholar, and most of the work was done by John Martindale himself. The three volumes of PLRE provide a vast store of information for the period from 260 to 641, a period when the nature of the Roman empire was changing dramatically (some would say that by 641 it had become well and truly Byzantine). They provide the solid scholarship and the data that constitute the unglamorous but essential underpinning for the reinvention of Jones's Later Roman Empire as 'late antiquity', which has also characterised the last thirty years or so. And they have stimulated a broader interest in prosopography in this and in other periods. The email bulletin boards which now exist for enthusiasts would probably not have been started had it not been for PLRE.

PLRE is a tool for scholars. It is not an answer to historical narrative, and the production of a prosopographical lexicon like this does not in itself endorse the idea that Roman history – or indeed any history – is explicable primarily through personal connections. What then does it allow us to do that was not possible before? The main answer must be that it enables the scholar to understand the governing structure of the empire far more clearly. Patterns of promotion emerge, and pathways for non-Romans to rise in the system. It allows one to see how the administrative structure changed, especially in the earlier and later parts of the period. In this one might say indeed that it was a quintessentially Jonesian project. It does not, of course, answer the sort of questions which Peter Brown has done so much to stimulate



Gold solidus of the Empress Irene. Facing bust on both obverse and reverse. Constantinople mint, AD 797–802. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



This example shows the results for the search on 'women' and 'iconoclast' which provides one result, *Anastasio 1*. This record shows PBE's treatment of hagiographic sources.

for the same historical period. And the data are captured in traditional printed form, within the categories decided by the editors. They can only be interrogated in limited ways.

But by 1992 ideas had changed. Already by 1989 the success of PLRE had led to the suggestion of continuing it as far as AD 1261, the starting point of the prosopography of the Palaiologan period already published by the Austrian Academy. But it was now clear that any such continuation must employ electronic means, and that it should be searchable by the user. The Academy agreed to support a new Research Project to be named The Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire (PBE), which would cover the period from 641 to 1261. John Martindale would remain the main Editor, and Dr Dion Smythe was appointed in addition. After much discussion it was decided to base the project at King's College London, which had promised to house it and to provide expert computer help. The shoe boxes were no more. The information derived from the primary sources was entered in a complex database, at first non-relational, later fully relational. John Martindale entered an entirely new phase of prosopographical work.

A Byzantine prosopography posed yet more challenges. For one thing the first part of the chosen period was one in which Byzantium was undergoing rapid but not easily documented change. The available sources are difficult and in some cases sparse. For many persons the information from lead seals is

all that we have. In sharp contrast the later part of the period, from 1025 to 1261, is the best documented in the history of Byzantium, not only in Greek, but in western sources as well. We also now learned that after a period of uncertainty following the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the new Berlin-Brandenburg Academy intended to adopt as a formal project the prosopographical work on early medieval Byzantium already undertaken unofficially in East Berlin by Professor Friedhelm Winkelmann. In 1993 therefore the two Academies signed a formal agreement of collaboration. The end product of the British Academy project would eventually take the form of an on-line (or now web-based) database, while the German project would produce a series of volumes in the traditional way, their coverage ending in 1025.

Both projects are now at their first publication stage. The British project is publishing in April 2001 a CD covering the period 641–867, with more than 8,000 individual entries, while the Berlin team have issued several initial printed fascicules. The CD is extracted from the larger and more flexible database, which already includes material for the whole period to 1261. Work continues on this. But evolving such a complex tool is not simple, and in common with other such projects for different periods, we have spent a high proportion of the initial time period in its development. It has not been easy, especially as PBE was one of the earliest major research projects to use this

The CD-ROM  
Prosopography of  
the Byzantine Empire  
I: (641–867)  
is published by  
Ashgate

technique. But it is now being followed by many others and discussion of such issues was a striking theme of the British Academy colloquium.

With the establishment of the Arts and Humanities Research Board, our basic funding is now coming from that source, although the British Academy continues to provide extra help which has permitted an essential increase in staffing. The project would not have been able to advance without the guidance and practical help of the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at King's College London over a long period. However both the British and the German projects are now looking ahead to the longer term after the official end of their present funding. And after almost a lifetime spent on Academy prosopography projects, John Martindale retired on 30 September 2000 and PBE has a new team headed by Professor Michael Jeffreys of the University of Sydney.

What will this new Byzantine prosopography give us? Firstly, it could be argued that it will be more pioneering than PLRE, not only technically, but also in that the subject matter has been much less studied, and there is more primary work to be done. This makes the end product more difficult to

achieve, but also makes the results more groundbreaking. Secondly, the advent of the new technologies will not only allow individual users to ask new questions, but is already making possible a degree of international collaboration and networking unimaginable before. Our colloquium made very clear the degree to which scholars in many different historical fields are now also engaging in similar enterprises and how the discipline of history is changing as a result. The present PBE grew recognisably out of Jones's 1950 project, and the colloquium rightly celebrated fifty years of British prosopography. The related international projects mentioned above were all represented, together with interested researchers from a wide variety of disciplines in Britain, and the discussion was lively. It has become clear that in comparison with PLRE, PBE is a different animal altogether. The fundamentals of scholarship have not changed, nor has the value of prosopography. But PBE is no longer a lexicon, with pages to be turned over in the study or the library. We did not know even when we began how the technology would develop or what new possibilities it would offer. The Academy gave its support nevertheless. And now one can see that PBE truly belongs in the twenty-first century.

This example shows the results of the search for all patrikioi who were eunuchs, who are not mentioned in Theophanes Confessor's *Chronographia* (10 in all), choosing Ioannes 447 as an example, to show PBE's treatment of textual sources.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the PBE CD-ROM interface. The search criteria are: ((Title: Patrikios) AND (Eunuch: All Eunuchs)) NOT (Source: Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. and tr. C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, (Oxford, 1975), 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1883-85, repr. Hildesheim and)). The search results list 10 entries, with Ioannes 447 selected. The entry for Ioannes 447 is as follows:

Ioannes 447		Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire
Sex	E	
Florat	M/L DC	
Dates	867 (tpq) / 873 (taq)	
Titles	Patrikios (dignity), Sakellarios (office)	
Textual Sources	Photius, <i>Epistulae</i> , ed. B. Laourdas and I. G. Westerink, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1983-85) (letters)	

Below the table, there is a detailed text entry for Ioannes 447:

*Ioannes 447* was patrikios and sakellarios and a member of the Angouroi (probably his family, cf below), to whom the patriarch Photios (*Photios 1*) addressed several letters written between Oct. 867 and c. 873. Photius, *Ep.* 50, 74, 87, 130 (I 95, 116, 126E, 169 Laourdas-Westerink) (all addressed ἰωάννη πατρικίῳ καὶ σακελλαρίῳ κατὰ τοὺς Ἄγγλους). He was a eunuch (τῆ γυναικωνίτις ἐστὶ κατὰ κληρονομίαν, ἀνδρόγυνος καὶ εὐδότης καὶ ἀσποδοῦστος οὐ γάρτηρον σοφῶν) and so is strongly rebuked by *Photios 1* for interfering in the mysteries of the Church, by which he had made his family (his γένος) hated. Photius, *Ep.* 50. The allusion to his γένος may be associated with the reference to the Angouroi to suggest that he was a member of the family of the Angouroi, see *Michael 12* and cf. Winkelmann, *Quellenstudien*, pp. 151E, 214. Bergmeier, *Photios I*, p. 400, n. 50. He was no longer regarded as a friend by *Photios 1*: Photius, *Ep.* 87. He was accused by *Photios 1* of involvement in rebellion, along with his other misdeeds: Photius, *Ep.* 74.