

*Heretics and non-Christians in Orthodox Balkans and Asia Minor, 10th to 15th century: reality and imagination*

The project aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Orthodox majority's attitude towards religious minorities in Byzantium, Bulgaria and Serbia – including heretics, other believers, and non-Christians (especially Bogomils, Paulicians, Catholics, Armenians, Muslims and Jews). The research will examine real social, legal and political relations, as well as the ways in which 'others' were imagined and represented in literature, legislation and religious texts.

The project will determine how these relations developed at behavioural, cognitive and affective levels, and how these levels were interrelated. The project's novel approach lies in its comprehensive analysis of various sources, including chronicles, homilies, hagiographies, hymnographies, legal texts and penitentials, as well as the application of tools from social psychology and sociology, such as dehumanisation and the sociology of emotions and knowledge.

A key contribution of the project will be the exploitation of sources that have not previously been used in this context. These include unpublished Church Slavonic and Greek penitential nomocanons, and a critical analysis of anti-heretical texts produced in Orthodox countries, alongside Latin sources and texts originating from the heretics themselves. Comparative analysis will reveal the propaganda and narrative mechanisms used to marginalise 'others', providing a better understanding of the social functions of religion in medieval Orthodox societies. The project will provide new insights into research on collective identity, the exclusion of minorities, and the cultural and religious positioning of minorities in medieval South-Eastern Europe and Asia Minor.

The implementation of the project will have a number of scientific and social effects that extend beyond the scope of traditional historical research. Innovative methodological tools combining a historical-philological approach with theories from the fields of social psychology and sociology will be developed. Based on the collected data, a typology of contacts between religions will be created, ranging from peaceful coexistence and theological polemics to persecution. The key factors influencing the nature of these relations (e.g. political, local and doctrinal factors) will be identified, as will the main actors involved (e.g. secular authorities, clergy and local communities).

The model developed for analysing attitudes towards religious 'others' can be used in comparative studies, including in the context of other cultural circles and historical periods. This project will also serve as a foundation for interdisciplinary research into social memory, religious identity, and the mechanisms of exclusion.