



Michael Damaskenos, *Council of Nicea*, from *Eikones tes Kretikes Technes*, Herakleion, 1993, Fig. 101

Dialogues in Byzantium: the long history of a literary form

The literary dialogue, with varying degrees of verisimilitude as far as the speakers were concerned, was a form taken up by early Christian writers, and survived in different guises in the Byzantine period. The philosophical dialogue also persisted, but most dialogues in late antiquity and Byzantium were concerned with religious issues. Works designed to prove the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, Manichaeism, various heresies, and later, Islam, were cast in dialogue form, and records were also made of public disputations on religious themes. How far did these dialogues represent genuine open-ended discussion, and why was the form, neglected in many modern discussions of Byzantine literature, so persistent? What can be concluded from them about literary activity, religious discussion and intellectual engagement in Byzantium?

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