

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The subject of the project affects the issues important not only from the perspective of historical sciences, but also – and first of all – the key issues necessary to understand the phenomena of modern world, related to more and more intense mutual contacts between various nations, religions and cultures. What our research is focused on are notions and stereotypes. Our research team will try to have a closer look at the mechanisms of how they emerged and developed with centuries on a particular historical example: the Byzantine image of their eastern neighbours, Arabs and the image of the religion, that has emerged between them in the 7th century (Islam). We will try to show the notion in Byzantine and medieval sources. In the next step we will try to answer the question of what factors contributed to such an image: to what extent it was the consequence of the picture borrowed by east Christian authors from such antique writers as Herodotus or Strabo, and to what were they a *cliché* taken from the Old Testament tradition (which contained the vision of the nomadic people of the desert, descendants of Ishmael), and finally to what they resulted from more or less developed direct relations with the Arab tribes. By presenting the picture of “the Other” and “the Stranger” we shall try to point out several issues: stereotypes related to political life, organization of the state and the army, religion and broadly understood sphere of family life and customs.

The project has a dual construction. We want to show not only the stereotypes formed in Byzantium in 4th – 10th century, but also to look how persistent they proved to be in later centuries as well. For a few reasons we have chosen the writings of medieval Rus. The oldest text on the subject interesting for us were created in 12th century and the most complete and most diverse comes from the 14th–16th century. A few hundred years elapsed therefore from the times of the struggle between the Byzantine Empire and Arabs and of the Arab conquest. This seems enough long to trace back the processes of evolution of stereotypes in the minds of following generations. It should be noted that the vision of Arabs and their religion in Old Russia depended on the one hand on Byzantine sources and on the other on direct relations with other eastern people, sometimes identified with this group.

Pointing out which of the stereotypes still present in modern world date back to the earliest contact of the Christian world with the East and in what historical circumstances they emerged will certainly be an additional value of the project. It will help verify the authenticity of perception of the Muslim civilization by contemporary inhabitants of Europe by showing how much of it is a cultural *cliché*, inherited from previous generations and created in the reality so different from today's.