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**Inter-faith encounters in Late Byzantium:  
Conflict and dialogue  
in the Eastern Mediterranean**



**2025 Virtual Byzantine Colloquium**

***In memory of Anastasios Yannoulatos,  
Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës, and All Albania  
(1929-2025)***

**4–5 June 2025**

**Senate House, University of London  
Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU**

To reserve a place in the Colloquium free of charge please visit:  
<https://ics.sas.ac.uk/events/inter-faith-encounters-late-byzantium-conflict-and-dialogue-eastern-mediterranean>

Frontispiece: Alexander the Great discussing with the Jewish rabbis  
Miniature from the *Alexander Romance*,  
Venice, Hellenic Institute, Codex gr. 5, f. 92v (14<sup>th</sup> c.)  
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Source: Wikimedia Commons

## **Inter-faith encounters in Late Byzantium: Conflict and dialogue in the Eastern Mediterranean**

The Eastern Mediterranean has always been a world of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. During the late Byzantine period and the early Ottoman era (13th-15th c.), the challenges posed by war, political fragmentation, empire formation and management, migration, natural disasters and epidemic diseases led to new ways of religious interaction. Landmarks in this process were the Crusades, the Latin conquest of Byzantine territories, the Mongol expansion, and the rise and consolidation of the Ottomans. A mosaic of Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities found themselves in close contact, especially in the spheres of administration and economy as well as through inter-marriage, conversion and enslavement. Common spiritual needs and metaphysical anxieties and expectations, such as the quest for miraculous healing, led to shared pilgrimage shrines (e.g., Christian churches and dervish tekkes) and the inter-faith veneration of holy men and women. Not only were religious beliefs, customs and practices belonging to Christian sub-groups adopted and appropriated by other Christian sub-groups, but they also present similarities or even seem to have influenced and were themselves influenced to various degrees by Jewish and Muslim traditions. Last but not least, the geographical proximity and co-existence of the three monotheistic religions in this long period inspired religious clash in the public sphere (e.g., pogroms and popular revolts), and led their religious spokesmen to conduct theological debates and pen apologetic treatises against the religious Other.

The aim of our Colloquium is to explore case studies of unity in diversity or unity vs diversity in Late Byzantium, a period of dramatic decline of the Byzantine Empire and the parallel rise of the Ottoman Empire, in a vast territory inhabited by various Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities. It seeks to throw new light to the history and culture of the Eastern Mediterranean, the region of the Black Sea, the Balkans and Asia Minor at a time marked by tension and intolerance together with gradual assimilation and adaptation as well as by a high degree of flexibility and fusion of cultures. Such intermingling is evident in the social and intellectual world of the protagonists involved, in literature, art, architecture, and visual and material culture. Our speakers represent a variety of scholarly fields and methodological approaches, focusing on case studies of inter-faith encounters during the late Byzantine and the early Ottoman periods (13th-15th c.), covering aspects of inter-faith tension, conflict, tolerance and co-existence, re-addressing earlier debates and providing fresh perspectives on the mechanics of identity formation, boundary building, inter-religious and inter-cultural exchange, and community inclusion and exclusion, shedding light on the complexities of a colourful, yet harsh and violent world, inhabited by Christians, Jews and Muslims of different denominations.

# Programme

**Wednesday 4 June 2025**

17:00 **Welcome** by Prof. Katherine Harloe, Director of ICS

17:10 **Opening remarks** by Dr Charalambos Dendrinis, Director of the Hellenic Institute, RHUL

## **SESSION 1. SOCIETY AND POLITICS**

**Chair:** Dr Chrysovalantis Kyriacou

17:30 Prof. Rustam Shukurov (Austrian Academy of Sciences)  
*Muslim-Christian conversions and crypto-Muslims in Byzantium*

18:00 Jack Dooley (Royal Holloway, University of London)  
*Wielding Greek and Latin faith identities in Late Byzantium: the case of the Orsini family in the Morea and Epiros*

18:30 Discussion

19:00 Break

19:30 **Keynote Speaker:** Prof. Nicholas de Lange (University of Cambridge)  
*Inter-faith encounters in Late Byzantium: the case of Judaism*

20:00 Discussion

20:30 **Closing remarks** by Dr Paris Chronakis, Director, Centre for Greek Diaspora Studies, RHUL

## Thursday 5 June 2025

10:15 Opening remarks

### SESSION 2. THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY

**Chair:** Dr Charalambos Dendrinou

10:30 Dr Evangelos Katafyllis (Royal Holloway, University of London)  
*Theological intersections: Muslim-Christian encounters in Jalal al-Din Rumi's Ariflerin menkibeleri*

11:00 Dr Chrysovalantis Kyriacou (Theological School of the Church of Cyprus)  
*Orthodox monks, Armenian lords, Seljuk sultans, the Latins in Cyprus and a manuscript: reading Euthymios Zygabenos' Panoplia Dogmatike in thirteenth-century Eastern Mediterranean*

11:30 Dr Norman Russell (St Stephen's House, Oxford)  
*Topos and Reality in the Lives of Late Byzantine Neomartyrs*

12:00 Discussion

13:00 Break

### SESSION 3. SPACE AND CULTURE

**Chair:** Evangelos Katafyllis

14:30 Revd David Williams (Royal Holloway, University of London)  
*The Holy Light as a signifier of purity*

15:00 Prof. Jelena Erdeljan (University of Belgrade)  
*Popular funerary art in Late Medieval Serbia: An echo of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs in the Late Middle Ages*

15:30 Prof. Teresa Shawcross (Princeton University)  
*Religious Cult and Civic Government in Late Medieval Thessalonike and Siena: A Comparison*

16:00 Discussion

16:30 Closing Remarks



## Abstracts

### **RUSTAM SHUKUROV**

Professor in Byzantine History  
Division for Byzantine Research  
Institute for Medieval Research  
Austrian Academy of Sciences  
Email: [shukurov007@gmail.com](mailto:shukurov007@gmail.com)

### ***Muslim-Christian conversions and crypto-Muslims in Byzantium***

The paper examines documented cases of the conversion of Muslims to Christianity in Byzantium and the subsequent religious life and identity of newly baptised Muslims. The study provides a typology of different forms of Christianisation recorded in the sources, including both forced and voluntary baptisms as well as group and individual conversions. The first known instances of Muslim conversion to Christianity occurred during the Byzantine “Reconquista” of Eastern Anatolia and Syria in the 10th and 11th centuries, with occasional cases continuing through the 12th to 15th centuries. Not all baptised Muslims remained loyal to their new religious affiliation. Some reverted to Islam, while others led lives marked by a dual identity. The paper also discusses rare examples of Crypto-Islamic behaviour from the 9th to the early 15th centuries. While information on apostates from Christianity is scarce in contemporary sources, the study explores several instances where individuals reverted to Islam. One particularly obscure Persian text by the Timurid historian Hafiz-i Abru mentions a group of former Muslim apostates in the Empire of Trebizond who practised Islam secretly. Although such cases are not widely documented, we investigate the available evidence for multiple conversions between Islam and Christianity. By analysing these diverse forms of conversion and religious identity, the paper sheds light on the complex religious dynamics between Byzantium and the Muslim world during this period.

Professor SHUKUROV’s research covers various areas, including Byzantium and the Near and Middle East; Muslim Anatolia and Byzantium; Central Asia in the 19th century, demography, socio-linguistics and transcultural studies. He is currently exploring the mobility and intellectual and cultural inter-exchange between the Byzantine and Neo-Persian worlds as well as micro-structures and transcultural phenomena in the Empire of Nicaea (1204–1261).

## NOTES



**JACK DOOLEY**

Doctoral Student

The Hellenic Institute

Department of History

Royal Holloway, University of London

Email: [Jack.Dooley.2016@live.rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Jack.Dooley.2016@live.rhul.ac.uk)

***Wielding Greek and Latin faith identities in Late Byzantium:  
the case of the Orsini family in the Morea and Epiros***

Boundaries are often the location in which firmly establish identities, concepts and communities breakdown and interact with the “Other”. This can aid in the formation of relationships which away from the boundary may seem different, peculiar, or potentially dangerous. In the 13th century, the polities within the Morea and Epiros found themselves facing one such boundary, between the Latin West and Greek East. In the Morea, the newly established Principality of Achaia, with its small Latin ruling class, had to carve a relationship with its Greek population, which forged a relationship with existing Byzantine institutions. The result was a mixing of cultures which occurred at every level of Achaian society and the birth of a wide range of Greco-Latin political, artistic and cultural icons, the most well-known being the various forms of the *Chronicle of Morea*. In Epiros, further from the boundary, interactivity between Latin and Greek was less strong. At the upper echelons of society, the despots were forced to interact with their Latin neighbours to avoid conflict with the Latins and to protect themselves against enemies on other borders. The paper explores one important aspect of this interactivity, namely inter-faith relations, through the lens of one of the major families of the 13th and 14th centuries in the Morea and Epiros, the Orsini of Kephallonia. The Apulian family, which established the new County of Kephallonia in 1207, quickly became influential in both the Principality of Morea and the Despotate of Epiros. This was no doubt aided by their dual-ethnic status, as *gasmouloi*, being both Latin and Greek. This was the result of members of the family having married into the great Greek families, including the Komnēnoi and Palaiologoi. This allowed the Orsini to take advantage of their multiple identities. We shall examine this process, examining how the Orsini wielded faith to secure, support and grow their influence in both the Morea and Epiros.

JACK DOOLEY’s research interests lie in the history, literature and culture of Late Byzantium focusing on aspects of identity in the Palaeologan period, especially concerning the *gasmouloi*, which he explores in his doctoral thesis. He is also interested in Greek palaeography and epistolography, especially the Letters of George of Cyprus and George Oinaïotes.

## NOTES

**NICHOLAS DE LANGE**

Emeritus Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies

Faculty of Divinity

University of Cambridge

Email: [nrml1@cam.ac.uk](mailto:nrml1@cam.ac.uk)

***Inter-faith encounters in Late Byzantium: the case of Judaism***

Byzantium was notionally a unitary state with a single religion. This idea, which underlies the unique status and self-understanding of the “Orthodox” Byzantine Church, also seems to inform most modern histories, which, broadly speaking, ignore, dismiss or display hostility towards dissenting or differing religious expressions. Yet, dissenters there always were. This paper focusses on the somewhat exceptional case of Judaism. The Jews are relatively accessible among Byzantine minorities, because so many of their writings survive, including hundreds or maybe thousands of Hebrew manuscripts. During the Palaiologan period Jews were a definite, if minor, presence in Constantinople and other Byzantine cities, as well as in formerly Byzantine locations, such as Venetian-ruled Candia, which is particularly well documented. The Jews were to a large extent segregated from Christian society. This segregation was encouraged (indeed officially required) on the Christian side, and also on the Jewish side, although they were not formally separated in “ghettos”. This fact prompts caution as we attempt to reassess relations between Jews and Christians: we should beware of too easily importing assumptions based on today’s very different conditions. The Orthodox Church was resolutely hostile to “the Jews”, perhaps more as a concept than as a group of real-life individuals. This hostility is manifested in liturgy and preaching, and an old tradition of polemical writing against the Jews persisted in our period. Hardly any traces subsist of any sort of friendly relations between Christians and Jews, and genuine knowledge of Judaism is rare. As for Jewish writings of the period, they hardly ever mention Christianity; when they do, the tone is generally hostile. Yet, there are rare exceptions to this general landscape. A few Christian churchmen and intellectuals took an interest in Jewish practices, ideas and traditions. An intriguing example is Simon Atumano, Latin archbishop of Thebes, who supposedly knew Hebrew well enough to translate the gospels into that language, and is thought to be the author of a translation from Hebrew to Greek that displays a very profound knowledge of, and sympathy for, Jewish biblical scholarship (the so-called *Graecus Venetus*). Other Christian authors were interested in Jewish medicine or astronomy. On the Jewish side we have some examples of translation from Greek into Hebrew, mainly in the sphere of philosophy, but also of science. While assessing the value and extent of these exceptions to the rule, we should consider how far they are unique to the Jewish case, and to what extent they can cast light on other analogous cases, such as Christian–Muslim or Orthodox–Latin relations.

Professor DE LANGE has written extensively about Jews and Judaism. His most recent book is *Jews in the Byzantine Empire* (Athens, 2022). He is currently working on a corpus of medieval Hebrew inscriptions from the territories of the Byzantine Empire.

## NOTES

**EVANGELOS KATAFYLLIS**

Research Associate

Hellenic Institute

Royal Holloway, University of London

Email: [vankatafilis@gmail.com](mailto:vankatafilis@gmail.com)***Theological intersections: Muslim-Christian encounters in Jalal al-Din Rumi's Ariflerin menkıbeleri***

The paper examines Muslim-Christian theological encounters through the lens of the Sufi hagiographical source *Ariflerin menkıbeleri* written in 13th-century Anatolia. We look at how early Ottomans conducted interreligious debates; what were the socio-political and religious circumstances that led Jalal al-Din Rumi to engage in dialogues with Christians; where, when, and why did these encounters take place; what were the roles of the protagonists involved, and how were they presented in these accounts; what attitudes and modes of behavior did the two sides exhibit; what kind of doctrinal arguments were exchanged during these meetings; and finally, to what degree did Jalal al-Din Rūmi engage with his Christian counterparts, and what did he aim to achieve through these encounters. The paper offers an appreciation of early Ottoman hagiography as a source of Muslim-Christian theological encounters, the diffusion and development of early Ottoman Islam in Anatolia, and the Ottomans' dialogical skills and rhetorical prowess. It also sheds light on their perception of identity and the socio-political and religious conditions of these encounters, representing a unique case in interfaith dialogues. The analysis of these discussions enables us to assess Jalal al-Din Rūmi's theological knowledge of Christianity, the participants' stance and tone in these meetings, and how prone to dialogue Muslim interlocutors were. Studying the Muslim-Christian encounter reported in the *Ariflerin menkıbeleri* offers a new angle and a more holistic appreciation of the medieval culture of disputation between the two faiths in the 13th c.

Dr KATAFYLLIS specializes in Christian/Byzantine and Muslim/Ottoman intellectual interactions in the 14th-15th c., Ottoman Islam, early Ottoman history, the emergence of Islam in the Balkans, and the history of the Byzantine literature on Islam (8<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>c.). He has translated into Modern Greek a number of Byzantine sources on Christian-Muslim theological encounters and Byzantine treatises on Islam. He is currently preparing the publication of his doctoral thesis *Religious Intellectual Encounters between Byzantium and the Ottomans in the Fourteenth Century: The Case of Gregory Palamas*.

## NOTES

**CHRYSOVALANTIS KYRIACOU**

Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History  
Theological School of the Church of Cyprus/  
Research Associate  
Hellenic Institute  
Royal Holloway, University of London  
Email: [c.kyriakou@theo.ac.cy](mailto:c.kyriakou@theo.ac.cy)

***Orthodox monks, Armenian lords, Seljuk sultans, the Latins in Cyprus and a manuscript: reading Euthymios Zygabenos' Panoplia Dogmatike in thirteenth-century Eastern Mediterranean***

The incarceration and execution by the Latins of the Monks of Kantara (1231) is a well-known episode in the history of Orthodox-Latin relations after the Crusader conquest of Cyprus in 1191. Before their clash with the Latins and subsequent martyrdom, the nucleus of the monastic community of Kantara had come to Cyprus from Kalon Oros in Attaleia (1227/1228), for reasons related to the Seljuk conquest of 1221. One of the monks, the manuscript copyist, poet and theologian Makarios, later renamed Maximos, is also the author of a brief polemical text on Islam. The text, preserved in *Vaticanus Palatinus graecus* 365, is a confession of faith, following a compilation of excerpts from Euthymios Zygabenos' (d. post 1118) *Panoplia Dogmatike* (Πανοπλία Δογματική). Zygabenos was the editor-in-chief of a larger group of theologians preparing a compilation of patristic texts that formed a manual against various heterodox groups. *Panoplia Dogmatike* was composed at the order of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) and was probably presented to him in 1113–1114. This paper explores the possible circumstances behind Makarios' possible copying of *Panoplia Dogmatike* in defence of Eastern Roman Orthodoxy. It also seeks to interpret the reasons behind the migration of Eastern Romans from Seljuk Kalon Oros to Frankish Cyprus and understand better the role of refugee monks as guardians of the Orthodox tradition.

Dr KYRIACOU's research focuses on the history of Christianity in Cyprus and other Eastern Mediterranean areas, from Late Antiquity to the early modern period. He has written extensively on the ecclesiastical history of Cyprus, exploring themes of hagiography and identity throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

## NOTES



**NORMAN RUSSELL**

Honorary Research Fellow  
St Stephen's House  
University of Oxford  
Email:normanvrussell@outlook.com

***Topos and Reality in the Lives of Late Byzantine Neomartyrs***

The Lives of Neomartyrs in the Palaiologan era are far fewer than those of the later Ottoman Empire. The reasons for this are complex, the religious situation being more fluid in the earlier period before the *Rum millet* became a community within the Ottoman state with strictly defined boundaries. Building on the important work of Johannes Pahlitzsch, the paper proposes to go behind the literary texts, with the help of the patriarchal register and other documents, to explore further the various ways in which religious tensions between Christians and the dominant Muslims in western Asia Minor arose and how they were resolved. Resort to violent solutions was comparatively rare. The paper argues, however, that theological issues were of prime importance. To interpret the contemporary representation of religious events in purely literary or sociological terms impoverishes our understanding of them.

Dr RUSSELL is a translator of Orthodox theological works and has written widely on Orthodox themes. His publications include works on early Greek patristics, Hesychasm, and modern Orthodox theology.

## NOTES

**REVD DAVID WILLIAMS**

Doctoral Student

Department of History

Royal Holloway, University of London

Research Associate

Institute of Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge

Fellow of the Huffington Ecumenical Institute

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology

Email: [david.williams.2014@live.rhul.ac.uk](mailto:david.williams.2014@live.rhul.ac.uk)

***The Holy Light as a signifier of purity***

"The Greeks have another kind of church, of which I shall only remark that if a Latin priest had celebrated mass therein they would think that all the water of the ocean were not enough to purify the church, to such an extent do they wash the altar, and even the whole building, in their belief that the Latin mass contaminates and profanes it. Their usage of consecrating with leavened bread, and their other rites are sufficiently known. They hate the Latins worse than they do the Turks". This quote written by Niccolò Dandini in 1596 exemplifies the negative attitude toward sharing sacred space on the part of some Orthodox under Latin rule. The ritual purification of an altar that had been "profaned" by Latin worship is documented in the *Errors of the Greeks* (1563-1570) recently edited by Chrysovalantis Kyriacou, while Friar Angelo Calepio, an eyewitness of the Ottoman siege of Cyprus in 1570, offered a similar example. And yet, numerous examples of shared sacred space exist throughout the Latin East, even at the very heart of Christian sacred space: "In the sepulchre [of the Virgin Mary], masses are said, as they are in the Edicule [of the Holy Sepulchre]. And I celebrated there many times, as it is a place where all Christians can celebrate, no matter their rite, since it does not belong to anyone in particular" (Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium*, 1483-1484). Considering the hostility with which the Orthodox regarded the Latin/Roman Catholic Church the ecumenical character of the annual miracle of the Holy Light is highly unusual. In the case of the Holy Sepulchre the interreligious interactions and the shared nature of the space led to the control of a ritual that made explicit the superiority of one denomination over others. The paper argues that the heterodox witness of the miracle affirms the Greek Orthodox claims of ownership of the space of the Holy Sepulchre. As the space is not directly controlled by the Orthodox and cannot be purified by physical means the rite serves as a kind of affirmation of Orthodox purity over heterodox defilement. The historical nature of the miracle is also a source of interest for Muslims whose presence is noted in almost every pilgrimage account that describes the miracle. The ritual has been accepted by non-orthodox and even controlled by them but ultimately became a way to retain purity when management of the space of the holy Sepulchre and the ritual itself could not be saved from the pollution of heterodox.

Revd WILLIAMS' research concentrates on shared sacred space, saints, objects and rituals in the Byzantine Mediterranean.

## NOTES

**JELENA ERDELJAN**

Professor of Art History

Department of Art History

Faculty of Philosophy

University of Belgrade

Email: [jelenaerdeljan3@gmail.com](mailto:jelenaerdeljan3@gmail.com)

***Popular funerary art in late medieval Serbia. An echo of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs in the Late Middle Ages***

The paper presents and discusses the various types of funerary monuments present on a large number of preserved late medieval cemeteries found throughout Serbian lands in the Middle Ages and the pertaining and specific iconography of the sculpted depictions on the gravestones in question, which belong to rural and urban communities alike as well as in monastic surroundings. Taking into consideration the long survival of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs among the Orthodox Serbs to this day, as best exemplified by the celebration of *slava*, we focus on the contextualization and possible interpretation of such depictions as part of the ancestors cult underlying and intertwined with canonical Christian Orthodox beliefs and rituals related to death and dying. These sculpted motifs are mostly anthropomorphic, stylized in a number of different guises. Others include crosses, geometric, floral and zoomorphic motifs which, observed from the vantage point of inter-faith dialogue speak of the rich and deep and multi-layered spiritual world of popular culture in the late medieval Orthodox Balkans.

Professor ERDELJAN's research explores aspects of Byzantine and Medieval art and culture, Serbian art and culture of the premodern era, Balkan studies, Mediterranean studies, Jewish studies, and Jewish art and culture in the Balkans.

## NOTES

**TERESA SHAWCROSS**

Assistant Professor of History and Hellenic Studies

Department of History

Princeton University

Email: [csawcro@princeton.edu](mailto:csawcro@princeton.edu)

***Religious Cult and Civic Government in Late Medieval Thessalonike and Siena: A Comparison***

Taking as its starting point the story of Saint Demetrios and Lady Good Order as retold in the middle- and late-Byzantine retellings of the late antique *Miracles of Saint Demetrios*, the paper examines the relationship between religious cult and evolving political institutions in the second city of the Byzantine Empire: Thessalonike. It considers textual, art-historical and archaeological material shedding light on the public displays and performances that were associated in particular with the saint's feast days. In so doing, it analyses the ways in which the local saint was understood not only to protect the fundamental ideals of the Thessalonian constitution but also to foster in individual Thessalonians a mode of conduct appropriate to a productive engagement with civic life. The case of Thessalonike is considered alongside that of Siena at the end of the communal period in order to highlight similarities and differences. This comparison between Byzantium and Italy is all the more pertinent because of the concrete evidence of sustained contact between merchants, intellectuals and others from the two regions during the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.

Professor SHAWCROSS is Associate Professor of History and Hellenic Studies at Princeton University and a Senior Member of Robinson College, Cambridge University. She is a historian of the Medieval Mediterranean world. Her research situates itself at the interstices between Byzantium, Islam and the Latin West. She is especially concerned with contact, conflict and exchange between different ethno-religious and social groups, often within the context of large-scale migration and the experiences of migrants such as colonisers, enslaved persons, and refugees.

**NOTES**





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University of London**

**Our speakers and moderators of sessions**

**The Hellenic Institute and the Centre for Greek Diaspora Studies,  
Royal Holloway, University of London**

**Organising Committee:**

**Dr Evangelos Katafyllis, Dr Chrysovalantis Kyriacou, Jack Dooley,  
Dr Paris Chronakis and Dr Charalambos Dendrinos**



**THE HELLENIC INSTITUTE  
and  
CENTRE FOR GREEK  
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Back cover: Alexander the Great meets Queen Kandake  
Miniature from the *Alexander Romance*  
Venice, Hellenic Institute, Codex gr. 5, f. 161r (14<sup>th</sup> c.)  
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