

# Introduction

In the 560s, Saint Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, the former palace church of Theoderic, the Arian king of the Goths, was refurbished to cater for Christian Orthodox worship. A famous mosaic procession of martyrs, led on the female side by St Euphemia of Chalcedon, decorated the north and south walls from that time onwards. Euphemia was the patron saint of the council of Chalcedon that had defined Christian Orthodox faith a hundred years earlier. Her depiction in Saint Apollinare Nuovo may be seen as a statement for Orthodoxy and against Arianism in this former centre of the Arian faith. The Orthodox viewed the Arians as heretics, since the latter negated the divine nature of Christ. Euphemia's presence in Saint Apollinare must have been intended to strengthen the Orthodox identity of the believers in Ravenna, including them in the world of Orthodox belief – and clearly excluding Arianism<sup>1</sup>.

Almost nine hundred years later, in 1452, on the formerly Byzantine island of Cyprus, then a feudal Crusader Kingdom under the originally French Lusignan dynasty, an important Greek Cypriot statesman called Hugo Podocataro wrote his last will and testament<sup>2</sup>. Hugo left large sums of money both to Greek Orthodox and Latin churches. On the subject of his burial, he stated that he wanted to be buried in the Greek women's monastery of Le Femene in Nicosia, in his father's grave. However, he was afraid this might not be allowed by the Latin cathedral church, »since I was married in the Frankish [i. e. Latin] rite<sup>3</sup>«. Hugo therefore came from a Greek (i. e., formerly Byzantine) Orthodox family, but had officially passed over to the Latin rite (what we today call the Roman Catholic Church) on the occasion of his marriage at the latest. Though then officially a Latin Christian, his emotional ties to the Orthodox Church were strong enough to occasion his plea to be buried in an Orthodox monastery<sup>4</sup>. Hugo Podocataro was a typical example for members of the social elites in Cyprus, but also in other Latin-held territories in the Late Medieval Eastern Mediterranean, who lived in a highly complex contact situation between different Christian religious rites, in which they negotiated their religious identities according to the demands of their situation.

The mosaic of the Anatolian Saint Euphemia in the Italian church Saint Apollinare Nuovo offers a glimpse of how religious cults could travel, to be used for the coherence and integration of great masses of population and geographical spaces – the realm of Orthodox Christianity that was concurrent with the Roman Empire covered a great part of the Mediterranean and beyond. The population of Ravenna, which for a brief space of time had not only been subject to the Goths, but with their rule had also officially accepted the Arian belief, was to be re-converted in order to strengthen its belonging to Rome. The case of Hugo Podocataro in Cyprus, in turn, shows how these broad-scale politics concerned the fate of individuals and changed their lives, forcing them to negotiate a situation of religious contact that was riddled by strong hierarchies. However, it also reminds us that things were seldom as clear-cut as official broad-scale politics would like to make us believe. On a personal level, the contact of religious groups in a situation of occupation could open up spaces of negotiation and choices of identity construction.

These two instances of religious politics are a thousand years and almost 3000km apart. However, both offer deep insights into contact between different religious groups and the processes of religious identity construction, and the practices of inclusion and exclusion that were central to the communities in Christian Europe in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Christianity split up into various groups with different creeds and rites very early in its history, and though theological differences were at the fore of these separations, the theological-philosophical deliberations very much tied into the social depths of collective identity construction that could be used for politics both of integration and of dissociation. These processes of religious contact and identity construction deserve a thorough comparative analysis that traces the significance of processes of religious integration and dissociation for the development of the Euro-Mediterranean, from antiquity until today.

For much of the Middle Ages, religious processes were strongly influenced by the East Roman or Byzantine Empire. In Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, the East Roman

1 For a more detailed discussion of the church, the mosaics and St Euphemia, see Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna* 146-151. 164-171; and for a discussion of the identity politics involved in this affair, see Reihl-Weigl, *Euphemia* in this volume.

2 This testament, written in Hugo's own hand, lies today in the Archivio di Stato in Venice (ASVen, Notarile, Testamenti 14). It has been published in Rudt de Collenberg, *Les premiers Podocataro*.

3 Rudt de Collenberg, *Les premiers Podocataro* 143.

4 Cf. Salzmann, *Negotiating Power and Identities* 151.

Empire was the greatest political player in the Euro-Mediterranean area and constituted a reference point for the emerging Frankish states as well as for Slavic rulers. At the same time, people in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean generally saw themselves as belonging to one church. An awareness of basic religious differences between East and West and scepticism towards the Byzantine Empire in particular began to emerge only later. With the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, these differences culminated into open conflict. The Frankish occupation of Byzantine territory, however, also gave rise to a new intensity of contact between Byzantine Orthodox and Latin Christians and generated processes both of integration and dissociation.

In a parallel development, integration and dissociation can both be seen in the relations between Byzantium and the Slavic world. Byzantine missionary activity in the Slavic world from the ninth century onwards resulted in an extended process of assimilation, but also provoked Slavic reactions of dissociation. This development continued long after the fall of Byzantium, becoming part of the nation-building processes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The present volume therefore asks how religious exchange and contacts in Europe can be mapped between Byzantium, the Latin West and the Slavic World from Late Antiquity to modern times, and which role these contacts between various Christian communities in Europe played for their construction of collective (religious) identities. Within the framework of this question, the volume focuses on the ways in which various groups came into contact, how knowledge about the religious *Other* was created, and how it was used in discourse. What role did faith and religion play for – inclusive or exclusive – identity construction? How was Byzantine culture and religion received both during the lifespan of the empire and later?

The papers emerge from the joint work of a research group on *Contact and Discourse within Christianity. Byzantium, the Latin West and the Slavic World* that was part of the Leibniz ScienceCampus Mainz/Frankfurt *Byzantium between Orient and Occident* between 2015 and 2019. The project ended with a conference in May 2019 that featured most of the papers contained in this volume, though the contributions by Eleutherios Despotakis and Nicholas Melvani are a welcome later addition.

In exploring the questions of religious exchange and identities within the Christian Euro-Mediterranean, both the conference and the work of the research group more generally emerged from the Leibniz ScienceCampus, which approaches Byzantium both as a historical empire and a culture situated between Orient and Occident, which took on a mediating role between the traditions of what is nowadays called the Near East and Western Europe<sup>5</sup>.

This approach is informed by the burgeoning field of research on inter-cultural contacts that has been a strong movement in medieval history since the 1990s, and its belief that cultures are not static, unchangeable entities, but ever-changing constructions that are in continuous exchange with one another<sup>6</sup>. In more recent years, this perspective has become part of the debate on global history, a field that has been rapidly growing in the last decades. Approaches to global history among other aspects include the history of (cultural) (dis-)connections and exchanges, delving into the (dis-)connectedness of the world instead of just focusing on national or regional histories<sup>7</sup>. The ScienceCampus' investigations of the history of the relations between the Byzantine Empire and its neighbours, and particularly the question of how contact and discourse between different Christian groups in the Euro-Mediterranean helped create religious identities, must be situated squarely in this field.

The use of the term *identity/identities* indicates a second field of discussion that plays an important role for the present project. Identity studies is an exceptionally broad field; it looks back on many decades of research and discussion that were stimulated by the various cultural and post-colonial turns from the 1960s onwards<sup>8</sup>. The term *identity* itself has been hotly debated for some time. However, we believe that it can still be used in a meaningful way to discuss narratives of self and of group cohesiveness, which are particularly useful for the study of contact between different religious groups, of questions of religious affiliation and of their significance for social in- and out-groups. In keeping with modern studies from both the field of cultural anthropology and psychology, the papers in this volume discuss (religious) identity not as an essential, unchanging definition of self, but as a set of narratives that construct a sense of self both individually and in groups: people choose from various available cultural

5 For the concept of the Leibniz ScienceCampus Frankfurt/Mainz Byzantium between Orient and Occident, see Wissenschaftscampus: Leibniz-Wissenschaftscampus – Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident – Mainz/Frankfurt (byzanz-mainz.de) (27.07.2024).

6 The study of intercultural contact in medieval studies was and is, of course, part of a broader intellectual movement that is connected with the various postcolonial and postmodern turns; however, among German medievalists in particular the starting point of this work has been a group of scholars in a DFG-Schwerpunktprogramm around Michael Borgolte (*Integration und Desintegration der Kulturen im europäischen Mittelalter*), see Borgolte et al., *Mittelalter im Labor*; Borgolte et al., *Integration und Desintegration der Kulturen*.

7 The debate on global history has brought forth an enormous corpus of literature. We will signal here only some of the newer works that discuss the field and its questions themselves: Wenzhuemer, *Doing Global History*; Conrad, *What is Global History?*; Adelman, *What is Global History Now?*; Drayton/Motadel, *Futures of Global History*. Michael Borgolte's last great work (Borgolte, *Die Welten des Mittelalters*, 2022) shows clearly how the older approach of the history of intercultural contact has become integrated into the newer concept of global history.

8 For a recent discussion of the field, see Wetherell, *Handbook of Identities and particularly Wetherell, Field of Identity Studies*.

discourses to create a sense of belonging<sup>9</sup>. Constructions of identity may therefore change with time and situation; they are connected to various contexts and social roles. Religion may be only one category or social context of identity construction that can overlap and intersect or even come into conflict with other identity building sectors, such as race and language, region, social origin or gender<sup>10</sup>.

Narratives play an important role for the study of identities. Identity narratives answer the question »who am I<sup>11</sup>«? They are therefore also intimately connected to the question of the *Other* that is so often debated by historians<sup>12</sup>: if people see themselves as belonging to a specific (religious) group, who does not belong to it in their eyes, and how are these Others perceived and constructed?

In applying these questions of cultural exchange and identity construction to Christianity in the Euro-Mediterranean, the volume brings together scholars from varying disciplines: Patristics and Church History, Byzantine and Slavic Studies, Archaeology, Early Modern and Modern History. The authors work on diverse topics from pilgrimage to church architecture to German school books to Byzantine wall paintings, and the papers cover a time span between the fourth and nineteenth centuries. In their diversity, the papers speak to each other, and shed light on some recurring aspects of religious contact and identity construction that I will discuss briefly in five points.

### **In- and Out-Groups: Christian Rite as Unifier?**

Christian rites and cults could serve as unifiers on a social and political level. This is evident for example from Katharina Reihl's paper on Saint Euphemia, from which the episode on Saint Apollinaris Nuovo that introduces this paper is taken<sup>13</sup>. In tracing the transfer of Euphemia's cult from Anatolia to the West Roman Empire, Reihl demonstrates both how the saint's veneration strengthened the connection between East and West and how it was used in the attempt to re-integrate population groups into the empire that had for some time belonged to both a different realm and a different creed (Arianism). The unifying element is therefore, as always, based on the differentiation from the *Other*, in this case the Arians.

This unifying strength was, of course, by no means inherent to Christian faith. Eleutherios Despotakis' paper on the priests and copyists around Bessarion shows vividly how a unification project can fail: Bessarion, a Byzantine intellectual

who had come to Italy as a refugee after the fall of Constantinople, and had converted to the Latin rite, devoted the remainder of his life to bringing about the union between the (Byzantine) Orthodox and the Latin Churches. His attempts, starting with the Greek communities in Venice and Crete, failed, however. Despotakis shows how even Bessarion's close collaborators from Crete, who worked both as priests in Venice and as copyists for the cardinal's works, were not always unequivocally loyal to the professed church union. As examples for their flocks, they therefore behaved ambiguously, and indeed, the great masses of the Greek speaking populations never favoured church union. In the fifteenth century, the situation of strife between the Latin and Orthodox Churches was clearly too strong, the identities of both so distanced that church union was out of the question, especially for the Greeks, who had suffered at the hands of the Latins in the preceding centuries.

### **Ways of Dissemination and Re-interpretation**

The transfer of religious knowledge, as well as of cult objects, is an important precursor to ideological unification through religious rite. Jörg Drauschke, Kirill Maksimovič and Nikos Tsivikis examine the ways in which this transfer took place and in Tsivikis' case, which difficulties the dissemination of such knowledge could encounter. Drauschke shows the importance of relics in the transfer of saints' cults to Gaul: the number of relics coming from the Eastern Mediterranean that can be traced in this region is impressive and underlines their significance for the spread of Christianity. Relics came to Gaul both as official gifts and as souvenirs from private pilgrimages or as presents, featuring a wide range of ways of dissemination. The relics are a proof of thousands of personal contacts between Gaul and the Eastern Mediterranean that enabled the transfer of these authoritative objects and the religious knowledge that went with them.

Nikos Tsivikis in turn examines the spread of Christianity in the sixth-century Peloponnese. Based on archaeological and architectural evidence of churches from this period, as well as a special liturgical cross, Tsivikis argues that Christianity had not taken firm roots yet in this region at the onset of Slavic immigration. Christian churches were usually rudimentary buildings that exhibited simple aesthetics. The liturgical cross under discussion displays the Lord's prayer in an unusual, very prominent way. Tsivikis takes these elements to demonstrate

9 For the differentiation between essentialist ideas of identity and identity as a continuous construction, see Hall, *Recent Developments* 157-162 and Wetherell, *Field of Identity Studies* 6-18; for the idea of identity as the outcome of constant negotiation and the choice between discourses, see Hall, *Who Needs Identity?* and Ryan/Deci, *Multiple Identities*, esp. 226-227; the expression of identity and social reality via narratives as a concept can be found in Haldon, *Ideology* 21-22. For a more detailed discussion of these inter-connected ideas on identity, see also Salzmann, *Negotiating Power and Identities* 16-18.

10 For the categories or levels of identities, see Haldon/Kennedy, *Regional Identities* 319 and Schryver, *Excavating Identities* 8-9.

11 Haldon, *Ideology* 22.

12 See Brah, *Non-binarized Identities*, esp. 137-138; Hall, *Who Needs Identity?*; EBBach, *Wir/Ihr/Sie*.

13 K. Reihl-Weigl in this volume p. 15-23.

that Christianity in the Peloponnese was in a still developing, almost missionary stage in the sixth century. This fact, according to Tsvikis, might explain the absence of Christian traditions in this region in later times, when Byzantine missionaries returned to the region in the ninth century.

The reasons for Christianity's weak hold on the Peloponnese should probably be sought in the difficult social-economic conditions in the region, which had become a poor hinterland of the empire. In comparison with the blooming relic trade to Gaul in the same centuries, this shows clearly how social-economic conditions are a major factor in the spread of the Christian faith and the religious knowledge, architecture, liturgical vestments etc., that accompany and support it. The dissemination of religious knowledge needs social and economic support to flourish.

Besides the economic means, knowledge transfer also needs language and culture skills. Maksimovič's analysis of the Slavonic Nomokanon of Methodius and the details of its translation from Greek demonstrates this fact. Moreover, it reminds us that religious knowledge dissemination, like all knowledge transfer, is also a process of reinterpretation: every translation is also a re-interpretation, the creation of a new text in a new context. This holds true for religious texts and contexts just as for any other cultural object. In the case of the Nomokanon, Maksimovič demonstrates how even simple word translations, such as the Greek *New Rome* to the Slavonic *Second Rome* for Constantinople render insights into the transformation and ideological re-interpretation of political and theological concepts.

These micro-processes of translation, re-interpretation and dissemination create a greater picture of knowledge transfer and contact that results not only in the specific relations between political and religious entities such as the Byzantine Empire and the emerging states of the Slavic world, but also the actual characterization of religious rite and life in the regions under discussion. Like Reihl's paper on Euphemia, they showcase the strong religious contacts between the eastern and western parts of Europe in the Early Middle Ages, which are often forgotten in the light of later conflict and which contrast with much less developed contacts in regions such as the Peloponnese. They also showcase the intricacies of reinterpretation in the contact between Byzantium and the Slavic world.

### **Constructing and Subsequently Forgetting a Rift: Religious Othering as Propaganda Instrument**

Re-interpretation also played a role in a slightly different sense in the relations between Latin and Greek Christians in the time before and after the Fourth Crusade. Scholars have researched the opinion about the religious *Other* in this period for long years. The two papers concerned with this matter here offer new perspectives on this discussion. Savvas

Neocleous deconstructs the notion that the Latins viewed the Byzantines or Greek Christians as heretics and as *Others* as early as the beginning of the twelfth century. Following this traditional approach, the conquest of Constantinople by the participants of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 would have been the result of a century of hatred between Latins and Greeks. Neocleous shows how the picture of Greek Christians in Latin sources during this period was very complex and often positive, while the demonization of the Greeks was spontaneous battle propaganda issued by the priests of the army to boost the Latins' morale.

Nicholas Melvani's contribution follows up on this topic immediately, as he investigates the image of Constantinople in Latin sources, and especially in Venice, from the aftermaths of the Fourth Crusade until the fifteenth century. Melvani demonstrates how the proud exposition of spolia from Constantinople that adorned cities such as Venice from the thirteenth century onwards and their self-representation as the heirs of Constantinople developed into an active Forgetting of the Fourth Crusade. In the fifteenth century, Latin sources present Constantinople only as a second Jerusalem that should be rescued from the Ottomans, a Holy City in distress.

Together, both contributions showcase how the narrative of the relations between Latins and Greeks very much depended on the political situation (as is, of course, usually the case with such ideological narratives). According to the turn of events and the shifting of alliances and enmities, actors with authoritative voice, such as priests or chroniclers, could exploit theological differences by picking various elements from their array of ideological discourse that suited the political goals of the moment.

### **Contact in Former Byzantine Lands Held by the Latins**

This shifting, flexible use of religious Othering and identity construction was also a frequent characteristic of the originally Byzantine regions that were occupied by the Latins after the Fourth Crusade. In these regions, religious contact between Latins and Greeks, but also between various Christian groups in general, was often an everyday phenomenon, with Latins visiting Greek Orthodox churches and vice versa, though at the same time differences of rite and church communities could play a great role on the socio-political level.

Such phenomena are for example visible in Cyprus, where everyday contact between Latin and Greek believers took place very early after the foundation of the Latin Crusader state of the Lusignans (1192-1489). Over time, the popes complained again and again about Latins visiting Greek masses etc. At the same time, being a Latin Christian was a presupposition for belonging to the Cypriot elite and for holding state office until the end of Lusignan rule in the fifteenth century; the affiliation with the Latin rite was therefore

a highly useful instrument for social differentiation: religious Othering used for social purposes<sup>14</sup>.

Such strong social borders ran diagonal not only to everyday life, but also to artistic production, where exchange was an important, though not always tangible phenomenon. Antje Steinert investigates such a phenomenon in her paper on a group of Cretan churches that feature unusual wall paintings. Though Byzantine in their iconographic programme, the wall paintings exhibit a peculiar style that seems to be influenced by western painting techniques. Two of these churches, in Kephali and Leivadas, also include a Latin element of liturgical dress, the so-called *maniple*, in pictures of the Orthodox holy hierarchs. Steinert analyses the significance of these mixed elements and concludes that these phenomena themselves do not permit any interpretation of actual syncretism on the religious level, or the common use of these churches by both Orthodox and Latins. Rather, the exchange must be seen as taking place on an artistic level that did not necessarily reach beyond the mixing of painting styles and iconographic elements. With her contribution, Steinert strengthens the observation that strong contacts or even cultural adaptation on one level did not necessarily mean the same for other levels of social interaction.

### **In- and Out-Groups Again: Historical Projection**

The use of religious affiliation and of the differences between Byzantine, Orthodox, and Latin Christianity for the construction of in- and out-groups did not cease with the end of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century. On the contrary, the identification with certain types of Christianity, and concomitantly, the use of the Byzantine Empire as an object of historical projection, are important elements of

ideological narratives in Europe until today. These narratives have been studied in depth by part of the research group on Contact and Discourse within Christianity, focusing on national narratives in Serbia, Ukraine and Russia, as well as the perception of Byzantium in nineteenth-century Germany<sup>15</sup>. Christina Hadjiafxenti's paper in this volume on the image of Byzantium in German Protestant church history school books is one outcome of these studies. Hadjiafxenti shows how the narratives of nineteenth-century church history books stigmatise Byzantium and the Byzantine Orthodox Church as a weak, degenerate and, in a European perspective, peripheral state and church. Their consistently hostile attitude to Byzantium is connected to their Protestant background and their interpretation of Church history, which generally perceives the medieval history of the Church before Luther's reformation as a history of decline and decay.

This interpretation of Church history differs radically from discourses within the Orthodox world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and increasingly in today's Russian politics, for example, where an alternative idea of Europe is based on the identification with a specific kind of Byzantine history and the construction of Russia as Byzantium's heir plays an important role for state ideology<sup>16</sup>.

In the diachronic frame of this volume, these modern interpretations speak to the examinations of much older discourses and their constructions of (religious) identities and contact between different groups of Christians over time. Though the volume naturally discusses only a fraction of the interactions between Christian groups in Europe between Late Antiquity and Modern times, it may serve the reader to compare types of identity discourses, the changing contacts between and construction of (religious) in- and out-groups in Europe and, last but not least, the contrast between the changing contents of ideological narratives and the unvarying mechanisms of their construction.

14 See Salzmann, *Negotiating Power and Identities* 141-160; Salzmann, (Re)constructing Aristocratic Religious Identities.

15 The publications of this group include the collective volume of a conference on *Imagining Byzantium – Perceptions, Patterns and Problems* (Alshanskaya et al., *Imagining Byzantium*), as well as their separate studies, see Alshanskaya, *Das Erbe von Byzanz*; Alshanskaya, *Reception of Byzantium*; Alshanskaya, *Vizantija*;

Alshanskaya, *Byzanz in Russland* for the Russian and Ukrainian interpretations in the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries; Gietzen, *Das byzantinische Erbe der Serben* for Serbia; Hadjiafxenti, *Byzantium*; Hadjiafxenti, *Byzanz-Bild*.

16 See e.g. Guthier, *Waräger* for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Russia; as well as the publications mentioned in n. 16.

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