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BOOK REVIEW AND NOTE

Πάντα ῥεῖ: Change in Thirteenth-Century Byzantine Architecture, Art, and Material Culture. Edited by **Jenny P. Albani** and **Ioanna Christoforaki**. Turnhout: Brepols, 2023. 449 pp. $90.00 paper.

Since the Battle of Manzikert (1071) the Byzantine Empire began to rapidly decrease in size. With territorial loss came economic decline and marginalization. Funding that once paid for monumental architecture and beautiful artworks gradually evaporated. That is why *modern* art and architectural historians, as well as archaeologists, have not only emphasized that art production was reduced but also diminished in quality. Such conclusions have ramifications how scholars value, assess, and understand Christian artwork in the Eastern Mediterranean. The book being reviewed here, *Πάντα ῥεῖ* (Everything flows) edited by J. Albani and I. Christoforaki, attempts to challenge (and at times, confirm) these past conclusions, while asserting *postmodernist* approaches.

Serving as the 20th volume of the *Byzantinos* series, this paperback book is designed to balance affordability and quantity (of text, images, notes, etc.). It is medium-sized, measuring 164 × 240 × 25 mm, and, to accommodate the density of text and images within this format, the publisher chose an 8-point font size (which I found difficult to read), and the illustrations are rather small. With that said, the majority of paintings were reproduced in color and in high-resolution. Not all artworks described in the texts were provided – a maximum of fifteen images were allowed for each chapter. Altogether there are fourteen chapters, and these are organized thematically (based on geography, media, and iconography). Each chapter contains its own bibliography; as many of the authors are referencing the same publications, it would have saved some space (and costs) if all the bibliographies were collated and placed at the end of the book. There is a brief eleven-page index covering personal and geographical names; unfortunately, it does not include artistic, iconographical, and architectural terms.

The content of the book is based on a session of the XXIII International Congress of Byzantine Studies that took place in Belgrade in 2016. Session organizers also selected other authors to provide additional chapters. A wide range of media are covered: mural painting, icons, manuscript illumination, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, enamels, and architectural design and decoration. Some chapters focused solely on iconography, including programmatic depiction of saints, the Nursing Virgin, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Eschatology. This book provides a rich and complex glimpse into the visual culture in the Eastern Mediterranean following the Latin takeover of Constantinople in 1204 and the resurgence of so-called "Byzantine" (i.e., Greek-speaking) polities after the year 1261. I consider the Introduction and Conclusion as the most important chapters since they distilled the other sections' data into a coherent narrative.

The book will be a welcome addition to any Byzantinist's library, because it provides a "snapshot" of current scholarship among European and North American experts. As a whole, it is thought-provoking and well organized; however, readers must be aware of its shortcomings. The first problem is the application of the term *postmodern* (35); this word can be applied in disparate ways depending on the subject. So, the authors needed

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to define how they are using this term within this specific context. Rather ironically most of the authors are using *modernist* classifications and terminology such as *taste*, *aesthetics*, *medieval*, *Latin*, *Slavic*, *Byzantine*, and so on – and this leads to the second problem. Indeed, what does "Byzantine" mean between the years 1204 and 1261, when *Byzantium* was controlled by Latin monarchs who called themselves "Romanians"? (The Laskarids never called themselves "Byzantines," but rather "Λασκαριδαί.") Likewise, is it appropriate that we call Cretan icons "Byzantine" when they were produced under the Republic of Venices control beginning in the year 1204 (261) and influenced by its Latin clergy? Should we call Serres and Sgrafitto wares "Byzantine" (277) when they were clearly inspired by the glazed wares of Islamic and Arabic-speaking states? Even when "western" style and influence are recognized – in regions controlled by Latin rulers – the book's authors still insist on using the label "Byzantine" (331, 345, 349). So, at times, in this book, "Byzantine" merely means "a majority Greek-speaking" society, even if respective governments and artistic styles had no association with the former Byzantine Empire. Without qualifying their terms, authors of this volume will confuse their readers, especially young students and nonexperts.

Several chapters included new data, providing significant contributions to our understanding of medieval art. For instance, Antje Bosselmann-Ruickbie's research on enamels convincingly locates Sicily as a center of artistic production around the turn of the fourteenth century (355–380). Likewise, Konstantia Kefala offers a well-organized introduction regarding the frescos of St. John's Monastery (Patmos), which is surprisingly absent in English-language scholarship (381–410). Scenes in its refectory are rather unique, and the author persuasively identifies each based on a variety of literary sources; they are unified by the theme of *death* – thus, serving as *momento mori* for monks as they ate their daily bread. Other chapters in this book need to be read critically.

There is not enough space here to list the pros and cons of each chapter, so readers are encouraged to exercise critical judgment. Some (but not all) of the authors write in a polemical manner, based on a variety of assumptions. Because assertions are not arguments, I found myself unconvinced by several proposed theses. For example, Jasmina Ćirić's assertion that the decoration on the Monastery of Lips (Constantinople) can be read as a "narrative" or "story" is rather puzzling (81). Narratives in art must necessarily have figurative and linear components (i.e., with a beginning, middle, and end) – and the exterior of this ecclesiastical complex does not have any such imagery. Finally, Nikolas Bakirtzis's essay regarding castles in Cyprus is unlike all the other chapters; this author avoids analyzing and identifying the function and phasing the fortifications in question – thus, the reader is left with an ambiguous history that is unrelated to the actual structures. Even with these issues, this volume provides an important contribution to Byzantine Studies.

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