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PERFORMING ORTHODOX RITUAL IN BYZANTIUM

In this groundbreaking, interdisciplinary study, Andrew Walker White explores the origins of Byzantine ritual – the rites of the early Greek Orthodox Church – and its unique relationship with traditional theatre. Tracing the secularization of pagan theatre, the rise of rhetoric as an alternative to acting, as well as the transmission of ancient methods of musical composition into the Byzantine era, White demonstrates how Christian ritual was in effect a post-theatrical performing art, created by intellectuals who were fully aware of traditional theatre but who endeavored to avoid it. The book explores how Orthodox rites avoid the aesthetic appreciation associated with secular art, and conducts an in-depth study (and reconstruction) of the late Byzantine *Service of the Furnace*. This is often treated as a liturgical drama, and White translates and delineates the features of five extant versions, to show how and why it generated widely diverse audience reactions in both medieval times and our own.

ANDREW WALKER WHITE is an American theatre artist, cultural historian, and theatre critic. As a performer his work embraces everything from Shakespeare and Chekhov to dance theatre and mime; he is a former company member of Source Theatre and Théâtre Le Neon, both in the Washington, DC area. As a historian he has devoted himself to post-Classical Greek culture, and especially the theatre and drama of Byzantium, and has translated key late antique and medieval Greek texts. A veteran of the Fulbright Program, White has conducted research on-site in Greece and Turkey, and has lectured in both the United States and Europe.

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Acknowledgments

This study is the work of a bookish actor with a background in classics who, after many years on and off the stage, was encouraged to study the Eastern Roman Empire. Because I am among the first American theatre historians to study Byzantine theatre and ritual, I have attempted to map out some of the territory's contours in the hope that others will be intrigued and look into the specific areas I discuss here more deeply. Whatever critical reception they may have, the success of these pages lies in their being superseded – a prospect I welcome because it would mean that better minds have joined me in the quest to understand the complex heritage of post-Classical Hellenic culture.

This undertaking, admittedly large in its scope, would not have been possible without the guidance and encouragement of many people: at the University of Maryland, College Park, it was Patti P. Gillespie who first suggested I “sail to Byzantium”; Catherine Schuler guided my first years of research and drilled me in critical theory, chairing my committee most of the way as well; meanwhile, John Fuegi (he of *Brecht & Co.* fame) provided a much-needed dose of cynicism. As co-chair, Byzantinist George Majeska patiently guided the dissertation through its many changes with the later assistance of my final committee co-chair, theatre historian Frank Hildy, whose gentle but firm advice has always been much appreciated. Thanks, too, to Elizabeth Fisher of George Washington University for her guidance and patience through the dissertation and beyond.

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