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Andrew Walker White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Lists and acknowledgements (p. vii-xi), 189 pages, 7 appendices (p. 190-230), glossary, bibliography, and index (total 290 pages). With several illustrations and musical examples in sheet format.

The blurb on the dust cover calls Andrew Walker White's book a "groundbreaking, interdisciplinary study" of Byzantine liturgical ritual performance, and this is by no means an exaggeration. Not only is it the first thorough investigation and presentation of the long and complex history of Byzantine liturgical performance, covering the period from early Christianity until the fall of Constantinople (and a little beyond), it also shows the great success of the author's strenuous effort to combine history, theology, musicology, theatre history, and modern performance studies with great success.

This interdisciplinary approach is reflected in both the title and in the structure of the book, which is an updated and reworked version of his dissertation from 2006 (*The Artifice of Eternity: A Study of Liturgical and Theatrical Practices in Byzantium*, University of Maryland). Structurally, the book is divided in two parts. The first part consists of three historical chapters devoted to what White calls "spatial practices": processions, Church buildings, their interiors, and their use (ch. 1); an examination of the relationship, or rather the antagonism, between theatre and ritual in Byzantine Christianity (ch. 2); and finally a chapter on Byzantine music and singing practices (ch. 3). In the second part of the book, White focuses on the fourteenth century *Service of the Furnace*, which previous scholarship has identified as a liturgical drama comparable to the ones that evolved some centuries earlier in the Roman Catholic Church. In three chapters, White examines of the origins of the *Service of the Furnace* (ch. 4) and the religious and historical context in which it was performed (ch. 5), concluding with a close reading of some of the extant manuscripts containing the *Service* (ch. 6.). His examination leads to the necessary conclusion that, despite whatever possible unintended reactions to the *Service*, it was neither conceived of nor performed as a theatrical-liturgical drama, but was in its essence

a ritual in concordance with the other services of the church. Following the conclusion after the two parts, White offers the reader no less than five different versions of the *Service* including the Greek text and an English translation (Appendices 1-5); an excerpt from the 15th century archbishop Symeon of Thessalonica's *Dialogue in Christ* (Greek and English translation, appendix 6); and finally a short section on the Russian version of the *Service* which did in fact turn into a theatrical-liturgical drama (appendix 7). The book also contains a glossary, which is aimed primarily at the reader who is unfamiliar with the terminology pertaining to Byzantine music, Church interior, and theatre studies, as well as an exhaustive index. The appendices give the reader access to White's primary sources, some of them translated for the first time into English. The glossary is very helpful for an interdisciplinary study, and the bibliography and the index provides the reader with excellent opportunities to carry on further research in this rather vast and complex, neglected field.

On the other hand, the interdisciplinary approach of the book makes it difficult to review. Although White should be applauded for presenting his material with clarity and precision, it is nevertheless not obvious why the chapter on musical practices (ch. 3) contains a lengthy description (pp. 86-98) of the tonal system in ancient Greek music, complete with illustrations, when the description of middle and late Byzantine music is much less detailed, even though it is this later music that is the focus of the second part of the book. White demonstrates how the Byzantine authors claimed a strong continuity between ancient Greek music and Byzantine music, but also how their claim is very difficult to prove (pp. 101 and 109). The lengthy and quite detailed introduction to the tonal system in the ancient Greek music theory thus reads as a rather unnecessary digression.

The concepts of continuity and breach are in fact very problematic throughout the book. At times, White seems to claim continuity in Orthodox Christianity from the Bible until today, which reads as rather apologetic. For instance, he writes in the introduction: "the Orthodox have never seen the relationship between church and theatre the same way we in the West do" (p. 1). Even though it becomes clear that

White is focusing solely on Greek Orthodox Christianity, such a claim is problematic in several ways. When does Greek Orthodox Christianity become a separate entity distinct from its Western counterpart? Why is Syriac Christianity not included in the discussion of the early Byzantine period? Additionally, it is by no means evident that there should be a specific relationship between church and theatre in the West; such a relationship has been claimed in theatre history, especially concerning the Mystery Plays, but in the long and diverse history of the Western church(es) from Charlemagne's alliance with the Pope until today there have been several mutually exclusive reactions to theatre. Likewise, as White and his mentor Walter Puchner have shown, both religious and secular theatre came to Orthodox areas after the fall of Constantinople. Western influence might explain the impetus of religious and secular theatre in the East after 1453, but it also (perhaps unconsciously) affirms the ideological stance of conservative Orthodoxy that claims that nothing has changed in liturgical practice since the early Christians, an ideological stance which can also be found in the discussions concerning modern Greek Orthodox chant. Third, this claim leads to a characterisation of the West that is highly contestable. For instance, White claims that "unlike the West, the East never experienced a profound cultural breach with its past" (p. 113), a view that echoes the ideology of Italian humanism and the invention of the Renaissance as a historical period in the 19th century. Furthermore, reading Ethelwold's *Regularis concordia* uncritically, White posits a dichotomy between a highly educated lay congregation in the East who did not like "paltry spectacle", and a highly unsophisticated Western lay congregation who needed theatrical display in order to understand the mysteries of the Christian faith (pp. 183-184).

Another problem arises from the lack of definitions of central concepts like drama, theatre, and ritual, although it becomes clear through the course of the book that the main opposition White has set up is between the Orthodox symbolic-spiritual idea of representation and Western "realistic" theatrical practices. There is also a conspicuous lack of examination of the metaphorical use of drama and theatre among the Church Fathers such as Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. No-

where is Patricia Cox Miller's work on "the material turn" and "mental theatre" mentioned. The *Mystagogy* of Maximos Confessor and the *History and Theory of the Divine Liturgy* by the patriarch Germanos are not mentioned either, even though both works exerted great influence on the development of the Byzantine rite. These works make White's distinction between symbolism and realism less sharp.

Despite these critical remarks, *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium* is a very careful, well-argued and well written book. It is the first major attempt to remedy what Walter Puchner has called a "ghost-chapter" in the history of Byzantine sacred drama, i.e. that the Byzantines actually had theatrical practices comparable to the Mystery Plays in the West. The very first chapter on "Spatial practices in Byzantium" is an excellent refutation of the claim that there is a continuity between the ancient Greco-Roman theatre buildings and the Byzantine churches, and indeed the first part of the book should from now on become the standard introduction to Byzantine liturgical practices and read by all theatre historians. The second part is a convincing close reading of the extant manuscripts. Together with Alexander Lingas' in-depth musicological work on the *Service of the Furnace* and subsequent recording with Cappella Romana of one of the versions (on the CD "MT Sinai: Frontier of Byzantium"), White's chapters on the *Service* and his translations of the texts give the reader the best possible means to try to reconstruct what was once called 'the only Byzantine liturgical drama', but must now, after White's book, be called a ritual performance with a symbolic relationship to the story in the Book of Daniel 3 in the Septuagint. One can only hope that White will pursue his work further on the secular drama in Byzantium by among others Theodore Prodromos and Michael Haplucheir, a work which he has already conducted (and performed) during the Dumbarton Oaks symposium "Byzantine Theatron" in 2010. When a book on Byzantine secular drama is added, the ghost-chapter on Byzantine sacred drama found in several books on theatre history may finally be busted.

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