

# Preface

This volume is the product of a conference that took place in May 2019 in Mainz, Germany. The conference marked the end of the work of a successful research group on *Contact and Discourse within Christianity: Byzantium, the Latin West and the Slavic World*. This group was part of the Leibniz Science Campus Mainz/Frankfurt *Byzantium between Orient and Occident*, and it had set out in 2015 to examine religious contact, transfer and debate among the diverse ramifications of Christianity in Europe and the role that the often forgotten East-Roman, Byzantine empire and its version of the Christian faith played in these processes.

Within our group, pre- and post-docs worked on projects that ranged from the transfer of Late Antique saints' cults between the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Europe to religious contacts between Orthodox and Latins in the Latin-held islands of Cyprus and Crete, to the use of Byzantium and Byzantine Christianity as a reference point for nineteenth and twentieth-century nation building discourses in Serbia and Russia. This broad range of subjects allowed us to explore the question of religious contact within Christianity at very different points in time and space, showcasing both connections and continuities as well as the unique characteristics of each case. Far from being a place at the margins of European culture, as it is often seen in Western Europe today, the Eastern Roman empire played a key role for Christian Europe: as a reference point for its Late Antique and Early Medieval inhabitants, in the dealings with the Holy places of the Eastern Mediterranean, in the tensions between Latin and Orthodox communities that shaped religious identities in the Later Middle ages, and not least as a reference point, both positive and negative, for the emerging nations in nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe.

The 2019 conference invited external scholars as well as members of the group to reflect on the specific connection between religious exchange and identity construction in Christian communities across Europe. We asked in what ways various groups came into contact, how knowledge about the religious Other was created, and how it was used in discourse. The present volume collects many of the papers held at the conference, as well as two articles supplied by colleagues who enriched the ScienceCampus with their presence during the time the volume was in the making. I would like to thank all contributors and reviewers, as well as the co-organizers of the conference, Prof. Dr. Johannes Pahlitzsch and Dr. Jörg Drauschke, for their support. Special thanks go to Christina Hadjiafxenti and Savvas Neocleous for their warm and never-slackening support of the volume. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Dr Ian Hathaway for his diligent proof-reading on both content and style, and Chiara Bach and Philip Wendel for their untiring help with the editing.