

The History of Christian-Muslim Relations

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The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam

Edited by

Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and
David Thomas



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Front cover illustration: Emperor Theophilus (829-842) and the Khalif of Bagdad, al-Mamun, during the cultural exchange mediated by the emperor's envoy, John the Synkellos. Taken from the illustrated manuscript of John Skylitzes' chronicle *Synopsis Historion*.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Christians and Muslims have been involved in exchanges over matters of faith and morality since the founding of Islam. Attitudes between the faiths today are deeply coloured by the legacy of past encounters, and often preserve centuries-old negative views. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, Texts and Studies presents the surviving record of past encounters in authoritative, fully introduced text editions and annotated translations, and also monograph and collected studies. It illustrates the development in mutual perceptions as these are contained in surviving Christian and Muslim writings, and makes available the arguments and rhetorical strategies that, for good or for ill, have left their mark on attitudes today. The series casts light on a history marked by intellectual creativity and occasional breakthroughs in communication, although, on the whole beset by misunderstanding and misrepresentation. By making this history better known, the series seeks to contribute to improved recognition between Christians and Muslims in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Emmanouela Grypeou

The papers collected in this volume were presented in the international workshop *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* in Erfurt in June 2003. The Workshop was organized as part of a research project on Islamic Studies at the University of Erfurt with the title *Globalization and Regionalization Processes in Eastern Christianity and their Impact on the Formation, Expansion and Early Development of Islam in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries*.

The Arab conquests of the Byzantine eastern provinces and the consequent establishment of Muslim dominance foreshadowed the end of the long tradition of Hellenism in western Asia. However, the emergence of Islam in the Arabian peninsula and its rapid spread in the eastern provinces of Byzantium were preceded by chronic conflicts between the Byzantines and the local Christian communities. These conflicts were ostensibly of a theological nature. The objective of this research project was to investigate if, how far, and in which ways the possible cultural, religious, and social differences between the Byzantine central power on the one hand, and the peripheries of the empire on the other, could have influenced the emergence and rapid spread of Islam in the eastern provinces. Thus the central theme of the major programme: The struggles between centre and periphery, whereby the margin becomes the or, at least, a centre.

The analysis focuses on theological issues in terms of cultural processes that took place between the Byzantine central power and its periphery. At this time theological issues acquired a specific socio-cultural character. So, the central power's striving for theological and cultural homogeneity can be seen to promote the idea of universal dominion or a global society for the Byzantine Empire, and specific religious controversies can, in turn, be seen as conflicts between globalizing and regionalizing tendencies in an empire that was multicultural in character.

The contextualization of theological matters enables the emergence of Islam to be considered not as an isolated procedure, but rather as a phenomenon that developed by means of complex cultural processes and reciprocal perceptions. This approach provides a better