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Reviews

J. Eric Cooper and Michael J. Decker, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Pp. xiv, 339.

Cappadocia is a land of many stereotypes. Travellers and pilgrims across the centuries have seen a spiritual landscape in its abundant rock-cut churches and unearthly fairy chimneys. Modern historians have considered this land-locked, arid region as an economic backwater, a frontier society perennially ravaged by raids from Persians or Arabs. Even the medieval sources themselves used the region's name as a byword both for the ignorant country bumpkins who dwelt there, and for the excellent breeds of horses which they supplied to the rest of the Roman world. In this book, which is partially based upon Cooper's 2002 PhD thesis at the University of Oxford, he and Decker set out to give us a coherent study of this land, and in the process to challenge each of these stereotypes. As its title suggests, the book gives us a picture of the *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*, a world at once more similar to the rest of the empire than we had imagined and at the same time unique. The authors argue for the unity of Cappadocia as a region, both in terms of its coherence and its distinctiveness during the period from the fourth to the eleventh centuries CE. This volume breaks down the subject by approaching it from three angles: Part I deals with geography and the economic activity of 'those who work'; Part II deals with 'those who pray', both monastic and ecclesiastic; Part III discusses 'those who fight', describing the secular elite, and attempting to place them within the context of their peers from the wider Mediterranean world.

In the first part, the authors establish the uniqueness of Cappadocia in the context of the Roman state. Undermining its reputation as an economically poor land, Cooper and Decker present a complex and self-sufficient pre-industrial economy. Much of its worth, however, was stored in movable property, particularly horses, sheep, and slaves, allowing the inhabitants to protect their wealth by moving it out of the way of marauding armies. Cappadocia was an overwhelmingly rural environment, with few cities built and administered in the Greco-Roman tradition. Instead of the urban life characterizing the rest of the Late Antique Roman world, much of the population lived in troglodytic towns, villages, monasteries, or elite complexes, burrowed into the chimneys, cliffs, and hillsides of the region. The authors argue that because settlement patterns differed from elsewhere in the Roman world, the collapse of urban life in the sixth and seventh centuries was less disruptive in Cappadocia than elsewhere.

Like the rest of the Byzantine world, Cappadocia had its share of monasteries, but in the second part Cooper and Decker criticize previous studies that simplistically equated any rock-cut church with a monastic community. Instead, they distinguish the archaeological structures associated with formal monasticism from other church-like complexes (such as those found in villages or elite housing complexes) by identifying refectories as the critical component of a monastery. Using this definition, such formal monasteries prove to be no more common here than elsewhere in the empire. In turn, the region's many churches are just that – buildings associated with the non-monastic church, and important testaments to the pious euergetism of the regional elite.

The book's third part turns to Cappadocia's secular elites, particularly tracing their relationship to counterparts in Constantinople. The authors depict a provincial elite who, in many ways, never fully embraced traditional Roman culture. Never a land of cities, Cappadocia was always a place of petty lords who lived in fortified rural complexes and rode about the land with small personal armies. The elite society which emerges from the details remains quite stable throughout the turbulence of the early middle ages (not necessarily the specific families, but certainly their networks and behaviours). Ultimately, Cappadocian elite attitudes and behaviours sat uncomfortably juxtaposed to the urban values of their fifth and sixth-century counterparts elsewhere, but were instrumental in preserving the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century, defending it in the eighth and ninth, expanding it in the tenth, and betraying it (when it no longer suited their goals and needs) in the eleventh.

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The work is illustrated with the help of about twenty diagrams and maps, helpfully situated in-text. Unfortunately, they are cramped, the maps especially being often difficult to read; they would have benefitted from full-page formatting. While the authors point out that they were limited in the space allowed for images that they could include in the work, a few more (for example, maps showing the distribution of identified monastic sites or subterranean towns to accompany their discussions) would have been welcome. It is in the notes and references at the end of the work that it is most apparent that the volume began life as a doctoral thesis. Although endnotes (as opposed to footnotes) mildly inconvenience readers, who have to regularly flip pages, their principal advantage is in allowing lengthier entries without interrupting the aesthetics of the page. Unfortunately, the notes in *Byzantine Cappadocia* rarely take advantage of this formatting choice: they tend to be dry, and only rarely reward the interested reader with additional discussion.

This particular volume works well in dialogue with other regional studies. Cooper and Decker's work provides one way of disentangling the overall data, creating a history of the specific, and successfully relating it back to the history of the whole. Although far removed from Constantinople, and thus from most of our literary sources, Cappadocia was an integral part of the Roman Empire for over a thousand years. In their study covering some seven centuries of that time, Decker and Cooper have produced a welcome volume which treats the province and its inhabitants with sympathy and genuine fondness, something often wanting in sources written by the residents' medieval contemporaries.

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Leonora Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. The* Material for History *of Nikephoros Bryennios*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xiv, 243.

If the twelfth-century Byzantine general and statesman Nikephoros Bryennios proved 'a most attractive personality' to his contemporaries,[1] the same cannot be said of his appeal among modern scholars, Antonio Carile being the notable exception. A decade ago Elizabeth Jeffreys was compelled to 'reconsider' Nikephoros, but saw little need to reassess his historical work, the *Material for History*; for her, and doubtlessly many others, the text remained 'a highly partisan account' of Bryennios' father-in-law Alexios Komnenos and homonymous grandfather during the period 1070–1080.[2] The established view is now contested in Leonora Neville's impressive new book, which proposes that the *Material for History* is a more complex work of literature than previously assumed.

The study's opening chapter hints that motivations other than a desire to glorify his extended family were behind Nikephoros' decision to draft a historical composition (pp. 13–28). Through skilful observations on gender, Neville dispels the popular perception of Nikephoros Bryennios as 'the passive and unambitious husband of Anna Komnene' (p. i) who balked at the prospect of becoming emperor when his wife and mother-in-law backed him to rule. Resisting the pervasive influence of Anna that has shaped prior assessments, Neville conceives of Nikephoros as a man with thwarted ambitions, painfully aware that his family might have ruled had Alexios Komnenos not defeated the rebellion of his grandfather. This compelling reappraisal of Nikephoros initially appears speculative, but is expertly substantiated by the author's subsequent readings in the *Material for History*.

The remainder of the first section offers a framework for detailed literary analysis by investigating trends in history-writing and works which influenced the composition of the *Material for History* (pp. 29–59). Intriguingly, Bryennios is suggested to have appealed to a contemporary interest in Roman history, drawing inspiration and models from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch and Polybius. The proposal is supported by recent scholarship, with Dimitris Krallis' research on the eleventh-century historian Michael Attaleiates – with whose work Nikephoros was almost certainly familiar – demonstrating that such an approach was not unique in this period. And as Krallis contends that Attaleiates believed Republican Rome offered models of virtue to which his own generation should aspire, and used allusions to Roman history to give

1 Elizabeth Jeffreys, 'Nikephoros Bryennios Reconsidered', in Vassiliki Vlyssidou (ed.), *The Empire in Crisis (?): Byzantium in the 11th Century (1025–1081)* (Athens, 2003) 213.

2 Ibid., 213.