

DEDICATED TO THE TWO I LOVE

When Sir Matt Busby dubbed United "the Red Devils", could he ever have imagined inspiring two academic tomes that explore the Byzantine era?

Words Joe Ganley

So many events that occurred in the year 2020 were unprecedented. So, as the months rolled on, precious few things were able to surprise us in the manner they might have done a year or two earlier.

But, still, when we found out a two-volume academic study entitled *Hell in the Byzantine World: A History of Art and Religion in Venetian Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean* had been dedicated to Sir Alex Ferguson and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, we were slightly taken aback.

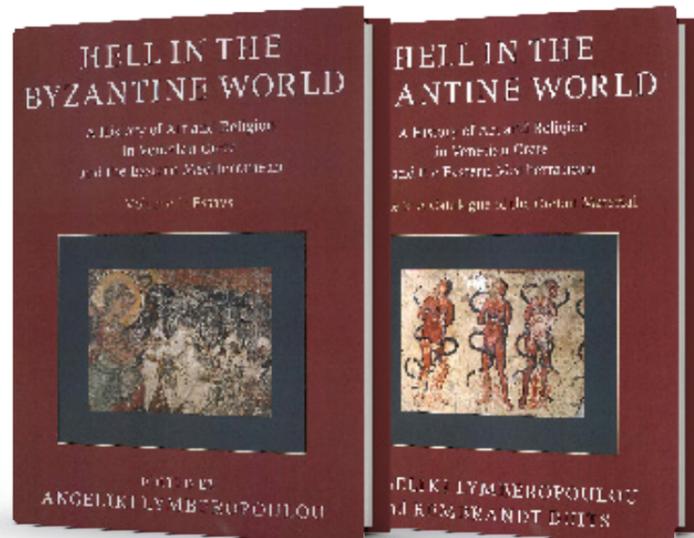
What did Sir Alex's achievements in Aberdeen and Manchester have to do with images of hell and the afterlife in the churches of Lakonia? We knew Ole's dad, Oyvind, had been a successful Greco-Roman wrestler as a young man in Norway, but did the Solskjaer family have an unknown link to Venetian Crete?

But, thankfully, the explanation is simple, as author Angeliki Lymberopoulou revealed to us when we made contact.

"The book is about the representations of hell in the wider Byzantine era," begins Lymberopoulou,

who is Senior Lecturer in Art History at the Open University. "We cover the whole Mediterranean from the 13th century to the 17th century and, of course, hell has many, many devils in it. And this book is inspired and dedicated to the Red Devils, because it has been my passion! I wanted to do something that was directly related to my passion of football, and so it was the devils association with United.

"Does the club want to be associated with hell? Probably not!" she chuckles. "But we are the Red Devils, as Sir Matt decided. It's exactly what he wanted: to



Our manager is credited with inspiring the second volume of the academic work



We knew Sir Alex was inspirational, but we didn't realise quite how far his influence had spread...

strike the fear of hell into the opponents; to say that we are unbeatable! It has nothing to do with rotting in hell because you are a sinner. It's about raising hell; being so overwhelming that the opponent cannot contain you!"

Devilishly different

Lymberopoulou became a Red at the age of 12, in 1982, when it seemed "the whole of Greece" supported Liverpool. "I wanted to be different," she says. "Every Saturday I watched football, and we had the English league, so I grew up with English football. With Ipswich Town, Crystal Palace when they were big and, of course, Liverpool. United affects me massively, primarily because it was there when I was going through very difficult times in my life in the '90s,



Angeliki Lymberopoulou is the author of the weighty tome (and also a massive United fan)

like my divorce. The only thing I had was United. It really took my mind off things. That might sound silly, but football is important to people."

Angeliki is an archaeologist, but also very interested in history. Her initial intrigue in the club and its backstory led her back to the Newton Heath days, through our name change in 1902, to the adoption of the "Red Devils" nickname which links our club to her study.

"Sir Matt thought it would be frightening for the opponents. Which was [initially] a problem for me, because I am Greek Orthodox!" she laughs. "So the fact United had this little devil as the symbol, I thought: do I really want to support a team with a devil [on the badge]? But then I thought: football has a different God! And I gave in! The allure of United was too great; it's a fabulous

club with so much history.

"I am not really interested in promoting the book as such," she stresses, "because this is an academic work and a not-for-profit thing. But this book is inspired and dedicated to the Red Devils, because it has been my passion."

If any fans fancy taking a look, they can expect an in-depth investigation into how Christian iconography developed, and how ideas around hell and the afterlife helped to safeguard society in the Byzantine period.

"It was about giving society moral codes to go along with the penal codes," describes Lymberopoulou. "For example, you should not steal – not only because it's bad, but because you're making your neighbour suffer. It was important that you adhered to something for the survival of society. Plus hell is much more interesting than paradise, because [in paradise] nothing happens!"

"The book has two volumes. The first is dedicated to Sir Alex Ferguson, who was the ultimate Red Devil to me. The second is to Ole, because I hope with him we can resurrect a little bit, and also because of his famous goal in the 1999 final."

Copies have been sent to both Ferguson and Solskjaer, who Angeliki hopes will be pleased with the dedication. If nothing else, the link between her monumental piece of academic work and our club proves the huge scope Manchester United has to influence people and projects from all over the world. 🍷

The dedications as they appear in volumes I (left) and II (right)

To Sir Alex Ferguson
The Ultimate (Red) Devil

To Ole Gunnar Solskjaer
The Ultimate (Red) Devil Apprentice



Two Red Devils...