

claim that Mary and the Jews demonstrate ‘differences and similarities between experiencing the written words of God’ (p. 131). Finally, in a chapter entitled ‘The fate of the Middle English miracles of the Virgin’, Boyarin turns to several texts – notably Chaucer’s *Prioress’s Tale* – which explore the vernacular context of the Virgin and the Jew on the eve of the English Reformation.

Boyarin’s methodology is comparative, informed by codicology, reception theory, and close reading. Perhaps most forcefully, Boyarin refutes a dismissive approach to this kind of ‘popular culture’, showing convincingly how issues of law, legitimacy, and interpretation are encoded in these fascinating texts and in their troublesome Jews (who, as characters, make law, legitimacy, and interpretations difficult and then resolvable by the Virgin’s intervention). Boyarin is least strong in probing the issue of belief, or the extent of ‘unbelief’, but her forensic micro-contexts allow her to explore a wide range of case studies and examples. In the final chapter in particular Boyarin might have developed her argument along more theoretical lines to move beyond existing scholarship. Particularly welcome are three editions in Boyarin’s appendices: ‘The founding of the Feast of the Conception’ from the *South English Legendary*, the story of ‘Blood on the penitent woman’s hand’ from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Museo 180, and several short texts from British Library Add. MS 37049. Forcefully argued and sharply focused, Boyarin’s book is a welcome addition to the scholarship on ideas of legality, literacy and legitimacy in medieval England, as well as extending our understanding of the place of Mary and the Jews in this culture.

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The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, vol. I: *Periods and Places*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). 464 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-5033-1. £85.00.

Any book attempting to give a broad yet detailed perspective on such a vast genre as hagiography – and Byzantine hagiography at that – deserves praise by definition. Braving the notoriously unwieldy corpus of saints’ legends from the extremely diverse lands of the Byzantine commonwealth that developed over one thousand years, at first glance this project promised nearly everything a scholar of hagiography might desire: a virtually exhaustive overview of the material within the genre, an evident attempt at presenting the information systematically, and, importantly, with equal attention given to the ‘provinces’ as well as to the ‘metropolis’. On closer examination, however, some parts of this book seem disappointing.

Conceptually, the most glaring problem is the almost complete absence of any references to the martyrs, which is never properly explained. The book begins with a discussion of the fourth-century Life of St Anthony in chapter 1 (which does not do much more than retell its content), as if it were the first extant example of hagiography as a genre, making no references to the

early apocryphal acts of apostles, records of martyrdoms (some of which are relegated to the very last chapter), and without mention of Eusebius of Caesaria (who briefly appears in chapter 6 on Palestinian hagiography). In what follows, hagiography is usually interpreted as a set of individual texts rather than an interconnected and fluid tradition. This could be explained as an attempt to make the arrangement of the material consistent and easy to follow, but this logic is broken already in chapter 3, which is arranged by authors, while the preceding chapter breaks up the material by geography and genre.

An equally serious problem is the uneven quality of the contributions. Alongside erudite and lucid chapters by such experts in their fields as Sebastian Brock (aptly summarizing the millennium-long Syriac tradition in a succession of short thematic sections) and Peter Cowe (with a predictable, but not overwhelming emphasis on the fourth-century St Mesrop Mashtots and his legacy in Armenia), one finds sections peppered with mistakes and inexplicable lacunae. To illustrate the above-mentioned concerns, let us briefly look at chapters 2 and 3, which take up a quarter of the volume and take us up to the tenth century. Chapter 2 excludes Middle Eastern examples, distorting the overall picture, while keeping the references to the Syrian stylite saints. It ignores the Life of Elisabeth the Wonderworker – a rare example of an early hagiographical text from Constantinople. Verse hagiography is hardly mentioned, and the genres of the *Praxis* (e.g. the famous Legend of the Three Stratilates) and the *Vita et martyrium* (e.g. of St Galaction) are absent. One and the same Life of St Spyridon (BHG 1648a) is mentioned as two different texts. There are several bibliographical mistakes. The list can go on. Chapter 3 ignores several important texts (the Life of Gregory of Acragant and the Life of Vergin by Epiphanius, as well as the unique hagiographical scholia by Methodios that accompany the Passion of St Marina and which only appear in a footnote in chapter 14 on Latin hagiography translated into Greek). Geographical terms are occasionally muddled (e.g. Gothia is not the south-eastern Crimea, nor can the Crimea be equated with Scythia in Epiphanius' Life of St Andrew). The brief and cursive discussion of Menologia and Metaphrastes (less than two pages!) is disproportionate by comparison with its impact on the genre. Finally, chapter 13 on Slavic hagiography does not make proper use of such significant works as the *Bibliotheca hagiographica balcano-slavica* (only mentioned in passing in the Addendum on p. 378) or Tvorogov's catalogue of saints' lives that were translated into Russian. The verdict is that, as a research-orientated companion, parts of this book may be misleading and must therefore be treated with caution.

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