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Foreword

Allow me to begin with a paraphrase of one of Fernand Braudel's most beautiful sentences: in this book, the artists travel.¹ In the periods that would centuries later be named the late Middle Ages and the early modern, artists moved across the regions of Eastern Europe: the Balkan Peninsula, the Carpathian Mountains, and the plains that stretch out toward the north, west, and east. They produced their works in communities that spoke and wrote in different languages and whose members professed their faiths through different rituals. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the intertwining of several microcultural models and reflexes, their creations are intelligible to the members of a given community. The sacral structures and holy images these artists created are as much the product of generally revered models and the interaction of their creative impulses. A unique visual heteroglossy of this world is the result of the interconnectedness based on historically, culturally, and religiously divergent traditions. That is the crucial characteristic of their activity. The essays collected in this volume speak to the manifold aspects of encounters and interchanges that unfolded in regions of Eastern Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The importance of the edited volume *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions* lies predominantly in the fact that, based on the conceptual premises of a global history of art (in terms of geography of art as theorized by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann),² it introduces to the scholarly scene a territory whose artistic heritage has, so far, been the subject of mostly overly specific academic interest. Existing scholarship is dedicated either to the individual monuments or works of art extricated from the original contexts of their creation and, as a rule, written from the inhibiting point of view of national histories.³ The essays presented in this volume, dedicated to defined clearly historical and geographic regions, are significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on the issues at hand while also being imbued with additional merit and quality. Taken together, these essays demonstrate that the above-mentioned regions, in their historical reality, functioned as a heterogeneous zone of interaction, exchange, and appropriation of objects, images, and ideas.⁴

1 Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée: L'espace et l'histoire* (Paris: Champs Flammarion 1999), 7.

2 See the bibliography in the chapter by Jelena Erdeljan in this volume.

3 A recent exception is the book on medieval wall paintings in Transylvanian Orthodox churches: Elena Dana Prioteasa, *Medieval Wall Paintings in Transylvanian Orthodox Churches: Iconographic Subjects in Historical Context* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 2016). See also Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende, eds., *Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective: From Frontier Zones to Lands in Focus* (London: Routledge, 2016); Balázs Nagy, Felicitas Schmieder, and András Vadas, eds., *The Medieval Networks in East Central Europe: Commerce, Contacts, Communication* (London: Routledge, 2019).

4 Stephen Greenblatt, "A Mobility Studies Manifesto," in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 250–253.

Being a part of the overall circulation of culture, massive historical processes, including emergence, expansion, and dissolution of various states, have defined the world of images not only as complex artistic media in shaping and mediating syncretic religious experience but also as indicators, per se, of the steady economic growth of regions. By grouping these case studies, which together illustrate *longue durée* phenomena of cross-cultural communication, the editors, as well as the authors of the individual chapters, have succeeded in mapping a network that eschews the dangers of what traditional art historical narratives called the megaperiods and breaches the geographic limits of the individual texts. This result confirms Homi Bhabha's views on the value of art "in its translational capacity: in the possibility of moving between media, materials, and genres, each time both marking and remarking the material borders of difference; articulating 'sites' where the question of 'specificity' is ambivalent and complexly construed."⁵

Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture covers the trajectories of artistic practices, the temporal "channels" through which traditional visual codes reached late medieval and early modern times, and the modes of adaptation that brought imagery and its creators into compliance with the desires of those who had commissioned artwork. The book maps variations of personal and collective identities that are grounded in models of connectivity that reflect the flourishing or stagnation of artistic activities. By detaching the artifacts from the framework of older narratives, *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture* liberates it from the hold of the long present and rigidly binary relation of center and periphery, which usually resulted in the disqualification of those branded peripheral as inferior.⁶

Judging from the contributions presented, that relation is far from a static one. Constantinople was the nucleus of the religious-ideological orbit for the territories examined in this volume, throughout its history – and especially in the waning days of its political power – it had constantly served as a source of creative possibilities for other Eastern Christian centers.⁷ Positioning regions of the Balkans and the Carpathians as the center of scholarly attention offers a significantly novel image of the geography of art in the spaces in question, less dependent on predetermined relations defined by the directions of historiography than by the artistic material itself and its local specificity.

The editors' concept illuminates the potential found in the historical sources and fostered through the innovative way of examining the local art, architecture, and visual

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, "Postmodernism/Postcolonialism," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 439.

⁶ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Introduction: Reintroducing Circulations: Historiography and the Project of Global Art History," in Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, 1–22, esp. 2.

⁷ See Jelena Erdeljan, *Chosen Places: Constructing New Jerusalems in Slavia Orthodoxa* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

culture. In *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture*, this artistic corpus is translated into a “hidden figure” from its formerly focal position, unquestionably significant but not the exclusive point of reference and itself susceptible to numerous transformations. In the now-already distant past, one could find a precedent to this approach in the never-realized concept of Wilhelm Koehler regarding the spatiotemporal horizon of coordinated research of the subject.⁸ Today, nearly a century later, the historiographic situation evidently indicates the fact that this is a field in which “normal science” is increasingly experiencing a change in paradigm evident in the study of the empire of Byzantium.⁹ The Byzantium of George Ostrogorsky is no longer, and the idea of a once monolithic organism of empire and its cultural satellites, known as the “Byzantine Commonwealth,” is undergoing substantiated deconstruction from many points of scholarly scrutiny.¹⁰

Regardless of Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann’s statement that traditional art history with its dominantly descriptive approach will always exist and that one should not harbor any illusion of a massive conversion of its adherents,¹¹ future trajectories of art-historical study should follow the paths proposed in this volume. At this point it would be too much to go into a detailed analysis of the reasons why the history of Byzantine art and architecture has sustained its orthodoxy by relying on a heterogeneous narrative in which the ideas and statements of Western European and American scholars differ, almost to the point of mutual unintelligibility. From those coming from the “native” Byzantine milieus, too much research has been constricted into a descriptiveness that serves the purpose of simulating interpretation of conjured-up pasts. The way forward from such a state of affairs is through careful visual analysis, nuanced consideration of historical context, and innovative theoretical frameworks that allow the multiplicity of meanings and functions of works of art to coexist. Still, in a most succinct form, it is important to draw attention to this situation because it causes miscommunication created by the idol of historiography. The problem stretches from one end of the hermeneutical horizon to the other, from diametrically different

8 Wilhelm Koehler, “The Dumbarton Oaks Program and the Principle of Collaborative Research,” *Speculum* 18, no. 1 (1943): 118–123; Kurt Weitzmann, “Byzantine Art and Scholarship in America,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 51, no. 4 (1947): 394–418, at 394; David H. Wright, “Wilhelm Koehler and the Original Plan for Research in Dumbarton Oaks,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 27 (2002): 134–175, at 163–167.

9 A recent example is Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

10 Christian Raffensperger, “Revisiting the Idea of the Byzantine Commonwealth,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 28 (2004): 159–174; Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*; Vlada Stanković, “Putting Byzantium Back on the Map,” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 32/33 (2016/17): 399–405.

11 Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, “The Prehistory of Globalization,” in *Art and Globalization*, ed. James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 44.

university curricula to the sensibilities and goals set by the individual researchers themselves. This field of study is thus filled with what James Elkins calls “our beautiful, dry and distant texts”¹² or, in the words of Thomas Kuhn, “model-problems,” which, consequently, offer “model-solutions.”¹³

It is also worth mentioning that reflexes of nationalism, a term always considered alarming, have long since ceased to play a crucial role in this issue especially in scholarship not dominantly sponsored by state funds. Bearing in mind the differences in the reality of historical perception but at the same time the similarities in modes of presentation of the past that exist in various contemporary states that re-imagine the Byzantine legacy,¹⁴ there is no danger either, if I understood Elkins correctly, of globally controlled art history or even “North Atlantic art history.”¹⁵ The Western heuristic constructs of overall objective analysis inclined toward cultural colonialism are not a cause of any damage to the ambience of average scholarly life of the former liminal regions at the borders of the Eastern and Western empires. Quite the contrary. If the “border,” “liminal,” “hybrid,” or otherwise designated contact zones are considered to partake in the realities of the late medieval and early modern world, they should be freed of any ideologized interpretation, whether stylistically or politically based. Moreover, acknowledging all the turbulences of their artistic production and exchange, study of the region should proceed along the paths laid out by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and others. The greater the number of “stations” on these paths

12 James Elkins, *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: On the History of Art as Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

13 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

14 See Diana Mishkova, “The Afterlife of a Commonwealth: Narratives of Byzantium in the National Historiographies of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania,” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 3, *Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies*, ed. Roumen Daskalov and Alexander Vezenkov (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 118–273; Slobodan Ćurčić. “Architecture in Byzantium, Serbia and the Balkans Through the Lenses of Modern Historiography,” in *Serbia and Byzantium: Proceedings of the International Conference Held on 15 December 2008 at the University of Cologne*, ed. Mabi Angar and Claudia Sode (Frankfurt am Main: PL Academic Research, 2013), 9–32. As proof of the lack of danger of the influence of nationalism that should, by definition, be accompanied by expansive publication activity in the once Byzantine milieu that would focus on their medieval past, I take the liberty to draw the attention of the reader to the scarce number of books on aspects of Byzantine history, archaeology, or art that had originally been published in any of the languages from the territory of what Obolensky had called the “Byzantine Commonwealth,” partly excluding Greece, and then translated and published in any major world language with a place of publication in the Western world. The situation is changing, most prominently with a series of volumes on *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages*, edited by Florin Curta and Dušan Zupka. On the other hand, seemingly as a paradox while fundamentally sustaining the purpose of volumes such as *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture*, I point to the latest publication by Sulamith Brodbeck and Anne-Orange Poilpré, eds., *Visibilité et présence dans l’image dans l’espace ecclésial: Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, in collaboration with Michel Stavrou (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2019). This book has, on its front page, a photograph of the Crucifixion from the monastery of Studenica in Serbia, chosen from among the vast corpus of Byzantine frescoes.

15 Elkins, afterword to *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, 206, 210–212.

fashioned in the manner of the present volume, the greater the chance that our perceptions of the art of those “liminal” times and places will emerge in all their dynamic contours.

Tracing in broad strokes the conduits of those paths, we reach the final and deepest strata of historical reality that is granted a future in *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture*. This is not solely the accumulation of the quantitative potential of this “new” space but rather related to the possibility of a considerably broader conceptual restructuring of the various issues under discussion. In examining the validity of the Mediterranean as a parameter of study (i.e., Eurasian studies), Averil Cameron pointed out that any future study of the Middle Ages shall be incomplete “if it does not make space for the history of Byzantium.”¹⁶ Although in itself this is a statement *nec plus ultra*, in the context of this volume I shall dare say that the question of which particular period and which regions in the history of Byzantium is increasingly paramount. From everything presented in the essays collected in this volume, it appears to be clear that yet another division of the world is more and more in need of fine tuning. Namely, taken as examples, recent publications have made valuable contributions.¹⁷ What makes this volume different, and thereby particularly significant, is a view of Byzantium from the vantage point of those who were in its midst or had constituted a part of it. Still, as has already been pointed out, Eastern Europe has remained “the Other,” which has prevented it from forming worlds of its own “in-between” the great empire, on the one hand, and the Mediterranean, the Renaissance world, or even Western Europe, on the other hand. Not without reason and especially at this time, I recall the title of Peter Brown’s book on Western Christendom where *diversity* appears as the key word: *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*.¹⁸ The present volume, moreover, is also focused on the issue of mediation of artifacts and the roles assigned to them in maintaining communication and the spread of ideas among the different social and religious groups, in the upholding and representation of hierarchy of late medieval and early modern society, and in the interconnectivity between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

Finally, I should acknowledge the fact that in reading this volume we are about to witness the fall of yet another old historiographic idol: that of strict demarcations

16 Averil Cameron, “Thinking with Byzantium,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 21 (2011): 39–57, at 39.

17 See Jonathan Harris, Catherine Holmes, and Eugenia Russell, eds., *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World After 1150* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Rembrandt Duits, eds., *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013); Przemyslaw Marciniak and Dion C. Smythe, eds., *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture Since 1500* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2017); Angeliki Lymberopoulou, ed., *Cross-Cultural Interaction Between Byzantium and the West, 1204–1669: Whose Mediterranean Is It Anyway?* (London: Routledge, 2018).

18 Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

between modes and techniques of artistic expression. The chapters of *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture* not only blur many territorial limits. Furthermore, they have the impact to do the same on a level of scholarly perception that has for so long been a barrier preventing our observation and understanding of artifacts of visual culture. The point of this rather novel angle is a balanced approach that takes into account even the smallest pieces of evidence that would highlight the problems under analysis. In his seminal book, Kaufmann already put in evident effort to give the *and* that stands between *art* and *architecture* the least significance possible as a term of division between the two.¹⁹ He was not the first to do so. Eight years earlier, writing precisely about the borders between Byzantine territories and Western art, Robert S. Nelson posed the following questions:

What if we blurred boundaries created by post-medieval nationalisms and thus surveyed, as some already have, the means, purpose and intentions of devotional images, ecclesiastical rituals and associated arts, the processional life of urban spaces, the social exchange of luxury objects, the lightning as well as the decorating of the churches, external embellishment of the churches or lack thereof, containers for the sacred, the orality of texts and images, the historical receptions of all forms and sites of medieval art, the representation of social differences, the economic status of artists/artisans, the visual as mediated access to the holy, the social functions of visual representation, or the act of seeing itself?²⁰

To the best of my knowledge, such a holistically stated reflection on the necessity to overcome artificially formed subjects of research in religious art, in the name of an authentic perception of its entirety, lies conceptually quite close to the presumptions of the global history of art. With the exception of Nelson's own texts, such an approach has scarcely been repeated in works dedicated to Byzantine artistic creation.²¹ Again, not only are the scholarly interventions and views of the editors and the authors whose texts are presented in this volume intrinsically positioned along the same lines as such sound judgment, but they have the opportunity and ability to develop further and stimulate fresh research.

Therefore, it is time to adopt the holistic approach: to return to a unified assessment of art, architecture, and visual culture as part of an inseparable whole;²² to refer to the study of the fullness of meaning and the various transformations of the structure of the church; to step away from the predominant narrative on architecture as a

¹⁹ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

²⁰ Robert S. Nelson, "Living on the Byzantine Borders of Western Art," *Gesta* 35, no. 1 (1996): 3–11, at 11.

²¹ To a point, certain exceptions are found in volumes edited by Alexei Lidov and published from 2006. See Alexei Lidov, ed., *Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006); and Sharon E. J. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²² See Edmund Thomas, "Roman Architecture as Art?," in *A Companion to Roman Art*, ed. Barbara E. Borg (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 344–364, with references.

series of technical qualities and rather to observe it, taking into consideration the values upheld by *homo medievalis*. It is time to understand architecture as a distinctive, sacred place; the center of life and activity of the micro or macro community; the most significant point of reference in all aspects of human interaction and spatial behavior; a repository of the ultimate spiritual warrants of existence; a site of perennial evocation of sacrifice, salvation, and eternal life in the endless reaches of the *oikoumene*; a place wherein sacred images were contained and from which their sacred light emanated, was returned to, and reunited with it thus becoming one with that light; a place of transcendent unity that found its reflection in the interiorized and contemplative experience of the faithful.

The editors and authors of the studies presented in this project have all contributed to making *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture* a multiply exceptional volume. Moreover, and beyond just the scope of its methodological and thematic framework, probably its most rewarding impulse lies in the fact that this effort is part of the initial steps to generate a strong drive for interdisciplinary dialogue among art historians engaged in the study of a certain period and a given territory with scholars from a number of other fields of research, such as historians of various specializations, archaeologists, and anthropologists, as well as those who will promote the *North of Byzantium* platform as an integral part of possibly similar explorations aimed at exact and assessable reconstructions of historical pasts of different territories. In that future, it is certain that traces of the past will disclose an even lesser existence of borders and even greater spaces of cultural interactions. *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture* and all those whose laudable efforts have been invested into putting this volume together are heralds of such an awaited future.

