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## **Monks, Merchants and Artists in the Eastern Mediterranean.**

### **The Relations of Byzantium to the Arab Near East (9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> c.)**

#### **Abstracts**

Alexander Beihammer (Nicosia): Ideological Trends and Developments in Byzantine-Arab Diplomatic Relations from the Eleventh to the Thirteenth Centuries

This paper intends to examine the various repercussions on ideological attitudes in Byzantine-Arab relations, which were caused by a series of major changes in the political constellations of the Muslim-Arab world from the eleventh century onwards. The Seljuk expansion not only brought about significant territorial losses in most parts of Asia Minor, but also led to the emergence of a powerful protecting force of Sunni Islam and the Abbasid caliphate. As a result, Byzantium had to re-think its relationship with Baghdad and unavoidably became involved in the antagonism between the Seljuk dynasty and the Shiite caliphate of Cairo. The establishment of the Crusader States in Palestine and the ensuing attempts of the Comnenian emperors to regain their leading position in Cilicia and Northern Syria entailed a reorientation of Byzantine attitudes towards the political forces operating at that time in Syria and Iraq. Fluctuating between aggressive and appeasing positions, Byzantium partly appeared as supporter of the Christian cause in its capacity as supreme sovereign of the Crusader states and partly enforced a policy of coming to terms with the Muslim rulers of the region. The Third Crusade and the alleged alliance between Isaac II Angelos and Saladin occasioned the circulation of a sort of

conspiracy theory in Europe. It goes without saying that this coalition was very differently interpreted by both Greek and Arab observers. The emergence of the Mamluk Sultanate and the re-erection of the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople by Michael VIII formed another decisive watershed which once more led to a tightening of relations between Constantinople and Cairo.

Koray Durak (Istanbul): Movement of Merchants between the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic Near East from the ninth to the eleventh centuries: from aggregates to individuals

Concerning the movement of merchants modern scholarship has either limited the discussion to certain geographic areas (such as Egypt or Constantinople), or treated the subject impressionistically. David Jacoby examines the presence of Byzantine merchants in Egypt from the tenth to the twelfth centuries in the context of the Byzantine-Egyptian trade, while Stephen Reinert draws upon a number of Arabic sources and the *Book of the Eparch* in his study of merchants from Islamic territories, but he only concerns himself with the situation in Constantinople. The geographic distribution of Byzantine merchants in the Near East and Near Eastern merchants in Byzantium, the durations of their stays, and the networks that they created during their tenure in the hosting country are three main subjects investigated in this presentation. Another aim is to present a number of individual merchants from Byzantium and the Islamic Near East along with some information about their ethnic and religious backgrounds and their connections. I believe that this is a worthwhile endeavor since no modern work provides the names of specific merchants who were active during the period in question; rather the scholarship treats merchants from Islamic lands in Byzantium and vice versa in the aggregate.

Nicolas Drocourt (Nantes): Muslim and Arab-speaking Christian Ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire (9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

Arab-Muslim and Arab-speaking Christian ambassadors were numerous in the Byzantine Empire between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are essentially known thanks to Greek and Arabic sources and their presence raises many questions. As official envoys and representatives of Muslim sovereigns the conditions of their reception have to be asked. How far the advantageous arrangements for their official trip within the Empire (suggested by Greek normative texts such as the *De cerimoniis*, II, 47, p. 683-685) are confirmed by texts describing or mentioning it? In which ways the *basileis* received them in Constantinople – and does their religion, for Arab-Muslim envoys, implies aspects of reception that do not appear for other ambassadors? But conditions of stay in the Empire are not sufficient to cover all the aspects that their presence implies. Historians also have to deal with political, military and cultural data concerning them. This paper would like to propose an overview of these themes for a category of persons who belonged to an elite and could played an important role as cultural brokers.

Asa Eger (Greensboro): The Archaeological Landscape of the Islamic-Byzantine Frontier

The traditional view of the Islamic-Byzantine frontier is of a no-man's land ravaged by annual raiding from both Muslim and Christian armies. This entrenched view is a literary topos that is not reflected from the archaeological evidence. Drawing evidence from surveys and excavations across the frontier, it becomes clear that the frontier was a settled one. The landscape was criss-crossed with roads connecting settlements, large cities and urban centers, small villages, farms, monasteries, pastoral camps, and waystations. Agricultural estates and irrigation projects, both caliphal and locally sponsored, appeared as new constructions as early as the late seventh century on the Islamic \*thughur\*. In the late seventh / early eighth century new settlements indicating gradual sedentarization and increased revitalization in commerce were founded including a system of waystations linking the Abbasid and Byzantine frontiers. Environmental changes and population shifts led certain communities to adapt to new ways of life in seemingly difficult terrains. In this settled frontier, traditional holy war between Byzantines and Muslims was but one interaction

in a more complicated arena. Here settled and nomadic groups competed for resources with one another while central states attempted to control these peripheral groups. In this dynamic and settled landscape a wider range of exchanges took place between diplomats and prisoners, merchants and artists, pilgrims and religious figures.

Sidney Griffith (Washington): Paul of Antioch and the Muslims: Orthodox Theology in Arabic in the Thirteenth Century.

Of all the Arabic works attributed to Paul of Antioch, the Melkite Bishop of Sidon in the 13th century, scholars have paid most attention to his famous, 'Letter to a Muslim Friend' and the several Muslim responses to it. While not neglecting this important text, the present study discusses it within the context of the other works attributed to Paul, tracing his continuous themes and highlighting his summary presentation of traditional Melkite thought in Arabic. Looking back from the vantage point of Paul's work, the lecture highlights the critical junctures in the evolution of Arab Christian Orthodoxy from the eighth century to the thirteenth.

Robert Hillenbrand (Edinburgh): The scholar, the saint and the sovereign: Aspects of Frontispiece Design in 13th-Century Painting

The paper explores how Byzantine images of holy personages and rulers were adopted and adapted by the painters charged with depicting scholars in the frontispieces of books written in Arabic. This process, which subjected long-established types to unexpected omissions and additions, led to a blurring of the iconographical distinctions between these three types of figure. By degrees, too, the neutral or classicizing background of Byzantine images gave way to much more sharply delineated contexts for these images of sacred, royal or scholarly authority. Thus a millennial tradition of frontispiece design embedded in Roman and Byzantine culture lost its staid and predictable quality, taking on new forms and new meanings.

Lucy-Anne Hunt (Manchester): Christian Art in Egypt and Greater Syria of the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries as Seen Through the Prism of Key Intermediaries.

From an initial standpoint of the processes of cultural brokerage, this paper seeks to identify and contextualise examples of the referencing of Byzantine/Melkite art by Arab-speaking Christians in Egypt and Greater Syria during the period of the Crusades. Icon painting and book illumination will provide the focus, with reference to other arts including wallpainting. Instances of the manufacture, or transfer, of works of art through the agency of individuals and (often overlapping) groups will be considered. These are discussed with reference to selected key intermediaries, including ecclesiastics (monks and priests) and administrators, as well as travellers (merchants, diplomats and pilgrims) and the artists themselves. What motivated these cultural producers and with what results?

Mat Immerzeel (Leiden): Byzantine Artists in the Latin and Islamic Middle East

As the most important Byzantine monastic settlement within Muslim territory, the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai preserves an impressive collection of medieval works of art. Less known, however, are the activities of thirteenth-century Byzantine artists in other parts of the region, not only on behalf of the local Melkites, but also in Latin, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Coptic sanctuaries. Written sources report about Byzantine painters travelling as far as Tabriz and Northern Mesopotamia to decorate church interiors as well as about the participation of Greeks in the refurbishment of a palace in Latin Beirut. In the past years Byzantine murals were uncovered in Israel, Lebanon and Syria. In Coptic Egypt, the contribution of Byzantine-trained painters to the embellishment of Coptic churches appears from icons, wall paintings, canopies, and illustrated manuscripts in Cairo and several desert monasteries. These discoveries shed new light on the artistic interaction between the different Christian communities of the Middle East, and simultaneously raise the matter of a revision of the concept 'Crusader art'.

Hugh Kennedy (London): *Thughūr* and *ʿAwāṣim*. Financing the Defence of the Muslim Frontier with Byzantium in the Early Islamic Period

This paper will discuss the fiscal status of the frontier provinces suggesting that the *thughūr* areas enjoyed a privileged tax status and that the *ʿawāṣim* were established in the early Abbasid period to provide financial support to the frontline thughur areas. It will also look at direct central government investment in fortifications and other military activities during the period.

Bettina Krönung (Mainz): The employment of Christian Mediators by Muslim Rulers in the Arab-Byzantine Diplomatic Relations from the Ninth to the Eleventh Centuries

A number of historical sources in Arabic refer to Christian ambassadors and other mediators, which were employed by Muslim rulers in the diplomatic contact with Byzantium in the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this paper I will not only deal with the question of who these mediators were. Moreover I will discuss the factors that led some of the Abbasid, Fatimid, Umayyad and Hamdanid potentates to draw on Christian intermediaries. What are parallels and differences in the choice of Christian mediators by rulers of the respective dynasties? Was there a common motivation in their choice, which could therefore be described as typical Islamic?

Benjamin de Lee (Eugene): Niketas Byzantios, Islam, and the Aristotelian Shift in Ninth-Century Byzantium

This paper will explore how Niketas Byzantios, a ninth-century Byzantine intellectual known only through his writings, including anti-heretical and anti-Islamic treatises, changed the Byzantine intellectual discourse about Islam. This shift emphasized Aristotelian syllogisms rather than traditional patristic and scriptural citation. While the study of Aristotle had never died out in Byzantium, a brief comparison with Niketas' writings and earlier thinkers, like those from the iconoclast controversy and also his contemporary Patriarch Photios, will demonstrate just how much a new approach in

theological polemic was initiated by Niketas. Comparison with later anti-Islamic polemic and some anti-Latin treatises demonstrate just how lasting Niketas' impact was, as later Byzantine anti-Islamic writers chose to follow his approach rather than earlier thinkers like John of Damascus. Ironically, as this paper will also demonstrate, this new approach was inspired by an Islamic thinker, and this exchange gives new insight into the exciting intellectual cross-fertilization of the early medieval eastern Mediterranean.

Johannes Pahlitzsch (Mainz): Syria and Palestine in Byzantine Hagiography of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries

The truce between the Fatimid rulers of Cairo and the Byzantine emperor of 1035/36 inaugurated a new phase of Byzantine influence in Syria and Palestine. The emperor was allowed to restore the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and indeed this treaty could be understood as an acknowledgment of the Byzantine "protectorate" over the Orthodox Christians in the Holy Land. It seems that at the same time the orthodox monasteries in the Holy Land became increasingly attractive for the Byzantines as documented in several lives of Saints from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century who spend some time in monasteries in that region. These texts include the life of St. Lazaros of the Mount Galesion that was written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the life of St. Christodoulos, the founder of the Theologos-Monastery on Patmos, the life of the stylite Gabriel, written by Neophytos Engkleistos in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century who himself spend some time in Palestine, and the life St. Leontios, patriarch of Jerusalem. The aim of this paper is to examine on the basis of these texts the relations between the orthodox monasteries in the Holy Land and Byzantium in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the depiction of the Near East in these texts and the religious importance of Palestinian and Syriac monasticism for Byzantium.

Robert Schick (Amman): The Relations between the Christians in Palestine and the Byzantine Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries

This paper will examine the Christians in Palestine and their relations with the Byzantine Empire from the period of the civil war between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun after the death of Harun al-Rashid in 809 until the Fatimid takeover in 970. The paper will cover the area of modern-day Israel/Palestine and Jordan and will concentrate on historical sources, while also examining the archaeological evidence for a continued Christian presence in the area of Palestine.

Jack Tannous (Washington): Byzantium in Islam?

In the seventh century, Arabs conquered regions which had been populated by Greek speakers for nearly a millennium and which contained some of the most important centers of classical learning in the entire world. The goal of my paper will be to ask whether and how this cultural footprint persisted under Arab rule into the Abbasid period; if so, does it make sense to speak of a 'Byzantium' within Islam, an internal source of language, ideas, and texts which could be drawn upon by non-Greek speakers living within the Caliphate, for their own purposes? To address this question, I will attempt to look at the knowledge of Greek and of Greek texts in ninth-century Baghdad specifically and then look at the knowledge of Greek and of the presence of Greek texts in the ninth-century Abbasid Caliphate more broadly. Searching for living, breathing Greek within the Caliphate will ultimately take me in the direction of the Syriac-speaking Christian communities of Mesopotamia and Greater Syria who continued Late Antique traditions of scholarship and learning, including a knowledge of Greek, unbroken, into the Arab period and whose presence and activities suggest the existence of another, earlier, Eastern 'Byzantine Commonwealth,' one whose borders extended south, into the Middle East. Discussions of Arab Muslim interaction with Byzantium, I will argue, should include discussions of Arab Muslims dealing with the 'Byzantium within' which was much more immediate, much more easily accessible, and indeed, much more influential than the Byzantium which resided in territories under the political control of Constantinople.

Alexander Treiger (Halifax): Translators and Translations from Greek into Arabic in 'Abbasid Palestine and Byzantine Antioch

Abstract: My communication will discuss two principal centres of Christian translation activity from Greek (as well as Syriac) into Arabic—'Abbasid Palestine (750-969) and Byzantine Antioch (969-1084)—and the major translators active in these two centres. Since research on Graeco-Arabica has traditionally focused on translations of "secular" literature (philosophy, medicine, and science), done in Baghdad, translations of Christian ecclesiastical literature (biblical and liturgical texts, homilies, hagiography, and patristic literature), produced in Palestine and Antioch, have fallen by the wayside and are almost completely neglected. I will offer some remarks on the history and relative chronology of these translations, focusing on the earliest (pre-tenth century) translations of the Greek Church Fathers. On the basis of this analysis, I shall argue that these translations, in their choice of texts, translation techniques, and theological and linguistic features, shed important light on Palestinian Christianity in the early Islamic period.

Vasiliki Tsamakda (Mainz): Perceptions of Muslim Arabs in Byzantine Art

The paper will focus on some aspects of depictions of the Arabs and the way they were perceived and represented in Byzantine works of art. The starting point will be the representation of Arabs among the sinners and heretics in hell depictions. Until now the research has focused on the western clerics and monks appearing in Byzantine hell scenes of the late Byzantine period due to the historical circumstances and the loss of great parts of the Byzantine Empire to the West. The discovery of Arabs among hell scenes of the Byzantine frescoes of Crete raises the question about the role of the Arabs in the Cretan society in general and about the religious and political attitudes of the Greeks towards the Arab population. Crete was under Venitian domination from 1211 to 1669 but also had an Arab past until the reconquest of the island in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The study will be then extended to other Byzantine media depicting Arabs and their possible hostile attitude towards them.

Alicia Walker (Bryn Mawr College): Pseudo-Arabic Inscriptions at the Middle Byzantine Church of Hosios Loukas: Modalities and Meanings

The monastery complex of Hosios Loukas in Phokis, Greece, has long fascinated scholars because of the incorporation of pseudo-Arabic motifs in the decorative program of its middle Byzantine churches. Pseudo-Arabic appeared in the marble revetments of the templon screen (now preserved only in dislocated fragments) of the tenth-century north church and is still found in the cloissoné brick coursings on the exterior of the north building as well as in the mosaic program of the eleventh-century south church and the wall painting of the crypt beneath it. This paper explores the possible modalities through which these motifs were transmitted to Hosios Loukas, and how different means of transference could have inflected the significance that pseudo-Arabic held for the various groups involved in the construction, decoration, and use of the complex. The impulse to ascribe a single cross-cultural conduit or reception for pseudo-Arabic is resisted in favor of recognizing the full range of potential agents of transmission – including monks, merchants, pilgrims, patrons, soldiers, and craftsmen – as well as the different meanings they may have ascribed to the building and its decorative program.

Elizabeth Williams (New York): Jewelry and Fashionable Dress between Byzantium and Islam

Despite similarities among the forms of jewelry found throughout the eastern Mediterranean during the eighth through twelfth centuries, many studies still catalogue these objects according to monolithic taxonomies of "Byzantine" and "Islamic" in order to situate jewelry within the broader narratives of art history. The limitations of this approach are many, obscuring for example the similarities between artifacts attributed (often arbitrarily) to Byzantine and Islamic cultures without engaging with their intriguing similarities. Perhaps the most damaging aspects of this approach are its focus on objects' place of production, and its tendency to interpret the movement of jewelry styles from major centers outwards to peripheral regions.

In this paper I argue that literature on medieval dress practice in the eastern Mediterranean of the eighth through twelfth centuries provides a framework for locating jewelry within more inclusive social and cultural contexts. Parallel trends between clothing and jewelry have gone largely unnoticed by those studying jewelry, yet considering the circulation, use, and reception of jewelry should nuance our appreciation of shared trends between Byzantine and Islamic spheres, particularly in women's dress in regions outside court centers in Cairo, Baghdad, and Constantinople. The case studies to be presented address shared preferences for jewelry in terms of broader sartorial trends through documented historical and archaeological contexts for jewelry and fashionable dress.