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REVIEW–DISCUSSION

D. Krueger: *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontios's Life and the Late Antique City*. Pp. xvi + 196. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, xxv. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1996.

This book marks a new stage in the reading of Byzantine saints' *lives*, and is itself a very new and persuasive reading of a famous and much studied example of the genre. Leontios, bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus in the seventh century, was the author of two important *lives*, the *life* of John the Almsgiver and the text studied here, the *life* of Symeon the Fool. The bibliography reads like a roll-call of the most distinguished Byzantinists who have concerned themselves with hagiography: Delehaye, Festugiere, Rydén, Mango, Aerts. Yet, as K. points out, the text has attracted more interest as an early (and closely datable) example of the *life* of a holy fool than in its own right. K. sets out to redress the balance. The novelty of the approach lies in that it is a self-conscious attempt at a literary reading of a single hagiographic text, touching only in passing on the issues of authenticity and historicity which have been the traditional subject-matter of such studies from the Bollandists on. (It does, however, involve a study of Leontios's sources and their deployment, also traditional activities.) It disclaims (pp. 6-7) any attempt to get behind the text to a 'real Symeon' in Emesa and specifically condemns (p. 21) the mining of saints' *lives* for nuggets of 'fact', which is a (somewhat late) response to the fundamental work of Peter Brown and Evelyne Patlagean in the early 1970s—but still puts it ahead of the Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Project. This, a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to extract realia from all saints' lives between the seventh and tenth centuries and make them available on a computer database, was the brainchild of the great and regretted Alexander Kazhdan, whose twin interests in his later years were literary approaches to literature and hagiography. These are combined in K.'s book, if not in Kazhdan's collaborative project, which represents a systematic and rigorous close to a long chapter of research rather than the beginning of the next stage, the truly literary analysis of Byzantine saints' *lives*.

K. begins, however, with context rather than text, and is here at his weakest. He claims confidently (p. 4) that the 'meaning of a particular literary text depends on its context, on its situation in time and place', and proceeds to assert (rather than prove) that the life tells us more about seventh-century Cyprus than sixth-century Emesa. He presents what is known about the setting, leaning heavily on Cameron's fundamental article as well on

Haldon's book, but his connections with the text are tenuous, and his working methods (p. 10, n. 20 'my informal survey') do not build confidence. Despite the confident subtitle, and although by the end—on the textual level—he has constructed a coherent picture of late antique city values, this book will not satisfy the reader wishing to learn about Limassol in the seventh century.

Chapter 2 efficiently establishes the structure of the text: 1. prologue, 2. formation of the saint in the desert, 3. ministry of the saint in Emesa, 4. Epilogue, characterising the third section as 'a collection of anecdotes, written in a colloquial style with a marvelously rich vocabulary'. He then demolishes (p. 21) any lingering hopes that it has anything to tell us about sixth-century Emesa, and helpfully warns (p. 20) against correlation of high levels of language with educated audiences and low levels of language with less educated audiences, before proceeding to discuss basic issues of authenticity and composition. He sees Evagrius's account of Symeon as the earliest account of a tradition about Symeon. He outlines Leontios's own claims about his sources, agrees with the consensus of scholars that his claim to have access to an eyewitness account is probably spurious, and convincingly shows that Leontios nowhere says that this was oral testimony. He disposes of Mango's proposed *paterikon* source: the anecdotes in section 3 are just too numerous to have come from anything like any of the*paterika* we know. He is also able to answer many of the detailed arguments which Mango deployed to support his theory that section 3 is not by Leontios: his 'empty grave' solution is particularly impressive.

It therefore seems unnecessary (and a pity) to fall back (p. 29) on a hypothesis of incomplete revision. Turning to Leontios's claims to have written before on the subject, he shows the weakness of Ryden's theory that he is referring to the hidden sanctity of Vitalius in the *Life of John the Almsgiver*. Festugière's theory was that Leontios started with a first version resembling section 2, then found anecdotes which enabled him to write a second, fuller version of the life: K. counters with the nature of Evagrius's account, based only on material similar to section 3 (though his argument is not strengthened by the absurd suggestion that 'without anecdotes like those found in Evagrius and in the second half Symeon would not be a subject sufficiently interesting for a saint's *life*'). K.'s solution is the reverse of Festugière's, and a variant of Mango's, that Leontios himself first wrote the anecdotal material, possibly using Evagrius as his source for three episodes, though claiming his source was the autopsy of John the deacon, and then added the second (desert) section, also using Evagrius, and the rhetorical introduction and conclusion, sections 1 and 4. He concludes with a note on the later Armenian *synaxarion*, suggesting that Leontios's *life* alone could have been its source.

K.'s main problem, which is answered by Mango's solution, and which he does not really address, is the difference of style between the anecdotal material of section 3 and the rest of the work. His only attempt is to refer to Patlagean's insistence on the distinction between the sections on 'formation' and 'ministry' in Byzantine saints' *lives*—though he then reveals that her evidence is the *Life of Symeon*. (K. confusingly calls these 'life' and 'miracles', whereas this whole text is concerned with *bios* rather than *thaumata;* the subgenre of section 2 is his life as a *boskos* and of section 3 his life as a *salos*. Bakhtin's third chronotope, the death of the saint, is enclosed in section 3 with reference to section 2.) There is no attempt to establish authorship by Leontios on linguistic, metrical or statistical grounds; there is no explanation why Leontios did not homogenise the level of style when he revised the work as a whole. Overall, K. has offered some good arguments, a new solution, but the issue is far from settled. Curiously, in that he then proceeds to discuss only the third, anecdotal, section, his argument for the unitary nature of the life is impaired.

In the next six chapters, two on the hagiographic origins of 'Leontios's' Symeon, two on his Cynic origins and (effectively, with the conclusion) two on his Biblical typology, K. is on surer and very effective ground. He shows in chapter 3 ways in which the text is similar to other late antique saints' *lives* (anachoresis, ascesis, powers of healing, exorcism and miraculous feeding), using Browning's typology, but rejecting some of Browning's assumptions. In the second half of the chapter he shows ways in which it diverges from, and even inverts, the values of other *lives,* and Leontios's strategies for dealing with these differences. He presents Symeon as shameless, shocking: defecating in the street, consorting with prostitutes, farting, eating meat, and exposing himself in the women's bathhouse. Chapter 4 pursues some of these characteristics in the literature of hidden sanctity, and chapters 5 and 6 identify others with Cynic *chreiai.* These chapters perhaps represent the greatest originality of the work, offering both a survey of the continuity of Diogenes traditions in late antiquity (to Theophylact Simocatta, with a glance forward to Psellos in the eleventh century) making good use of *progymnasma* material, and a reading of Symeon emblematically entering the city with a dead dog and proceeding to reveal urban hypocrisy and inequalities through the reactions to his behaviour, several aspects of which recall Diogenes. These are defecation in public, eating lupines (though other saints, for example Theoktiste of Lesbos, ate lupines without Cynic overtones), eating raw meat, the episode with the dog, and the association with madness. K. makes great play of the humour of these episodes (even translating *thermia*, lupines, as 'baked beans'), though these few episodes are mentioned many times before and after the analysis on pp. 92-104, which creates a strong sense of repetitiveness in the work as a whole. In chapter 7 K. shows the limitations of a simple

Cynic reading of the text and the way Leontios demonstrated Symeon's Christomimetic sanctity despite his shocking behaviour. Gospel typology is produced to explain various episodes in the *life:* the entry into Emesa, various miracles of healing and feeding, the overturning of the tables of the pastry-chefs, his burial by a converted Jew, and the discovery of his empty tomb. The brief conclusion brings together the double basis of Symeon's sanctity: the Cynic and Christomimetic episodes are not isolated reflections of 'sources' but together point to the significance of a 'fool in Christ'; the Cynic elements reveal the inadequacies in the values of apparently Christian cities; theomimesis is necessary to establish Symeon's credentials as more than a fool or a Cynic in that he also echoes the Christ who entered Jerusalem and overturned the tables of the money-lenders. At the end of K.'s book the late antique city is more apparent than at the beginning.

This is an intelligent, well-written book, which handles in a sophisticated manner humour and parody, paradox and typology. Its deficiencies in leaving unsolved major issues of authenticity and (despite p. 7) structure, and in failing to root the text in a sure Cypriot context are minor compared with its real and original achievement. Yet each of these deficiencies, while minor in itself, has wider implications. K.'s decision not to look at the *Life* as a whole (despite p. 6: 'this study treats the *Life of Symeon* as an integral whole') leaves open, as we have seen, the authenticity issue and the more interesting question of variation in level of style. It also ignores the whole 'formation' part of the life, which, at least from a middle Byzantine perspective, could be seen to be not 'more conventional' (p. 4), but just as transgressive as the second: it depicts a spiritual friendship of two ascetics exceptional in Byzantine full-length *lives:* it is at that stage a double *life* of Symeon and John, said to be told by Symeon the fool to John the deacon in Emesa. The *hegoumenos* Nikon's testing before tonsuring them reveals not only the commitment of each to the ascetic life, but also the commitment of each to the other, not as *geron* and *mathetes,* but as equal novices, and romantic friends: 'we two were as one soul'. This section is also knitted by theme and plot into the second part: John and Symeon start their process of *anachoresis* in evading their families by pretending to turn aside to defecate; at the end of Symeon's life (so in the second part) he keeps his promise made in the first part to visit John two days before his death and take him with him. At the central hinge of the *Life* the pair's renunciation of their life together as *boskoi* enables the second part of Symeon's career, as *salos,* a motif which in later lives (Nikon, Leontios) is found at a slightly different place in the structure, in the holy man's rejection of all family ties, followed by the love of the *hegoumenos* for him, which has in turn to be rejected before he sets off for the desert. In the second section of Leontios's *Life of Symeon* as in the third, apparent transgression is redeemed in revelation.

As for failures in contextualisation, what is surprising is that K. makes any such claims for his work. His reading succeeds on the textual level, and includes good discussions along the way, e.g. of the generic type of concealed sanctity (pp. 70-71), the intermingling of material in *chreiai,* florilegia, hagiography and parainetic texts (pp. 76-77), his note on *phouska* (p. 151, n. 31). His decision to append an English translation is exemplary. What he does not deliver is his promise of context, although he announces confidently that his approach depends on the idea of context. In fact it is more surprising that such a polished, sophisticated literary approach should be so unaware of the theoretical problems of context (similarly, p. 24, 'Leontios fully intends' of the problems of intention), recognised for most other literatures at the end of the twentieth century. If we are to advance into the next stage of the literary study of hagiography, or indeed of other kinds of Byzantine narrative and historical texts, it will be necessary to accept certain concepts as problematic and adopt theoretical gains made in other areas to advance the literary study of Byzantine literature as a whole.

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