

Icons and Byzantine Cultural Identity

Michael Featherstone / CNRS

Normally viewed from a religious point of view, the Iconoclast controversy was also a dispute over inherited culture in Byzantium. Certain members of the old élite which had survived the ravages of the seventh and eighth centuries considered the icons necessary for their salvation as well as their cultural identity. The Iconoclasts were not only heretics but also uncultivated rustics who betrayed old Roman, that is, Constantinian imperial tradition by adopting barbarian customs.