There are countless under-studied or ignored authors from the Byzantine Empire awaiting scholarly attention. In the area of Byzantine spirituality the twelfth century as a whole has received little consideration, primarily owing to the perceived lack of any significant or noteworthy author. While the tenth-century mystic Symeon the New Theologian and the fourteenth-century hesychast Gregory Palamas have been the focus of much academic industry, little serious attention is paid to figures from the intervening centuries. Recognizing that literature on monasticism and empire in the twelfth century is extensive, this book hopes to fill the void that appears to have marked the study of spirituality of the same period by taking as its subject the twelfth-century monk and spiritual theologian Peter of Damascus. Although he is the second most voluminous writer included in the Philokalia, Peter is one of the least studied of the philokalic authors. The main study devoted to him, now seventy years old, by Jean Gouillard was incomplete and, on some points, erroneous. As well, Gouillard’s reading of the Petrine philokalic texts through an Evagrian or Maximian lens gives the reader an inadequate and inaccurate picture of Peter’s spiritual theology. Peter of Damascus: Byzantine Monk and Spiritual Theologian seeks to renew interest in a figure who was an important contributor to the larger field of Byzantine monasticism and spirituality. Using unedited manuscripts, prosopographical evidence, and published sources, this study attempts not only to recover the shape of Peter’s life and work but also to elucidate his spirituality through a detailed examination of both The Admonition to His Own Soul and The Spiritual Alphabet, demonstrating the ways in which that spirituality remained accessible to both monastics and non-monastics.
Peter of Damascus

Byzantine Monk and Spiritual Theologian

GREG PETERS

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To my wife, Christina,
for unconditional love and support
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To research and write on an obscure figure like Peter of Damascus has proved both rewarding and challenging. The rewards came with uncovering new and previously undiscovered connections between Peter and twelfth-century Byzantium, identifying new texts and pieces of information related to him, as well as with the joy of spending so much time concentrating exclusively on his spiritual theology. The challenges came in trying to stay connected with the larger discipline of Byzantine studies, when a lack of peers with whom I could share my discoveries made it difficult for me to keep the forest in view for the trees. However, I have enjoyed the work, and if my efforts serve to stimulate interest in Peter among Byzantinists as well as scholars and students of Christian spirituality, then it will have been time well spent. For understanding both the opportunities and the challenges presented by the project, I wish to thank especially T. Allan Smith, csb, of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, both for overseeing my first foray into the thought of Peter of Damascus and for his support over the past eight years while I have continued researching and writing on this neglected Byzantine spiritual theologian.

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