

SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL
OF
BYZANTINE
AND
MODERN GREEK STUDIES

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Editorial

In this third volume of the Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, we are happy to welcome a guest-editor, Dr AnnaLinden Weller, who has edited five articles from a conference that she organized at Uppsala University in 2016 within the frame of the ‘Text and Narrative in Byzantium’ research network. The articles are written by Baukje van den Berg, Stanislas Kuttner-Homs, Markéta Kulhánková, Jonas J. H. Christensen and Jakov Đorđević, provided with an introduction by AnnaLinden Weller. In addition, the journal includes two more articles – one by David Konstan, based on his 2016 lecture in memory of Professor Lennart Rydén, and one by Adam Goldwyn – and two book reviews.

In October 2018, Modern Greek Studies in Lund will organise the 6th European Congress of Modern Greek Studies, and according to the number of submitted abstracts it promises to be an interesting event for scholars from many countries around the globe to come together.

The journal is open for unpublished articles and book reviews related to Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies in the fields of philology, linguistics, history and literature. It is published in collaboration with Greek and Byzantine Studies at Uppsala University and we welcome contributions not only from Scandinavian colleagues, but from scholars all around the world.

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**Instructions for contributors to
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SJBMGS encourages scholarly contributions within Byzantine and Modern Greek philology and history.

Manuscripts of articles to be considered for publication should be sent to Marianna.Smaragdi@klass.lu.se or Marianna Smaragdi, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University, Box 201, 22100 Lund, Sweden.

Your article will be refereed. If it is accepted for publication, you will be asked to supply a final version on e-mail. Authors will receive five copies of the journal volume.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Claudia Rapp, *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium. Monks, Laymen, and Christian Ritual*, Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

The Greek prayers of ‘adelphopoiesis’ found in Byzantine manuscripts from the eighth to the sixteenth century are the focus of Claudia Rapp’s long-awaited book. These texts were first brought to the attention of scholars and a wider public in the book by Yale history professor John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, published in 1994, barely six months before his premature death by AIDS. Boswell had presented these prayers as evidence confirming his views regarding Christian tolerance with respect to same-sex relations in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, since they marked a positive recognition and a degree of sanctioning by the Church of lasting emotional ties and life-long commitment between men. From the outset, Rapp takes a distance from Boswell’s thesis, stating as a fact (‘concluding’ as early as pp. 2-3) that ‘the *adelphopoiesis* ritual in Byzantium was not created with the purpose of sanctioning and sanctifying homosexual relationships’. Rather, as a self-declared positivist, Rapp’s interests lie in the social function of the ritual, its practical dynamics, and the role it played in literary sources, from narrative hagiography to legal texts.

It is perhaps appropriate to leave aside any sensationalism in discovering texts that sound much less daring in a world where same-sex marriages are for the most part officially recognized. Indeed, Boswell’s digging in the past in order to support the present scenario is considered irrelevant by some, and misguided by others. But the questions of how, precisely, these texts functioned; what status they did have, or were seen as having; and, if not same-sex ‘marriage’, what, exactly, these texts were used for, what was the nature of the bond that they celebrated and sanctioned; all these questions remain for the most part unanswered by the end of this book. The many texts adduced here as proofs of the continued importance of ‘adelphopoiesis’ in Byzantium stretch the meaning of this practice well beyond the witness of the prayers, and muddy the

waters concerning both the definition and the distinctiveness (if any) of such practice in Byzantine history.

One problem that I see with the approach to this topic is the belief, common to many Byzantine historians, that Greek sources manifest a perfect continuity from antiquity to the present. This assumption causes the abandonment of any serious chronological development in favour of a flattened account that displays this thematic sameness. For example, Rapp concludes her third chapter on monastic antecedents to 'adelphopoiesis' by noting the abiding constant of the pairing of two monks throughout the centuries. Indeed, this chapter begins with desert monasticism and ends with its 'Byzantine continuation' in eleventh-century Kiev. Finally, Rapp declares that the tradition of paired monks 'continues in Orthodox monasticism to the present day' (p. 178). The methodological grounds for discovering such unbroken sameness are questionable. When historians after Boswell express doubt that any practice, even that of sexuality, can be recognized from antiquity as 'same' or even 'similar' to our conception of human identity and relations, what is the point of presenting Byzantine practices as never changing? The resulting chronological mix is confusing, and the absence of a historical perspective renders the evidence more anecdotal than analytic.

The one serious historiographical challenge (beside Boswell's) to the interpretation of the adelphopoiesis ritual is that of its assimilation with Western blood-brotherhood and oath taking. Answering to Sideris' emphasis on the latter, Rapp quickly dismisses his hypothesis on the basis that the prayers are only spoken by the priest, whereas the context of oath taking would demand active participation on the part of the vowing couple; she adds that a context of reconciliation is unlikely because, in hagiographical accounts, one party is often a monk or holy man entering this bond (p. 29). Neither objection is very strong. Rapp emphasizes that the prayers leave much room for interpretation of what the actual service could be shaped as, not just because of the absence of performance rubrics, partly filled in by reference to reports of current ceremonies, but also because of a degree of impromptu performance, which could well have included the actors' response. Moreover, a context of sanctity does not preclude the existence of strife. Later in the book, Rapp returns to

considering oath taking as a possible explanatory paradigm, especially considering the legal implications of the pact. It is only in the penultimate chapter that the reader discovers that, from the legal point of view, the adelphopoiesis prayers were explicitly rejected as having any binding value; and even from the ecclesiastical viewpoint, they were increasingly banned not only between lay and monastics (from around the ninth-tenth century), but also between lay people (who could, by the way, seal this type of relation even when they were of the opposite sex). Essential information – for example, that the eleventh-century legal collection, the *Peira*, is the earliest legal text to mention adelphopoiesis – is tucked away in a rather puzzling section of questions and answers (pp. 231-242), a kind of catechism on adelphopoiesis based on the legal sources. Here we discover too, rather late in the day (p. 245), that ‘the only consanguinity relations by arrangement that are recognized by the law are those that arise from godparenthood and filial adoption, because they imitate nature in bringing forth sons, while it is not possible to create a brother for oneself’. Such perspectives appear in marked contrast with the expectations of a ‘ritual brotherhood [that] follows the model of biological relations’ as declared at p. 9. The figural use of a ‘brother’ type relationship, implying by its very definition the absence of sexual manifestations, in all its various acceptations (as in monasteries, lay fraternities, commercial guilds or close friendships) remains insufficiently explored and understood in a treatment that abandons rational classifications in favour of a blind surrender to the ‘sources’.

The legal section entitled ‘Prescriptions and Restrictions in Byzantium’ (chapter 5) brings to the fore the issue of consanguinity and acquired social bonds, bringing home the point that the sexual consummation of a bond such as adelphopoiesis is not a matter of preference or prurience, but plainly an aspect considered incompatible with the contours of this kind of pact. Perhaps because in a lay environment such boundaries and distinctions could not be clearly drawn, both ecclesiastical and legal authorities turned sour on this point and confined adelphopoiesis to a limbo of devotional practice filled with good intentions, but without official status. This evidence might in fact lend support to Rapp’s other central thesis, namely, the monastic origins of the practice

from the pairing of monks in a desert setting. Emphasis on sexual renunciation within deep emotional and life-long commitments to another person, usually of the same gender, is both an expected and a troubled aspect of the monastic setting, as Rapp shows with many apposite stories from the desert fathers. In any case, the issue of sexual relationships is upmost in the public arena as marking different types of social bonds. Homosociability might well have allowed a greater degree of closeness and physical contact than a puritan perspective could tolerate; but genital satisfaction is a rather precise and concrete category, which does not pertain the private sphere alone.

One strand that seemed to make sense to the author throughout the various aspects of the adelphopoiesis is economics. In the case of monks, Rapp describes ‘the contractual nature of paired relationships’ as ‘sharing a spiritual capital’. Describing ‘vicarious penance’ as a key aspect in such negotiations, the spiritually more advanced party is said to have ‘laid up a bank account of good deeds which was large enough to share with others’ (p. 148). Rapp points out that one of the grounds for the rejection of the practice between monks and laymen was ‘the danger of alienation of a monk’s personal property to an outside heir that would otherwise pass into the ownership of the monastery’ (p. 198). Such concerns reveal material interests on fifteenth-century Athos that have little to do with spiritual companionship, let alone monastic renunciation. It makes good sense that ‘adelphopoiesis appears as one of several social setups that would facilitate profitable economic interaction [...] what, in modern fund-raising jargon might be called “cultivating the donor base”’ (ibid.). In dealing with the story of Basil I and the widow Danelis as a ‘case study’ for chapter 4, the ‘potential for political and economic alliance’ that fraternity ties offered comes to the fore. Here Basil comes across as a ruthless social climber, using his association with the previous emperor via questionable homoeroticism and being in turn embroiled in useful networks thanks to the prediction of imperial power, both sides jarring with the monastic precedents that were presented earlier as constituting the essence of this bond. In fact, the inclusion of this text is questionable for many reasons: the declared absence of a reference to ‘adelphopoiesis’ as such, the fact that one version even omits the

oblique mention of a bond of ‘brotherhood’ (see n. 70 at p. 205), as well as the literary paradigmatic quality of the ‘rich widow’ character, despite which Rapp wants to claim that the text can ‘provide a contemporary view of how an *adelphopoiesis* relation could be enacted’ (p. 203). Here too we feel worlds apart from the initial prayers with which this study began.

Continuing with the language of economics, Rapp describes the maidservant who arranged an illicit relationship as a ‘broker [...] who had acted on behalf of her “brother by arrangement”’ (p. 245-6). There is perhaps a sense in which *adelphopoietos* could be seen as designating someone actively engaged in negotiating a pact of brotherhood, a match-maker or go-between, whether led by emotional or practical (read economic) motivations. This sense may be prevalent in Tzetzes’ accusations to women acting ‘like adelphopoietoi’ (p. 227) as well as in the role of Niketas as the ‘ally and seeker of brotherhood-pacts (*symmachou kai adelphopoietou*)’ to John, resulting in his appointment to the patriarchate of Alexandria (p. 184). Changing degrees of consanguinity, this type of relationship would be called nepotism in the West. This way of favouring someone’s career was clearly an accepted and widespread practice, and indeed it enabled the ‘crossing of boundaries’ in a way that was not exclusive to, nor particularly blessed by, the Byzantines.

It is disconcerting that a book on Byzantine texts does not contain one word in Greek characters. This is surely due to an editorial policy that expects to market the product to a wider audience. However, I cannot see how transliterations make the approach to a foreign language easier; they are certainly patronizing. What they do certainly do, is make any substantial quotations of texts in the original impossible, so that philological points can only be made concerning single words, which appears entirely inadequate to any reader wanting to form an independent opinion of the primary material presented. Since the subject matter is ultimately very specialized, and hardly matches the universal aspirations of a Boswell-turned-Byzantinist (and explicitly so), it is probably safe to conclude that it will not attain the same degree of popularity.

In shunning away from the Boswell thesis but providing no close-text analysis of either the liturgical, or the literary, or the legal sources

she presents, Rapp risks not satisfying any particular audience. If the Orthodox may be relieved at knowing they do not provide the precedent for same-sex marriages (a charge that Robert Taft SJ had already absolved them of with characteristic tact¹), they might not equally rejoice at the breezy admittance that they had nothing against using brotherhood bonds as a cover for pre-marital or otherwise illicit sex, as rather surprisingly appears in the conclusion to this book. In comparison, Boswell's attempts at defending Christianity of the rather horrible charges of bigotry and intolerance were candid and well meaning. Not all that glitters in Byzantium is gold.²

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¹ As reported by Mark D. Jordan, “‘Both as a Christian and as a Historian’: On Boswell’s Ministry”, in Mathew Kuefler, ed., *The Boswell Thesis. Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, 2006), 88-107, at p. 94.

² The copy-editing of the book is uneven, perhaps because of its layered genesis over an extended period of time. For example, at p. 90, ‘the Pachomius’s foundation’; at p. 187, the sentence ‘Antony found consolation for his loss with the arrival of George at the monastery, who was not only a fellow Cypriot...’ is ungrammatical. More seriously, the caption to two illustrations of the Madrid Skylitzes reproduced after Tsamakda’s publication describes them as from an ‘Escorial’ (*sic*) manuscript. The codex belongs to the Biblioteca nacional de España in Madrid, and not to the collection in the Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

