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Reviews

Thomas Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song. Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. Pp. xiii, 265.
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The Virgin in Song examines the figure of Mary in the work of Romanos the Melodist, whose fame and epithet arose from his composition of dramatic dialogue hymns (*kontakia*). Romanos was a sixth-century deacon in a suburban church dedicated to Mary the Theotokos in Constantinople, and according to legend he was inspired by the Virgin Mary herself to compose his hymns. Legends must have a basis somewhere, so it is no surprise that Mary plays a significant role in his poetry. But the Mary we meet in Romanos' work is at times quite surprising, and Arentzen guides the reader through the expected, the paradoxical and the startling in three key roles which Mary plays in the hymns: virgin (chapter two), mother (chapter three), and 'voice' (chapter four).

Chapter one, *The Song and the City*, is a masterly introduction both to Romanos and the hymn form he so cleverly employed (the *kontakion*), and to the life and times of the great city in which his hymns were heard. Opening with an evocative retelling and analysis of Romanos' inspiration by the Virgin Mary, Arentzen quickly establishes the significant position Mary holds in Romanos' story and his poetry. As a way of situating the *kontakia*, Arentzen explores Constantinople's theatrical scene and its connections to church life, and the liturgical setting and audience of his hymns. We are then treated to a journey through the life of a Constantinopolitan girl and a tour of Marian doctrine and devotion so that we can see how Romanos' Mary fits (or does not fit), both with ordinary women and in the context of the burgeoning Marian cult. This introductory chapter well-equips the non-specialist to enter into the world of Romanos' hymns, but also provides a new focus which will enable the established scholar to see Romanos in a new light.

The second chapter focuses on Mary's virginity. It explores the notion of a sexually desirable and fertile virgin, through an analysis of Romanos' depiction of the annunciation (in the hymn *On the Annunciation*). Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel—a young woman and a male figure meeting alone in a room—lends itself to eroticization and Romanos makes the most of it. Text and audience become blurred to the extent that the audience is encouraged to participate in the desire for Mary. Unlike the silent, cloistered virginity expected of Constantinopolitan girls, Romanos' Mary is powerful and authoritative. Her power, Gabriel's powerlessness and the lack

of a Holy Spirit are all suggestive of a fertile virginity. Arentzen closes this chapter by arguing that Romanos does not use Mary to champion ascetic virginity, but rather advocates modesty and temperance in city life. Mary is not your everyday virgin: her virginity is inimitable and unachievable because she has a special relationship with Christ.

Chapter three follows Mary into the cave and observes her breastfeeding the infant Christ. In his analysis of *On the Nativity I*, Arentzen argues that Romanos' Mary is not the meek mother who silently treasures what is said about her child. She is the one in charge, who addresses the Magi's concerns, who even speaks for Joseph, who emphasizes the divinity of her child and his safe-guarding of her virginity. Arentzen makes two significant claims about Romanos' Mary which set her apart from earlier presentations. First, the suckling deity is, for Romanos, proof of Mary's virginity. This is a departure from earlier theologians, who used her virginity as proof of Christ's divinity. And, second, Romanos is part of a movement away from the imagery of the nursing Father. For him, Mary is not solely the mother and nurse of Jesus, but the nurse of 'our life': the provider and protector of the congregation, and perhaps all Christians. The maternal Mary in Romanos' hymns emerges as a significant figure in her own right: not just a 'vessel' for Christ, but a powerful ally and defender of humanity.

In the fourth chapter, Arentzen focuses on Mary's authoritative voice and her role as intercessor, mediatrix, ambassador, protector, and even empress, and he examines the limits of these terms to describe the unique role Mary plays in relation to Christ. This chapter examines two hymns, *On the Nativity II* and *On Mary at the Cross*, which both address questions of death and resurrection. In the former, Mary's voice is powerful and authoritative, the 'voice of salvation'. Her voice mediates between Adam and Eve and her infant Christ: her child speaks only to her and she relays his message, so that her speech is endowed with divine power. Arentzen argues that this redemptive voice extends to the congregation too, so that they sing their salvation through Mary. But the strength and power of this Mary seems missing in *On Mary at the Cross*, a hymn in which she weeps and begs to understand the reason that her son is going to die. It is a complex and puzzling hymn. Mary's repeated weeping and questioning come under criticism by the figure of Christ, and the hymn ends mysteriously in Christ apparently allowing Mary to follow him into his death. Arentzen's thoughtful analysis of this hymn presents it in a new and illuminating way: Mary's questioning is for the benefit of listeners. Her unique relationship with Christ enables her to speak freely (*parrhesia*) and through her authoritative and probing questions, she presents the audience with Christ's own explanations of the crucifixion and resurrection. She enters into his suffering not to die his death, but to put aside her emotional involvement and become the mouthpiece of God's salvific actions. Throughout this chapter, Arentzen argues for a partnership between Christ and Mary: 'she speaks, he acts' (p.162). Mary's voice becomes a 'salvific agent' (p.163).

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Mary emerges as a complex, multi-faceted figure in this book, and Romanos as a creative and sometimes daring innovator. *The Virgin in Song* thus makes a significant contribution to scholarly understanding of Mary in Romanos and the developing Marian cult, and, more broadly, of the function of liturgical poetry in late antiquity.

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Geoffrey Greatrex & Sylvain Janniard (eds), *Le Monde de Procope/ The World of Procopius*. Paris (Orient et Mediterranée 28): Éditions de Boccard, 2018. Pp. 426
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This volume on Procopius presents a number of papers delivered at colloquia at Mainz in December 2014 and Ghent in May 2016 supplemented by invited contributions from younger researchers, especially those who have not yet contributed to such a collection. Of the 20 items, the majority are in English, but three each are in French and German in a deliberate attempt to highlight and defend the multilingual nature of Humanities research that is under threat from the Anglophone steamroller. The volume is divided into four, roughly equal, sections, but the editors worked hard to achieve a reasonable level of coherence within sections and across the volume by circulating drafts for comment.

In the first section, Procopius and Roman Society, Geoffrey Greatrex surveys the information about Procopius' home town of Caesarea, though lack of evidence means that neighbouring Gaza has to serve as a substitute on occasions. Marion Kruse urges that Procopius applied a sophisticated and coherent economic understanding in his critique of Justinian's policies, but reads too much into the limited evidence. Mark-Anthony Karantabias rightly states that Justinian's power was far from absolute and that Procopius' attacks rely on distortions and omissions to create the impression of exceptional evil, whereas Justinian was really little different from other rulers. Johann Martin Thesz also points to the flaws in Procopius' critique of Justinian, with the lens of moral degeneration used to attack social changes which had been proceeding for generations. Maria Conterno considers whether Procopius' silence on contemporary Christological disputes represents a serious distortion, arguing that it is broadly in line with other contemporary authors and so not significant for Procopius as a writer or historiography as a genre.

The second section, on Past and Present in Procopius' works, contains four chapters of which the first two, by Jessica Moore and Timo Stickler, deal with Procopius' views of Rome, Romans and Romanness in the Gothic wars, when complexities were inevitably caused by the East Roman army, with its significant non-Roman elements, campaigning within the historical landscape of the Roman state with severe consequences for the Romans as defined as inhabitants of the city. Procopius appreciates the value of the Roman past but does not regard it as inevitably superior