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Panajiota Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, Christina Papakyriakou, Anastasia P.Pliota, *Byzantium-Early Islam. Cultural heritage management: Shared experience beyond boundaries*

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We felt it was important to review this book, although its release date was in the end of 2008 (on the other hand, the official presentation of this volume will take in Thessaloniki February 20, 2012), because of the exceptional contribution achieved through the over three whole years of extraordinary cooperation within the context of a joint program with the European Commission. The final but not sole outcome of the Euromed Heritage III Programme entitled "Byzantium-Early Islam (BYZeIS), was the partnership consisted of Greece (Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage, project coordinator Vassillis Kodioridis; Centre for Byzantine Research; Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), Cyprus (Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber); Israel (Israel Antiquities Authority, Conservation Department); Palestinian National Authority (Mosaic Centre Jericho); Turkey (Middle East Technical University).

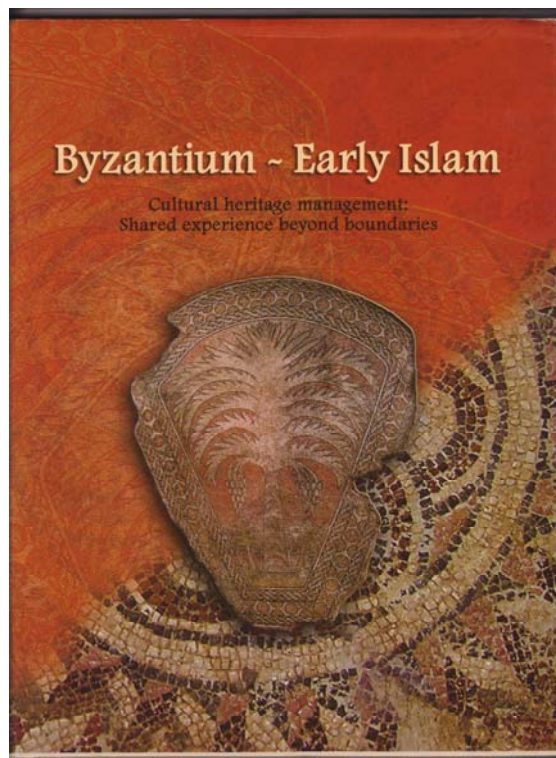
This project refers to a historical reality which chronologically corresponds to the twilight of Late Antiquity in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin, where the formative characteristics were rooted in the Greek- Roman and Early Byzantine tradition on the one hand, and in the cultural background of the people of Islam during the period of their expansion into the territories of the Roman and Early Byzantine Empire on the other. The century coinciding with the first Islamic dynasty of the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus (661-750) has been a very important period indeed.

This project began to take shape in the nineties with the discovery in 1992 of a big octagonal church in an olive grove belonging to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem, between the Holy Cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem: this was the initial spark and a prime mover for the creative idea. After thirteen years the project was approved and funded by the European Commission and in 2008 the partners have recorded the final results of such incredible research and experience.

The volume comprises four sections in the traditional printed form and a fifth part in digital. The first part is dedicated to the topic of the cultural Heritage management and it's structured in three chapters. In the first the authors define the concept, aims, geographical context and complicate history of the BIZeIS project. The overall aim of the BYZeIS is to increase the public awareness about the importance of the cultural Heritage in the Eastern

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Mediterranean and to lay the foundations of theory and practice on the Heritage management in a region in conflict. The second chapter focuses on the actual aspects, presenting the best practices within the context of the cultural Heritage in the MEDA countries of Cyprus, Israel, the Palestinian National Authority and Turkey, stating very important guide-lines for the improvement of the managerial practices on sites and monuments (tangible cultural Heritage), such as Heritage and land-use planning (control of the development processes, solution to problems and good practices). The publication underlines that the most urgent lacks in these areas concern the didactic activities in schools, the high level curricular courses and the necessity of an educational plan for the detection of training and didactic opportunities. The first part of the book ends with the presentation of the relationship between Heritage and communities, together with the theoretical background about the community involvement and the actions for the enhancement of the common awareness carried out during the FTWorkshop III in Thessaloniki.



All the papers in the first part share a common theoretical approach and a practical dimension; furthermore, on the basis of the experience gained, they make useful recommendations which shall be taken into account by other projects in the future. The paper about the best practices in cultural Heritage management will surely be of great help to all the specialists involved in the cultural Heritage sector, as it compiles a large bulk of knowledge into a manual, while the article about the awareness stimulates the attention (usually neglected by traditional archaeology) to the relevance of educational activities as a mean of enhancement for the cultural Heritage.

In the second part (the most extensive one) the scientific results which ensued from the triennial research of the four partner are presented. The four researches share a single goal: to protect the cultural treasure of the Eastern Mediterranean. Each of the involved countries chose its own archaeological focus, assembling, studying and presenting particular aspects of the materials selected following the criteria belonging to the framework of the general research of the BIZeIS project. It is easy to appreciate how the chapters from the four

partners are not diverse, harmonized in the light of the common goals, nevertheless carefully preserving the autonomy of each of the four texts. The various ways of approach (recording, preservation, management) belong to the common cultural project. Another common denominator is the fact that Cyprus, Israel, Palestinian National Authority and Turkey refer to cultural Heritage monuments located in areas which witnessed in the past or still are subject to national, political or religious conflicts. The Cypriot team opted for studying the churches of its island, with the aim of the creation of a complete database. The Israelis chose to focus on the historic city of Ashkelon and the development of an archaeological park that would be a model for the management and the development of the cultural Heritage in the region. The Palestinians chose to concentrate first on cataloguing the archaeological remains in the Jericho and Bethlehem Governorates, and then on documenting and conserving the floor Mosaics in these regions. The Turkish author after outlining the criteria of approach to the cultural Heritage in modern Turkey, focused on the perception of Byzantium by the Turkish beholder, trying to establish methods for a better interpretation, and to foster awareness of this cultural Heritage.

The third part is dedicated to the Final Conference and the fourth one comprises the paper about the statistical results of the FTWorkshops I-III. The fifth, and last section, is attached in digital form and has a supplementary role. It includes the entire book in PDF format, an extended version of several documents, the summaries of the partners' texts in the authors' native languages (Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Turkish), the numerous presentations and curricula vitae of coordinators and contributors. Very interesting a children's booklet by the Palestinian partner, telling the story of the Hisham's Palace, in Arabic language. A very rich and original iconographic repertoire contributes to make this book also a very artistic work, with very interesting results in the Heritage and Tourism field, but overall the geopolitical vision for a cultural and political re-composition of MEDA countries is the most important value in a feasible process of a new, creative and peaceful cross fertilization through a common Heritage.