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Sommario/riassunto

This new volume explores the surprisingly intense and complex relationships between East and West during the Middle Ages and the early modern world, combining a large number of critical studies representing such diverse fields as literary (German, French, Italian, English, Spanish, and Arabic) and other subdisciplines of history, religion, anthropology, and linguistics. The differences between Islam and Christianity erected strong barriers separating two global cultures, but, as this volume indicates, despite many attempts to 'Other' the opposing side, the premodern world experienced an astonishing degree of contacts, meetings, exchanges, and influences. Scientists, travelers, authors, medical researchers, chroniclers, diplomats, and merchants criss-crossed the East and the West, or studied the sources produced by the other culture for many different reasons. As much as the theoretical concept of 'Orientalism' has been useful in sensitizing us to the fundamental tensions and conflicts separating both worlds at least since the eighteenth century, the premodern world did not quite vet operate in such an ideological framework. Even though the Crusades had violently pitted Christians against Muslims, there were countless contacts and a palpable curiosity on both sides both before, during, and after those religious warfares.