

Constantinople. Ritual, violence and memory in the making of a Christian imperial capital.

By Rebecca Stephens Falcasantos. (Christianity in Late Antiquity, 9. The Official Book Series of the North American Patristics Society. A Joan Palevsky Book in Classical Literature.) Pp. xii + 221 incl. 2 maps. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020. £78. 978 052 030455 0

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Falcasantos's book is based on her Brown PhD thesis of 2015, which discussed how Nicene Christians used rhetoric, ritual and selective memory to claim Constantinople as a uniquely Christian city, excluding heretics, Jews and pagans. The scope, structure and methodology of the book is similar to the thesis: Falcasantos uses Constantinople both as an example of broader trends in late antiquity and as a case study for her methodology. The principal elements of this methodology are discourse analysis and the study of social practice as performance (Bourdieu), a focus on space and the construction of meaning, emphasising the contingency of group identity and behaviour (Brubaker) and de-familiarising and questioning familiar categories. The book employs a fairly broad array of literary sources, particularly Socrates and Sozomen, though it also makes use of some topographical and legal evidence. To scholars of late antiquity this general approach is not totally unfamiliar – Eric Rebillard, Susanna Elm and others have pioneered separate elements. Falcasantos brings together these different strands in a coherent and relatively novel way, however, giving it her own stamp.

Falcasantos's book is divided into five chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. Barring the first the chapters broadly proceed in chronological order, though each also tackles a different theme. Chapter i, 'Religion in late antiquity', sets out Falcasantos's view of the relationship between Christians, Christianity and the wider late Roman world. She broadly sees both as evolving within a traditional Roman religious landscape, questions the usefulness of 'religion' as a category and alters her terminology accordingly. Chapter ii, 'The founding of a city', is in this reviewer's opinion the strongest. Here Falcasantos effectively argues that the vast majority of Constantine's buildings and decorations would have had decidedly pagan resonances to most onlookers and that Eusebius and his successors had to work hard to create the image of an immaculately Christian city. Chapter iii, 'Violence and the politics of memory', is somewhat disappointing, given its focus on memory and literary construction in Socrates and Sozomen. A good opportunity to address the direct role of violence in creating a Nicene city in the mid-late fourth century is thus lost – especially as contemporary (albeit biased) evidence can be found in Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. In fact this period is comparatively neglected in Falcasantos's analysis, compared to the reigns of Constantine and the Theodosians.

Chapter iv, 'Cult practice as a technology of social construction', analyses how Nicene Christian leaders sought to draw boundaries between their congregants and religious outsiders, and how historians recorded these efforts. This is a clear and intelligent analysis, which follows the approach of much productive recent writing on late antique religiosity (one thinks particularly of Isabella Sandwell and Eric Rebillard). It also contains an interesting section on Chrysostom's theory of spectacle and its relevance in his polemics against the theatre: albeit one which feels overly long for its role in the book and mainly summarises an earlier chapter of hers from an earlier volume (Georgia Frank, Susan R. Jacobs and Andrew S. Holman [eds], *The garb of being*, New York 2020). Chapter v,

'Imperial piety and the writing of Christian history', moves away from the city to focus on the self-presentation of Theodosius II. Drawing particularly on the analysis of Judith Evans-Gruber, Falcasantos analyses how Theodosius and his councillors portrayed the imperial regime as a pious reforming monarchy in the best Roman tradition, highlighting how these policies correlated with times of potential stress and giving some discussion of Constantinople as the theatre of Theodosian self-presentation. This is, again, an interesting analysis. Yet like the discussion in chapter iv, it feels only partially relevant to the city and thus to the rest of the book. Although in Falcasantos's defence this is consistent with her desire to offer conclusions about the wider empire, it still flows somewhat awkwardly. The conclusion brings together previous themes and is a competent summary.

Falcasantos is broadly successful in her main argument. The contention that Constantinople did not necessarily begin as a Christian city but became one through the efforts of episcopal and imperial figures is generally persuasive, although it would have been augmented by more use of the evidence in pagan writers like Julian, Himerius or Themistius. To a lesser extent, so is her contextualisation and de-familiarisation of Christianity, which fruitfully questions narratives of Christian exceptionalism and the categories they have inspired. This is only partially effective, however, because her alternatives do not always persuade. Sometimes the problem is stylistic – 'those who engaged in practices directed at Christ' instead of 'Christians' (p. 42) is a particularly egregious example. Sometimes it is analytical. Calling churches 'temples' (discussion at pp. 25–6) from time to time is generally misleading in the majority of cases given the differences in ritual usage and architecture (Falcasantos makes a strong case, however, regarding Constantine's mausoleum, the Church of the Apostles [pp. 67–72]). The methodology itself has a 'love it or hate it' quality. At some points it is a helpful and incisive theoretical framework which illuminates the city's religious life, while at others it is a contestable and frustrating intellectual structure which distracts from her analysis.

The prose style is often complex and jargon-laden, which can partially be attributed to these methodological choices. The editing and proof-reading is by contrast near-perfect though there are some inconsistencies between the two maps (pp. 50 and 109). Overall, this book makes an intelligent and informative argument about religious change in late antique Constantinople, though one whose focus could be tighter. It is only partially convincing, however, as a vindication of a general method and approach.

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Armenia between Byzantium and the Orient. Celebrating the memory of Karen Yuzbashyan (1927–2009). Edited by Bernard Outtier, Cornelia B. Horn, Basil Lourié and Alexey Ostrovsky. (Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 16.) Pp. xviii + 718 incl. frontispiece, 124 colour and black-and-white figs and 14 tables. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2020. €249. 978 90 04 39773 6; 2213 0039
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This substantial volume, comprising twenty-seven contributions, is dedicated to the memory of the eminent scholar of medieval Armenia, Professor Karen Yuzbashyan.