Piety and Plague
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Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies Series

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Piety AND Plague
FROM BYZANTIUM TO THE BAROQUE

edited by
Franco Mormando
Thomas Worcester
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Plague—whether bubonic or any other similar epidemic of acute disease resulting in massive mortality—was one of the enduring facts of everyday life on the European continent, East and West, for centuries, from earliest antiquity through the first decades of the eighteenth century. Accordingly, as scholars have now come to realize, it represents one of the most important influences on the development of that continent's society and culture. One cannot fully understand and explain the vicissitudes of European history in any of its aspects—political, economic, ecclesiastical, artistic, or social—without taking into adequate consideration the role played by epidemic disease such as bubonic plague and society's response to it.

To date, however, the largest portion of scholarship on the issue has focused on the political, economic, demographic, and medical aspects of the subject. *Piety and Plague* seeks to redress this imbalance by giving greater coverage of what could broadly be termed the religious, cultural, and psychological aspects of plague and European society's response to it through the many centuries and over a wide geographical terrain, including Byzantium.

The essays in this volume are interdisciplinary in nature, their authors representing the fields of classical studies, art history, history, church history, literature, and theology. The sources studied herein are not only written or printed texts, but painted images and other forms of visual documentation as well. Indeed, the latter represent an immense and hitherto insufficiently studied treasury of information about and insight into how European society responded to this dread mortality.

In addition to having response to the plague as their common theme, the essays in this volume are similar in that each one, in its own way, either explores new, previously ignored, or little-studied historical territory or provides fresh new answers to old and at times vexing questions. All of this is based upon original research among the primary sources, printed or painted, although readers will also find in each essay ample bibliographical references to the most important secondary sources on the issues covered in this volume.
This volume has its origins in the New England Renaissance Conference devoted to the same subject and organized by the same editors (Mormando and Worcester), held on 23 April 2005 at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. We acknowledge with gratitude the financial support from Holy Cross for the conference and for the preparation of the volume for publication. The conference, in turn, was held in conjunction with the concurrent exhibition of Italian painting at the Worcester Art Museum (April–September 2005) entitled *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500–1800* (website: www.worcesterart.org/Hope). Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester also served (along with Gauvin Bailey and Pamela Jones) as curators of the exhibition and editors of the accompanying catalogue.
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