Editor's Preface

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This year's summer issue presents articles clustered around two topics: *Monasticism and Sacred Landscapes* and *Byzantine Connections.*

Under the heading *Monasticism and Sacred Landscapes* we have assembled articles discussing the interaction of monastic institutions with their environment. How did they shape the landscape, both in an economic/ecological sense, and in ritual and symbolic ways? This topic is explored in case studies from Southeast Asia, Byzantium and Western Europe: Cambodia, Greece and Gaul. Monasteries are among the medieval institutions that seem most easily comparable, at least between Christian and Buddhist spheres, as Jesuit missionaries already noted. But we have to be careful that the classification of non-Christian institutions as ›monasteries‹ does not transport any unreflected assumptions into our analysis. The present papers put apparent cross-cultural similarities of monastic communities to the test. They are supplemented by a fairly theoretical essay about the significance of ›asceticism‹ in Christian monasteries but also in modern scholarly discourse, which may encourage further reflection about the topic.

An Old Ritual Capital, a New Ritual Landscape uses architectural evidence to trace changes not only in religious practice but also in the interaction between religious and non-religious spaces in the urban environment of Angkor Thom from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries CE. *The Monasteries of Athos and Chalkidiki (8th-11th centuries)* examines the influence the foundation of monasteries had on the development of an entire region, and focuses thereby on regional conflicts between local agricultural and religious communities in which competition for the control of land seems to have been a driving motive. *Pro qualitate loci et instantia laboris* undertakes a close reading of the founding myths of late antique monasteries in Gaul, exploring – in combination with archaeological evidence – the interaction between the monks and their human and natural environment in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.

The Limitations of Asceticism is based on a critical reading of scholarly language used in the study of religious communities. Three different angles are employed: the roots and history of the terms asceticism, Askese, ascétisme are outlined, the origins of the term *askēsis* traced in Greek monastic discourse and the transformations of religious ›ascetic‹ practices in a number of Latin hagiographic and normative texts described. The article offers an innovative and challenging approach to traditional ideas about monastic practices. Submissions critically engaging with its argument, or applying it to other macro-regions, would be welcome.

The cluster *Byzantine Connections* addresses the cultural, commercial and diplomatic exchanges of Byzantium with its eastern and western neighbours. Two articles focus on the reception of Byzantine culture in Italian sources: *Greeks and »Greek« Writers in the Early Medieval Italian Papyri* examines Greek script used in the sixth- and seventh-century papyri documents of Ravenna, whereas *Resenting Byzantine Iconoclasm* investigates an eighth-century inscription in Lombard Italy providing new aspects of the reception of Byzantine iconoclasm.

Mercantile and Religious Mobility between Byzantines, Latins and Muslims, 1200-1500 uses historical network analysis and social theory to describe commercial dynamics between individuals, families and groups in the late medieval Eastern Mediterranean, and religious conversions along Islamic-Christian borders. »*A Universal Narrative of Humanity*« addresses issues of otherness in the travel reports of Priscus of Panion (fifth century CE) and William of Rubruk (thirteenth century CE) – one who travelled from Byzantium to Attila the Hun, and the other via Byzantium to the Mongol Empire.

These two thematic clusters will be continued with further papers, hopefully in the next issue, 10, which will be uploaded on 1 December 2019. The main thematic cluster in this issue will be *Uses of the past in times of transition: Forgetting, using and discrediting the past*, which confronts aspects of the ›Transformation of the Carolingian World‹ with comparable situations in Byzantium or parts of Asia in about the same period, the ninth to the eleventh centuries.