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Christian Høgel:

*Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization*

Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002

204 pages (appendix; bibliography)

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This book is about one of the great achievements of Byzantine hagiography, the tenth-century rewriting of saints' lives (148 in all), a project commissioned by the Emperor and led by Symeon Metaphrastes (the "rewriter" or "translator"). Lives were collected, edited, and re-organized into a vast liturgical collection – a ten-volume *Menologion* – which has survived in more than 700 copies.

Somewhat unusually in the context of medieval studies, the sheer wealth of material has apparently made scholars hesitant to approach the collection. The present book is in fact the first monographic treatment of Symeon Metaphrastes.

The scope of the book is wide, but its main concern is with the social and historical context of the Metaphrastic enterprise. A short general introduction (11 pages) presenting the *Menologion* and discussing earlier research is followed by the first chapter, "Greek Hagiography and Hagiographical Redactions before Symeon Metaphrastes" (41 pages), which provides important background information by describing the main changes in Greek hagiography from Late Antiquity to the Middle Byzantine period. Sub-chapters deal with developments in style, genre, and social context; the spread of the cult of the saints; liturgical hagiographical collections; the status of hagiography in the hierarchy of sacred texts; and finally see Constantinople emerge as a new center of hagiography towards the late eighth and then in the ninth and tenth centuries. A final section briefly discusses various forms of redaction and rewriting.

The second chapter, "Symeon Metaphrastes: Life and Works" (28 pages), is a critical assessment of extant sources for the life and activity of Symeon Metaphrastes. Høgel guides us step by step through various pieces of internal and external evidence (the latter including Greek, Georgian, and Arabic sources), evaluating their credibility and possible interrelationship, with a sharp eye for plausible convergences of information. Symeon not being an uncommon name, an attempt is made to single out those pieces of information that indisputably concern Symeon Metaphrastes and not other imperial employees or writers with the same name. The exposition leads to a discussion of the authorship of a number of works commonly ascribed to Symeon (Metaphrastes, Logothetes).

The third chapter, "The Composition of the Metaphrastic *Menologion*" (39 pages), is devoted to the structure and contents of the *Menologion* as a whole and deals, above all, with Symeon's working process and his possible criteria for selecting and combining texts. Høgel proposes three, possibly four Metaphrastic procedures used for the *Menologion*. These concern the treatment of sources (earlier lives and other texts), including whether (1) an earlier text was incorporated into the *Menologion* with only minor changes (in some cases with a new prologue and ending); (2) the text was rephrased orally, taken down in short-hand, and subsequently copied into normal script; (3) a new narrative was composed

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on the basis of several sources; or (4?) stories of two different (groups of) saints were combined into one text. The various procedures are described in greater detail and illustrated with examples.

In the fourth chapter, “The ‘Publication’ of the Metaphrastic Menologion” (9 pages), Høgel discusses certain details in the sources and in the manuscript evidence that indicate that the Metaphrastic enterprise, commissioned by Basil II (976-1025), was interrupted before completion, as Symeon for some reason lost favour at court. Høgel’s hypothesis is that separate texts of the Menologion may have circulated during Symeon’s lifetime, but that the Menologion as a whole was ‘published’ only subsequently, after Symeon’s (and Basil II’s) death. Høgel suggests that this “second publication” of the Menologion, probably also introducing its ten-volume structure, took place under Constantine VIII (1025-28). This deduction is based on two manuscript notices (short poems) mentioning a “Konstantinos (Neos)” as commissioner or producer of the hagiographic collection. Meanwhile Høgel also argues that several other details in the sources may be better explained if we assume that Constantine VIII had the Menologion officially ‘published’ after Symeon’s death.

Chapter five, “The Metaphrastic Texts. Style and Authority” (16 pages), deals with the stylistic features of the Metaphrastic texts, and, more generally, with the ultimate motivation behind the project of rewriting. Høgel looks for evidence in the prologues to single lives, and he comments on the narrator’s stance.

The sixth and last chapter, “Readers and Reworkers of the Metaphrastic Menologion” (8 pages), deals with the fate of the Metaphrastic collection in the Middle Byzantine period, its use within monastic and imperial circles, its readers and reworkers.

A brief “Conclusion” (2 pages) sums up the main results of the study, which also contains a bibliography (13 pages) and a list of Metaphrastic texts (32 pages), specifying, where relevant, identified sources for single lives, in addition to other information.

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Høgel’s relatively short monograph (171 pages, if we exclude the list of Metaphrastic texts) contains a wealth of information. His object of study is a huge collection of texts preserved in an abundance of manuscripts, and, in addition, he draws on a wide range of primary and secondary historical and critical sources in order to study the Menologion in context. Høgel’s style is concise in the sense that the author is able to bring together and discuss a great deal of information in few pages. The way he guides us through single pieces of evidence is engaging and his step-by-step lines of argumentation make fascinating reading. Høgel’s eagerness to challenge established truths, to venture into fresh explanations, as well as his intuition for combining known facts into something new and convincing are among the main assets of the book. His ability to generalize on the basis of a wide range of sources is also commendable. His hypotheses are generally well argued, while, at the same time, he is careful to remind us when facts cannot be ‘proven’ conclusively.

Given the wide contextual approach and limited number of pages, it goes without saying that close readings and detailed textual analysis are not given priority in Høgel’s book. This is understandable, yet one might have wished that Høgel had taken his discussion a few steps further in some places by going more into detail. One example is his brief treatment of the narrator-‘I’ of the lives (pp. 146–48); also, his interesting discussion of Symeon’s prologues is limited by the chapter’s main focus (the motivations behind the collection as a whole) and could presumably have yielded even more if also analyzed from other perspectives.

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Generally, a greater emphasis on the literary and rhetorical aspects of the lives would have given the reader a fuller picture of the Metaphrastic enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

The potential readership of Høgel's monograph is wide: Byzantinists and other Medievalists, Church historians, Classical philologists, historians. For those interested in the history of rhetoric, in particular, Høgel's book is important reading for several reasons. Its theme is one of the great rhetorical enterprises in the Middle Byzantine period; more importantly, Høgel's wide, contextual approach to his topic is, I think, both stimulating and challenging for students of the history of rhetoric, a field in which the focus tends to be somewhat narrowly confined.

A consistent system of translating textual examples would have made the book more accessible to readers less well versed in Greek. Excerpts are sometimes given only in Greek, sometimes only in English, sometimes both in the original and in translation, the latter occasionally in footnotes. The choice in each instance is not self-explanatory and a more consistent approach would have been preferable.

A general index would have been useful, and so would an index of Metaphrastic texts. The book would have benefited immensely from thorough proofreading as well as stylistic revision by a native speaker. Apart from numerous spelling errors (this reviewer counted around 90, equally distributed in the main text and in the footnotes), the text contains too many colloquialisms and the syntax is occasionally awkward. Finally, a list of contents not confined only to the main chapter titles, but including also the titles of all sub-chapters, would have given the reader a better grasp of the book's structure before he or she began to read it.

Quibbles aside, this is a fresh approach to a challenging topic. Høgel's book is a very welcome contribution to the study of Byzantine hagiography.

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<sup>1</sup> In one instance, the reader is referred to an earlier publication by Høgel, where he deals with literary aspects, in particular thematic elaboration, in some Metaphrastic texts; cf. C. Høgel, "The Redaction of Symeon Metaphrastes: Literary aspects of the Metaphrastic martyria", in C. Høgel (ed.), *Metaphrasis. Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography* (Oslo: Research Council of Norway, 1996), pp. 7–22.