

Byzantium and Its Neighbours
Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue
edited by Luisa Andriollo, Luigi D'Amelia

Preface

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There can be no doubt that Orthodoxy was an important form of the cultural identity in Byzantium, and has remained so in all the countries that originated the “Byzantine Commonwealth”

(Paul Magdalino, 2010)

The present volume, edited by Luisa Andriollo and Luigi D'Amelia, offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationships between Byzantium and its different neighbours, with a particular focus on the religious dimensions of these interactions. This collection of essays presents a range of scholarly perspectives that elucidate the processes through which religious identity was constructed, negotiated, and contested within the context of the Byzantine world and its external relations.

Byzantium, with its rich tapestry of cultural and religious influences, serves as a critical case study for understanding the dynamics of self and otherness. The contributors to this volume engage with various aspects of Byzantine religious life, examining the impact of the empire's interactions with neighbouring cultures on its own religious identity. These interactions are explored in relation to Christian, Muslim and Jewish cultures, with contributions from G. Strano on the Armenians, L. Andriollo and M. Fanelli on Muslims and V. Déroche on Jews. By means of a series of illustrative examples, the essays examine the intricacies of dialogue and conflict, elucidating the manner in which religious beliefs and practices served as a conduit for both unity and division.



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A key theme of the volume is the concept of religious selfhood in Byzantium. The essays examine how the Byzantines defined themselves in relation to their surrounding communities, frequently utilising religious criteria to delineate the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. This self-definition was not static; rather, it evolved in response to changing political landscapes, cultural exchanges, and theological debates. The volume emphasises that the Byzantine understanding of self was inextricably linked with perceptions of the 'other', resulting in a dynamic interplay of dialogue and confrontation.

Moreover, the volume addresses the role of religious institutions and figures in mediating these interactions. The contributions emphasise the pivotal role of ecclesiastical and monastic authors in influencing the discourse on religious identity. By examining specific texts/'speeches' (see D'Amelia's essay) and historical episodes, such as the interactions between Byzantium and the Islamic world or the relationships with the Jews or the various Christian groups (Armenians, Latins), the authors reveal the multifaceted nature of religious dialogue and its implications for broader socio-political contexts.

In addition to its historical focus, *Byzantium and Its Neighbours* also engages with contemporary theoretical frameworks, drawing on concepts from postcolonial studies, identity theory, and interreligious dialogue (see in particular the editors' Introduction). This interdisciplinary approach enhances the analysis and prompts readers to consider the continued relevance of Byzantine religious dynamics in the contemporary globalised world, where issues of identity, otherness and dialogue remain pressing.

The present volume is an exemplar of the spirit and goals of the new series, *Alterum Byzantium*. It views Byzantium as a meeting space of culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse worlds. At the same time, it traces themes that span the entire millennium and also characterise the modern dimensions and realities *après Byzance*.

In conclusion, the inaugural volume of the new series, *Byzantium and Its Neighbours. Religious Self and Otherness in Dialogue*, represents a significant contribution to scholarship. It encourages readers to rethink the boundaries of religious identity and the potential for dialogue in a world characterised by diversity and difference. This volume is essential reading for anyone interested in the intersections of religion, culture, and history in the Byzantine era and beyond.

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