

## Foreword

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The 'motto' *Byzantium - Bridge Between Worlds* evokes first and foremost the spatial, physical centrality of the *Reich der neuen Mitte* and hence its function of connecting - and mediating between - not only East and West, but also the world of the North and that of the Mediterranean and Africa. This is expressed concretely, yet also symbolically, by the imperial capital itself, which soon became a model to be imitated, reproduced and multiplied.

The connections and relations between different worlds is also reproduced, at another level, in actual studies devoted to Byzantium. Thus the present volume collects most of the contributions to the plenary sessions held at the *24th International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, and reflects the progressive broadening of the very concept of 'Byzantine Studies'. Indeed, a particularly salient characteristic of the papers presented here is their strong focus on interdisciplinarity and their broad scope, in terms of both methodology and content. The cross-pollination between different fields of Byzantine Studies is also a major point illustrated by the volume. Archaeology and art history are given pride of place, and it is perhaps especially in the archaeological papers that one can grasp the vital importance of interaction with the so-called hard sciences and with new technologies for contemporary research. This relevance of science and technology for archaeology also applies to - and has significant repercussions in - the field of historical studies, where the study of climate change, for example, and the application of specific software to network studies are producing a major renewal of knowledge. In more traditional disciplines, such as literary, political, and intellectual history, the contributions to the present volume offer some important

reflections on the connection between Byzantium and other cultures and peoples by focusing on texts, stories, diplomacy, trade, and war.

This volume is, in a sense, the first part of a diptych: it is complemented by a second volume containing the *Abstract of the Free Communications, Thematic Sessions, Round Tables and Posters*, which perhaps illustrates even better the current situation in Byzantine Studies, the broadening of its perspective and, at the same time, the ever-changing borders of this concept and definition.