Christianity and the varied intellectual cultures of late antiquity. C.'s study presents a fresh perspective on an often overlooked yet highly influential ancient text, and ought to be well received by both Classicists and Theologians alike.

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HAGIOGRAPHY AND FICTION

VAN PELT (J.), DE TEMMERMAN (K.) (edd.) *Narrative, Imagination and Concepts of Fiction in Late Antique Hagiography.* (*Mnemosyne* Supplements 478.) Pp. x + 320. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2024. Cased, €119. ISBN: 978-90-04-68507-9.

This collection of articles investigates various aspects and concepts of fictionality, invention and imagination in late antique hagiography, not only in the Greek, Roman and Byzantine tradition, but also in more 'peripheral' contexts such as Syriac, Armenian, Arabic and Persian culture. It is an innovative approach if we consider that, even though theoretical discussion of fiction and fictionality has been largely employed in many critical studies concerning modern literature or different genres of ancient literature, this angle has been rarely adopted in the investigation of hagiographical accounts.

Part 1, 'Concepts and Contexts', includes an introductory essay (Chapter 1) by De Temmerman and Van Pelt, where it is pointed out that, although hagiography always claims to be a truthful account, it often resorts to narrative/fictional strategies, including implausible tales and descriptions of miracles: these narrative devices represent a way of persuading the audience that the story is a truth-based account. After elucidating some concepts of 'authentication' and 'fiction', this chapter also makes clear that the aim of the volume is to depart from the traditional idea that hagiography potentially offers information on historical reality or social history. On the contrary, hagiographical texts should be considered as a whole, and imaginative narrative should be viewed as an inherent element of the genre, going beyond the binary opposition between truth and invention. It also illustrates the current state of scholarship and possible new perspectives arising from this approach.

In Chapter 2 P. Roilos explores the cognitive function of the complex concept of *phantasia* in a number of late antique Christian texts, namely those of Origen, the apocryphal acts and some early Byzantine hagiography. It is observed that in his confutation of Celsus' arguments against Christianity Origen resorts to terms related to the ambivalent notion of *phantasia*, suggesting that a certain degree of imagination is necessarily present in any given account, and this may even produce accurate representations of reality. A similar strategy of 'reversing' the objections raised by the opponents of Christianity can be detected in the descriptions of the many wonders reported in the *Apocrypha*, always labelled as sorcery by the pagan rivals of the protagonists: here the fictionality involved in the narratives contributes to confer credibility on the accounts, especially if we consider that their Christian audience was more than inclined to admire miracles. Finally, it is noted that fictional *topoi* widespread in early Byzantine hagiography were later criticised as manifestations of

popular religious imagination by intellectuals such as Photius or Nikephoros the Confessor on the grounds that they presented saints performing bizarre or ridiculous actions.

In a brilliant analysis (Chapter 3) C. Høgel investigates one of the most important hagiographical works of the tenth century: the *Life of St Basil the Younger*, generally considered a fictional saint. In a passage of this fascinating text the narrator becomes one of the characters of the story. Using this episode as a point of departure, Høgel convincingly demonstrates that several characteristic features of the *Life* can also be detected in other contemporary hagiographical works. One of these aspects is the multifaceted perspective present when there are multiple narrators, thus expressing different points of view (as happens in the *Life of Theoktiste*). Another recurrent trait is the importance of the urban setting in the development of the plot, which betrays the secular perspective of the authors and their propensity for city life. This is a general trend in the tenth century, connected to the secularisation of Byzantine hagiography in the Macedonian period and the involvement of imperial power in the process of canonisation of hagiographical collections (e.g. the Metaphrastic *Menologion*). The imperial perspective can be recognised in the ambition of one of the characters in the *Life of St Basil* who wants to become an emperor. Even if the story is fictitious, it may be interpreted as a response to the *Life* of emperor Basil I. Fictional saints were probably more acceptable in this historical period because of the participation of aristocrats, as writers, rewriters and commissioners, in the making of hagiography.

In Part 2, 'Reality and Representation', S. Johnson (Chapter 4) deals with Syriac hagiography and in particular with two authors portraying saints who were writers themselves, namely Thomas of Marga, who composed the *Book of Governors* in the ninth century, and Abdisho Bar Brikha, who wrote a *Catalogue of Books* towards the end of the thirteenth century. The former is a literary history offering a collective history of the founders of monasteries in Iraq, and the latter is a catalogue of Syriac authors. This chapter examines aspects of fictionality related to the use of lists of authors as a literary device.

In Chapter 5 A. Binggeli draws our attention to the representation of the desert as a fictionalised space in Pseudo-Neilos' *Narratio* and in the anonymous *History of the Great Deeds of Bishop Paul of Qentos and Priest John of Edessa*. This captivating contribution persuasively shows that narrative devices are used in both texts to present the desert as a fantastical place and as a special locus of fictionalisation. Among these fictional strategies the most effective are imaginative projection (e.g. when one of the characters imagines the place), narrative ellipsis (e.g. when minor details concerning the development of the plot are intentionally omitted) and embedded narrative (e.g. when the voice of the main narrator is complemented by the voices of other speakers).

Chapter 6, by Ó. Preto Domínguez, brilliantly illustrates how fictionalised elements may serve the purpose of portraying an ideal figure. This is apparent in the post-iconoclastic depiction of Gregorios Dekapolites created by Ignatios the Deacon, the author of Gregorios' *Life*. Even though, as an historical figure, the protagonist was familiar with the iconoclastic milieu, the hagiographer manages to forge the image of an iconophile saint by skilfully distorting elements of his biography and utilising narrative devices to create the impression of a defender of images.

Part 3, 'Invention and Truth', opens with F. Ruani's (Chapter 7) examination of a set of Syriac hagiographical texts dating from the fourth to the seventh centuries where the thoughts, mental processes and inner monologues of the protagonists are described. The psychic omniscience of the narrator obviously contradicts all the claims of historical accuracy so frequent in hagiography but, as Ruani demonstrates in an acute analysis, this incongruity may be resolved, or attenuated, by the introduction of fictional elements. For example, the

incredulity of one of the characters (the doubtful informant) makes the narration plausible, as does the insertion of thoughts and explanations provided *post factum*.

Because of their intrinsic fictionality the *Lives* of the cross-dressing saints offer a privileged point of observation in the investigation of narratological issues. As Van Pelt convincingly shows in Chapter 8, the phenomenon of the shifts between female and male pronouns in narrating the vicissitudes of female saints disguised as monks is not merely related to an inevitable blurring of gender identity (and not even to the possible random intervention of a scribe), but often involves a degree of intentional fictionality. Through a rigorous and thorough survey of the texts Van Pelt argues that these switches, in many cases, do not appear to be casual, but they make sense within the narrative context. In other words, they are often markers of internal focalisation, as, for example, when they suggest how the saint is perceived by other characters in the story.

V. Calzolari (Chapter 9) explores aspects of fictionality in the fifth-century *History of the Armenians* attributed to Agathangelos, a text describing the conversion of Armenian people to Christianity. The Armenians are presented as elected by God and part of a divine plan. A plethora of narrative devices are adopted by the author conferring authenticity on an account that lies somewhere between historiography and hagiography and repeatedly claims to be truth-based.

The last section, Part 4: 'Models and Intertexts', is devoted to intertextuality. D. Praet (Chapter 10) analyses Jerome's *Life of Malchus* (or *De monacho captivo*), which he defines as a *novella* made up of echoes found in the Old and the New Testament. The presence of classical elements has been repeatedly highlighted by critics, but this study persuasively illustrates that the importance of biblical references is as important as the pagan background in the development of the narrative. Biblical episodes are alluded to either explicitly or by inversion to encourage the pursuit of sexual abstinence through the example of the chaste couple of Malchus and his unnamed 'wife'. Furthermore, the moral ambiguities of the protagonist find parallels with the shortcomings of biblical characters.

In Chapter 11 D. Krueger investigates Romanos the Melodist's *kontakion* on the harlot's encounter with Jesus. In this fine analysis it is convincingly argued that through the insertion of an interior monologue of the sinful woman the poet departs from the narrative of the Scripture by means of fictionality and by resorting to rhetorical devices (especially *ethopoiia*). Romanos not only imagines the inner thoughts of the protagonist, but he even adds an episode of the woman buying perfume from a myrrh seller, which is absent in the Gospels. In doing so, he interprets the biblical model by expansion and with a good deal of exegetical freedom. The image of the sinner seems to be the result of merging together the narratives of Matthew and Luke, while alluding to other female figures such as the Samaritan and the *haemorroissa*. Intertextual links are detectable not only in the narratives of the New Testament but also in hymnography (e.g. Ephrem's hymns) and in homilies contained in liturgical lectionaries, which were read on the same days as Romanos' *kontakion*. By combining this net of intertextual connections with fictionality Romanos manages to convey theological explanations. As Krueger persuasively concludes, in this case fiction is used as a form of exegesis.

G. Dabiri (Chapter 12) examines an enigmatic passage of the Qur'an that mentions the elusive figure of Dhu al-Qarnayn, who was presented as a prophet or a king in later exegetic sources. In the work of the influential interpreter Tha'labi (d. *c.* 1036), namely in the *Lives of the Prophets*, a connection is made between this figure and Alexander the Great. This chapter investigates the complex links by which Tha'labi unites the two figures and the 'authenticating strategies' he devises to create a liminal figure, a king-prophet both Persian and Greek, which eventually constituted a model for Sufi saints.

In the last chapter (13) M. O'Farrell focuses on the recurrence of a scene describing the youth of a future king at the court of his unworthy predecessor in literary works belonging to different periods, areas and languages, resorting to a comparative method. The sources examined are two medieval Persian texts narrating the raise of Ardashir and a group of hagiographies concerning Constantine the Great. Although the comparisons are interesting, it seems a little far-fetched to maintain the existence of a subtext deriving from a common root (as stated at p. 284), giving the absence of links between these traditions.

Taken as a whole, the volume represents a significant contribution to studies of late antique hagiography as it offers new perspectives that enable us to better focus on the peculiarities of the genre.

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VERBAL NOUNS IN LATIN

S P E V A K (O .) *Nominalization in Latin*. Pp. x + 260. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Cased, £75, US$100. ISBN: 978-0-19-286601-1.

This book is an excellent volume on Latin verbal nouns (henceforth VNs), written by S. (well known for her several studies on Latin syntax and pragmatics), in the wake of a number of previous articles on the subject. The book is divided into six main sections: an introduction, a description of VNs in Latin, an analysis of Cicero's narrative texts (*De divinatione*, *Pro Milone*, *Epistulae ad Atticum*), an analysis of VNs in technical texts (Cicero's *De inventione*, Vitruvius' *De architectura*), a section on competitors of verbal nouns (gerunds, gerundives, participles, supines, participial clauses, infinitives) and an analysis of VNs in legal texts, including an epilogue on the construction *-tio + sum* in Plautus and the modal meaning of *-tio* nouns (denied by S.).

From the outset, the book stands out for the clarity of its method and its numerous detailed analyses, text by text, in order to reach solid general conclusions on a relatively homogeneous type of corpus. The quality of the book is highlighted by tables showing precise data. As a result, the clearly presented figures and examples add to the knowledge as found in previous scholarly literature. All this is well known to S., who outlines a clear and important description of the state of the art and of the methodological framework (pp. 1–62).

Based on a corpus of legal and technical texts, S. proposes a systematic study of the patterns of VN valency. For each type of text S. analyses the pattern of arguments concerning the different VNs studied. Different types are proposed: the nouns are monovalent or bivalent, accounting for implicit or explicit arguments. In most cases, only one argument is expressed, which is often represented by a genitive or an agreeing possessive, such as *meus*. With regard to monovalent VNs, in many cases the explicit argument reports the agent. Otherwise, when the argument is not expressed, it can be inferred from the context, because of its co-reference with the subject: *siquidem ad **mortem** proficiscens Callanus Indus* (Cic. *Div*. 1.47). In the case of bivalent verbs, the most frequent structure is the presence of the second argument and the absence of the first (which is implicit or absent). The second argument is usually found in the genitive. For