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HEATHER A. BADAMO, *Saint George Between Empires: Image and Encounter in the Medieval East*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 2023. 264 pp., 24 color and 48 b&w ill., 3 maps. – ISBN 978-0-271-09522-6

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In this book, based on her doctoral dissertation ‘Image and Community: Warrior Saints in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean’ (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 2011), HEATHER BADAMO has undertaken a very ambitious task: to investigate intercultural and religious relations between, on the one hand, Christendom represented by the Crusaders and Oriental Christians such as Georgians, Armenians, Copts, and Syrian Jacobites (with their Greek background briefly outlined), and on the other hand, Muslim Arabs and Turkish tribes.<sup>1</sup> *Prima facie*, her work evinces some structural problems. First, BADAMO concentrates on thirteenth-century artefacts, even though the chronological frame of her investigation is not precisely defined. Second, her chosen geographical limits, indisputably well suited to her main thesis, raise concerns because two milieux that were very important for the cult of Saint George are excluded from the discussion. In Rurikid Rus’, St George became the official patron of the ruling dynasty.<sup>2</sup> In the Balkans, he was depicted as a dragon-slayer already in

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1. The book’s Chapter 5, pp. 139–149 (based on Chapter 7 of the dissertation, pp. 240–261) was partly published earlier: *Depicting Religious Combat in the Thirteenth-Century: Program at the Monastery of St. Anthony at the Red Sea*. *Gesta* 58 (2019) pp. 157–181. Significant parts of Chapter 3 (pp. 98–108) have also appeared as an article: *Mobile Meanings: A Global Approach to a Dagger from Greater Syria*. *Medieval Globe* 3 (2017) pp. 149–176.

2. See e.g. ВИКТОР N. LAZAREV, Новый памятник станковой живописи XII в. и образ Георгия-воина в византийском и древнерусском искусстве. *Византийский временник* 6 (1953) pp. 186–214; and more generally MONICA WHITE, *A Byzantine Tradition Transformed: Military Saints under the House of Suzdal*. *Russian Review* 63 (2004), pp. 493–513; EADEM, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900–1200*. Cambridge 2013. Unproven but promising remains a possible association of George with Yarovit-Yarilo/Yura, the ancient Slavs’ young male god of spring, fertility, and war, whose feast was celebrated in the mid-April; cf. ANDRZEJ SZYJEWSKI, *Religia Słowian*. Cracow 2003, pp. 114–122, esp. p. 118, where the author put forward a hypothesis about the replacement of this old pagan deity by Saint George.

the pre-Iconoclastic period (which contradicts BADAMO's point about the eleventh-century Georgian origin and Persian antecedents of the dragon motif, pp. 82–90).<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, we find in Southeastern Europe a similar acculturation of the saint's figure among Romani (Ederlezi) and Turks (Hıdırellez, 5/6 May, corresponding to 23 April according to the Julian calendar).<sup>4</sup>

BADAMO's starting point is the story of Jirjīs (George) which al-Ṭabarī recorded in his *Chronicle*. Despite her claims (pp. 24–25), this tenth-century Arabic author, also known as a Quran commentator (*muffasir*), does not associate the Christian saint with Islam. In the opening chapters devoted to the history of monotheistic religions before Muhammad, he simply summarises the hagiographical record, at some points corrupted and enriched with folkloric motifs (the presence of a pagan sorcerer, George's dialogue with Satan), but without any elements suggesting that the story formed part of Muslim beliefs.<sup>5</sup> In a slightly earlier passage al-Ṭabarī discussed the chronology of al-Khiḍr (in later literature associated with Saint George) and places him in Quranic context, where this holy man (not actually identified by name) appears as a spiritual teacher of Moses (Q 18.60–82).<sup>6</sup>

3. The earliest examples of depictions of St. George killing a dragon include the ceramic tiles from the Viničko Kale (Northern Macedonia) dated before the end of the sixth century: KOSTA BALABANOV – CONE KRSTEVSKI, *Die Tonikonen von Vinica: Frühchristliche Bilder aus Makedonien*. Munich 1993, pl. 2. Moreover, on the basis of the inscription on the seventh- or eighth-century Tsebelda stele EKATERINA PRIVALOVA has put forward a hypothesis about the presence of the dragon pierced by George on early this monument: E. L. PRIVALOVA, *Художественное решение двух композиций «чудес» св. Георгия в грузинских росписях зрелого средневековья*. Вестник отделения общественных наук АН Грузинской ССР (1963) pp. 181–221, esp. p. 182; ЕАДЕМ, Павниси. Tbilisi 1977, p. 64. In the light of the above examples, the statement by CHRISTOPHER WALTER, *The Origins of the Cult of Saint George*. *Revue des études byzantines* 53 (1995) pp. 295–326, esp. pp. 320–321, about the earliest depictions of George with the dragon being found in eleventh-century Cappadocian rock churches, should be rejected.

4. PATRICK FRANKE, *Begegnung mit Khidr. Quellenstudien zum Imaginären im Traditionellen Islam*. Stuttgart 2000, pp. 167–173.

5. MOSHE PERLMAN (tr.), *The History of al-Ṭabarī*. Vol. 4. *The Ancient Kingdoms*. Albany 1987, pp. 173–189.

6. WILLIAM M. BRINNER (tr.), *The History of al-Ṭabarī*. Vol. 3. *The Children of Israel*. Albany 1991, pp. 1–18. On the association of anonymous spiritual guide of Moses with al-Khiḍr (usually identified with Elijah), cf. HASSAN S. HADDAD, 'Georgic' Cults and Saints of the Levant. *Numen* 16 (1969) pp. 21–39; FRANKE, *Begegnung*, pp. 52, 60–78, 89–96, 136–161, 540–551 *et passim*; HUGH TALAT HALMAN, *Where the Two Seas Meet: The Qur'ānic Story of Al-Khiḍr and Moses in Sufi Commentaries as a Model*

Additionally, BADAMO supports her theory of the assimilation of George into Islam by citing the fact that Plato and Aristotle were regarded by Christians as proponents of their own religion despite their pagan origin. However, she is unable to point out Muslim theological or philosophical justification similar to that presented by Justin Martyr (*First Apology* 5.3–4, 7.3, 18.5–6, 20.2–5, 44.8, 59.1–60.11; *Second Apology* 10.2–8, 13.2–6), according to whom Greek philosophers deserved redemption because they cherished wisdom (*Logos*) even before the Incarnation of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

A reader might get the impression that BADAMO is unaware of the exceptional position that Saint George already held in early Byzantine religious culture. She ignores not only his numerous representations in art (e.g. on the north pillar in the St. Demetrius Basilica, Thessaloniki; on the column of the church of Archangel Michael in Bawit; in the transversal room of the temple of Ramesses II in Wadi es-Sebua converted in the sixth century into a church), but above all the influence of his legend in popular culture.<sup>8</sup> Besides verbatim references, such as Saint George appearing in the vision to Mar Qardagh to foretell his martyrdom,<sup>9</sup> the astonishing example the Ethiopian version of the *Acts of Saint Sisinnios* (BHG 1080), heavily reliant on St. George's *Martyrdom*, can be pointed out as the evidence of the spread of George's legend in various cultures long before the rise of Islam.<sup>10</sup> The example is especially important for understanding the mech-

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of Spiritual Guidance. Louisville 2013; LALEH BAKHTIAR, *Moses and Khidr: Consciousness Between the Two Seas of Reason and Intuition*. Chicago 2020; ERICA FERG, *Geography, Religion, Gods, and Saints in the Eastern Mediterranean*. Cambridge 2020, pp. 205–223, 228–229.

7. DENIS MINNS – PAUL PARVIS (eds), *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*. Oxford 2009, pp. 90–93, 124–125, 130–131, 194–195, 232–237, 308–313, 320–321.

8. On the early cult of St. George recently see e.g. FERG, *Geography*, pp. 145–147.

9. For the text of Mar Qardagh Martyrdom preserved in the Nestorian Chronicle of Seert (9th–11th c.) see JOEL T. WALKER, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq*. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2006, p. 260 (and pp. 237, 263–264 on the hagiographic patterns that followed the *Acts of St. George*).

10. The Ethiopic text repeats numerous tortures (beating by metal clubs, breaking on the wheel, shutting in the metal ox, placing a heavy stone on the saint's belly, beheading) to which the saint was subjected on the order of Diocletian after refusing to sacrifice to pagan idols, as well as miraculous healings and resurrections that God repeatedly granted him sending an angel. The story also features a dialogue with Satan, who fled a broken statue of Apollo, and numerous conversions caused by the indomitable stance of Sisinnios, cf. FRANCISCO MARÍA ESTEVES PEREIRA (ed.), *Martyrium Sancti Sisinnii (Acta Martyrum, Scriptores Aethiopici, Series Altera, 28)*. Rome – Paris – Leipzig 1907, pp. 261–272. Russian translation with commentary: ЕКАТЕРИНА В. ГУСАРОВА, *Легенда о святом Сисинии и Верзилье в эфиопской традиции*. In: А. Л. ТОПОРКОВ (ed.),

anisms behind the diffusion of the saint's cult across eastern communities. Unfortunately, BADAMO does not cite either this or any other similar example from Christian literature that could have placed her research in proper perspective. Instead, she presents George as a saint of modest reputation in the eastern Mediterranean prior to the advent of Islam (p. 27).

This omission allows the author to focus on the relationship between George and al-Khiḍr, which in her perspective had risen to the rank of an officially accepted cult. This, in turn, leads her to the conclusion that the identification of the Muslim holy man as a Christian great martyr was a manifestation of contact, dialogue, and exchange of ideas between two monotheistic religions (pp. 25–26, 30, 34–38, 81). ‘The assimilation of George into Islam might be taken as a sign of interfaith harmony and acceptance’ (p. 25). This implausible statement finds no support in the facts collected by BADAMO. Actually, the apocryphal figure of al-Khiḍr and his association with Saint George go back to the 11th century and have recently attracted the interest of several scholars.<sup>11</sup> Byzantine authors, too, were aware of this connection, as witnessed by a reference in John IV Kantakouzenos' treatise *Against the Mohammedans* (discussed by BADAMO on pp. 42–44) about the cult of Saint George among Muslims, who called him Chetir Elijah (the primary identification of al-Khiḍr in the Sufi milieu was with Prophet Elijah).<sup>12</sup> None of them, however, regarded this phenomenon as an official doctrine of Islam. Reversely, both medieval writers and modern scholars properly interpreted it as merely a feature of folk beliefs.

BADAMO uses a similar method to prove the early militarisation of Saint George (p. 49). As an example of ‘virtuous violence’, she cites a miracle of unspecified date or origin (which, according to her, goes back to the seventh or eighth century, though it is in fact probably not earlier than the ninth), where the saint reverses the direction of an arrow shot by a Muslim soldier toward his icon in the church in Lydda.<sup>13</sup> She fails to mention

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Сисиниева легенда в фольклорных и рукописных традициях Ближнего Востока, Балкан и Восточной Европы. Moscow 2017, pp. 141–192, esp. pp. 171–181.

11. E.g. FRANKE, *Begegnung*, p. 373; FERG, *Geography*, pp. 187–188, 226–228, 241–245 (the author stresses the unofficial, folkloric dimension of the cult, especially among Muslims). FERG identifies St. George with ancient deities of fertility, storms and spring, what seems to corroborate mentioned above (n. 2) possible association between the saint and the Slavic god Yarovit.

12. PG 154, cols. 512–513.

13. JOHANN B. AUFHAUSER (ed.), *Miracula Sancti Georgii*. Leipzig 1913, pp. 8–12. An early date for the miracle was proposed by ANDRÉ-JEAN FESTUGIÈRE, *Collections grecques de miracles. Sainte Thècle, saints Côme et Damien, saints Cyr et Jean (extraits)*,

the fact (which must be known to her, as she quotes the paper by ARIETTA PAPACONSTANTINO where this issue is analysed), that the legend is based on the earlier story about a wounded and bleeding image of Saint Theodore in the village of Karsatas, four miles from Damascus, described by Anastasius of Sinai (ca. 690) and repeated by John of Damascus in a *florilegium* included in his *Third Treatise on the Divine Images* (III 91).<sup>14</sup>

In her attempt to present Christendom and Islam as peacefully coexisting (and in some sense cooperating) in the Near East, BADAMO minimises the deep conflict between the Byzantine Empire (and its Christian satellites) and the Arab Caliphate. She overlooks the religious aspect of the conquest of Palestine and Syria and mentions neither the Battle of Yarmuk, nor the fate of the Christian defenders of Gaza and of Patriarch Sophronius, nor the numerous new martyrs who emerged as a result of Muslim religious politics leading to forced conversions.<sup>15</sup> She also overlooks less spectacular but

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saint Georges. Paris 1971, pp. 263–264, based on common motifs with the story about infidel horsemen piercing the column with the image of the saint in the church in Diosopolis (Lydda) written down by Adamnan in *De locis sanctis* (III 4–5) before end of the 7th century, cf. PAUL GEYER (ed.), *Itinera Hierosolymitana saeculi III–VIII*. Prague – Vienna – Leipzig 1898, pp. 288–289; *Miracula*, pp. 161–167. However, its text preserved in *Cod. Chalki* 39 (dated 1559) presents a much more detailed story, which could not have been developed before the final stage of Iconoclasm. It should also be stressed that the earliest known illustrations of the miracle are frescoes in Georgian churches in Pavnisi and Ikvi, dated to the second half of the twelfth century, cf. PROVALOVA, Павниси, pp. 111–119, figs. 27–28.

14. FRANÇOIS NAU (ed.), *Le texte grec des récits utiles à l'âme d'Anastase (le Sinaïte)*. *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903) pp. 56–89, esp. pp. 64–65; BONIFATIUS KOTTER (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*. Vol. 3. *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*. Berlin – New York 1975, p. 184. Theodore's legend displays more archaic features. The wounded icon bleeds, while the punishment for blasphemous Saracens is postponed and executed by some unspecified force. In George's legend, action takes place immediately. On the dependence of the George's miracle on Anastasius' tale see ARIETTA PAPACONSTANTINO, *Saints and Saracens: On Some Miracle Accounts of the Early Arab Period*. In: DENIS SULLIVAN – ELIZABETH FISHER – STRATIS PAPAIOANNOU (eds), *Byzantine Religious Culture Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*. Leiden – Boston 2012, pp. 323–338, esp. p. 329.

15. HIPPOLYTE DELEHAYE, *Passio sexaginta martyrum*. *AB* 23 (1904) pp. 289–307 (cf. also the English translation with commentary: DAVID WOODS, *The 60 Martyrs of Gaza and the Martyrdom of Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem*. *Aram* 15 (2003) pp. 129–150; reprinted in: MICHAEL BONNER (ed.), *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times*. Aldershot 2004. Cf. also the anthologies of martyrdoms from the early Islamic period: STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER (ed.), *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine: Passion of Peter of Capitolias, Passion of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba, Passion of Romanos the Neo-Martyr*. Provo 2016; ANDRÉ BINGGELI – STEPHANOS

more effective methods of Islamisation, such as legal (the Pact of ‘Umar), economic (*jizya*) and social (the status of *dhimmīs*) inequality, leading to the gradual but continuous decline of the Christian population in the occupied areas.<sup>16</sup> The general practice of turning churches into mosques is interpreted as a feature of cultural landscape ‘inherited’ by the Muslims from their Christian predecessors and as a result of the need to replace the symbols of an old religion with new ones (pp. 26–27, 31–33).<sup>17</sup> BADAMO finally admits the existence of forced conversion to Islam and slavery in the thirteenth century (pp. 123–125), but even then she creates a false impression that Orthodox Christians accepted slave trade by stressing that only Franks refused to take part in this despicable practice.

While the above omissions can to some degree be interpreted as intentional, so as not to contradict BADAMO’s general thesis, misleading interpretations in Byzantine matter (starting from Chapter 2) seem to arise from the author’s insufficient or at least superficial knowledge. The presence of warrior saints on the wings of ivory triptychs is interpreted (pp. 47–49), in the context of the cross on the reverse side accompanied by the inscription IC XC NIKA (mistranslated by BADAMO as ‘In this [the cross] be victorious’), as a manifestation of the militaristic dimension of Byzantine culture in the 10th–11th centuries. She does not refer to the theory, formulated by ERNST KANTOROWICZ almost a century ago but still viable and discussed in recent literature, that the celestial court depicted on Byzantine ivories was arranged on the model of the imperial one.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the centrally placed

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EFTHYMIADIS – SOPHIE MÉTIVIER (eds), *Les Nouveaux Martyrs à Byzance*. Paris 2021.

16. On the Islamisation of Christians under Muslim Arab rule in Syria, Palestine and North Africa see e.g. ANNE-MARIE EDDÉ – FRANÇOISE MICHEAU – CHRISTOPHE PICARD, *Communautés chrétiennes en pays d’islam. Du début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle au milieu du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris 1997; MILKA LEVY-RUBIN, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire. From Surrender to Coexistence*. Cambridge 2011; PHILIP WOOD, *Christians in the Middle East, 600–1000: Conquest, Competition and Conversion*. In: A.C.S. PEACOCK – B. DE NICOLA – S. NUR YILDIZ (eds), *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*. Farnham – Burlington VT 2015, pp. 23–50. For the situation in occupied by Seljuk Anatolia a useful study still remains SPEROS VRYONIS, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamisation from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*. Berkeley 1971.

17. On the policy of destroying, neglecting and converting Christian shrines into mosques cf. e.g. EDDÉ – MICHEAU – PICARD, *Communautés*, pp. 215–225; WOOD, *Christians*, pp. 48–49.

18. ERNST KANTOROWICZ, *Ivories and Litanies*. *JWI* 5 (1942) pp. 56–81, esp. pp. 70–76. Recently, the theory has been revisited by ANTONY EASTMOND, *The Heavenly*

figures of Christ, the Virgin and John the Baptist corresponded to the emperor, his wife (or mother) and father-in-law (*basileopator*). The Apostles in the lower row represented the imperial government of *logothetai*, while on the wings, the Church Father wearing *omophoria* and *phelonia* and martyrs in *chlamydes* matched acting bishops and imperial courtiers. In this interpretation, warrior saints find a parallel in the Palace Guard (βασιλική ἑταιρεία) whose members were always present at imperial audiences. This identification finds support in the saints' military attire, consisting of scale, muscle, or lamellar breastplates, military cloaks, officers' sashes, spears and shields, but sometimes also collars (*maniakia*) and swords held in a manner typical for imperial *spatharioi*.<sup>19</sup> Contrary to BADAMO's claims, these do not represent the equipment of field armies described in military manuals.

Similarly, the author seems to misunderstand the occurrence of military saints in monastic contexts, such as the mosaics in the interior of the main church of the Hosios Loukas monastery, ca. 1025 (pp. 9–10, 49–50). She does quote military passage from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (6:11–16) but interprets it solely as a justification of the 'righteous violence', neither understanding its symbolic, spiritual dimension, nor mentioning that the passage formed part of the rite of monastic tonsure.<sup>20</sup> By omitting this important fact, which explains the parallel between military saints and holy monks leading spiritual rather than physical struggles to gain the title of *athlete of Christ*,<sup>21</sup> BADAMO creates a misleading picture of Christianity as a religion that justifies 'virtuous aggression' (pp. 64, 77). Her unfamiliarity with the Byzantine tradition results in minor errors, such as the interpretation of the sword as a Christian religious symbol (pp. 53, 89), while in Byzantium it was long associated with Islam and an aggressive attitude.

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Court, Courtly Ceremony, and the Great Byzantine Ivory Triptychs of the Tenth Century. DOP 69 (2015) pp. 71–114.

19. Cf. P. Ł. GROTOWSKI, Military Attire of Warrior Saints: A Case of *Spekion*. Folia Historiae Artium, Seria Nowa 11 (2006) pp. 5–16.

20. FREDERICK CORNWALLIS CONYBEARE, *Rituale Armenorum*. Oxford 1905, pp. 140–141.

21. See e.g. GERARD J.M. BARTELINK (ed.), *Athanase d'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine*. Paris 1994, p. 192 (quotes Eph 6 :12,); Symeon Metaphrastes, *Life of St Avram*. PG 115, col. 69. On the spiritual war (πνευματικός πόλεμος) conducted by monks against Satan in the Christian doctrine cf. GEORGE T. DENNIS, *Defenders of the Christian People : Holy War in Byzantium*. In : ANGELIKI E. LAIOU – ROY P. MOTTAHEDEH (eds), *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*. Washington 2001, pp. 31–39, esp. pp. 36–37.

Due to these associations, the depictions of Emperor Isaac Komnenos with an unsheathed sword on his coins and seals were not accepted in Byzantine society and were not continued in imperial coinage.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, the four crescents painted on George's kite-shaped shield in a twelfth-century Sinai icon are not necessarily related – as BADAMO suggests (p. 68) – to Muslim symbolism. This motif enjoyed growing popularity in Byzantine art of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, where it was usually accompanied by eight-pointed stars or crosses, usually interpreted as attempts to establish imperial heraldic signs associated with Artemis, the ancient protector of the city of Byzantium.<sup>23</sup> Neither the ornamental rim of the shield, nor the Pseudo-Kufic inscription on its surface, which became a common form in Byzantine art from the tenth century at the latest, can be regarded as evidence of direct Islamic influence. Pseudo-Kufic letters appear, for example, on the shields of Saints Demetrius and Procopius in the Hosios Loukas mosaics.<sup>24</sup> BADAMO's other interpretations are likewise open to criticism. Her associations between the riders depicted on Muslim artefacts and Saint George (pp. 93–98) remain disputable and unconvincing, while her remarks about the image of the warrior saint on horseback

22. ERIC MCGEER – JOHN W. NESBITT (eds), *Byzantium in the Time of Troubles. The Continuation of the Chronicle of John Skylitzes (1057–1079)*. Leiden – Boston 2020, pp. 36–37 [I 1]; MORITZ PINDER (ed.), *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae historiarum*. Vol. 3. Bonn 1897, p. 666 [XVIII 4]; ANTHONY KALDELLIS – DIMITRIS KRALLIS (tr.), *Michael Attaleiates, The History*. Cambridge MA – London 2012, pp. 108–109 [XII 1]; cf. also ROBERT S. NELSON, 'And So, With the Help of God': The Byzantine Art of War in the Tenth Century. *DOP* 65/66 (2011–2012) pp. 169–192, esp. pp. 176–177, fig. 7, who points out that this visual formula was not continued in the coins of later emperors. An example of the legend written in Arabic on the coins of George III of Georgia calling him 'Sword of the Messiah', described by BADAMO (p. 89), should be interpreted as imitation of Muslim coinage.

23. ANDREAS STYLIANOU – JUDITH STYLIANOU, A Cross inside a Crescent in the Shield of Saint-George, Wall-Painting of the Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou, Cyprus. *Κυπριακά Σπουδαί* 26 (1982) pp. 133–140; NIKOLAOS K. MOUTSOPOULOS – GEORGIOS N. DEMETROKALLES, *Η Ελληνική ημισέληνος*. Athens 1988, 20–39; MELINA PAISSIDOU, Warrior Saints as Protectors of the Byzantine Army in the Palaiologan Period: the Case of the Rock-cut Hermitage in Kolchida (Kilkis Prefecture). In: IVANKA GERGOVA – EMANUIL MUTAFOV (eds), *Heroes, Cults, Saints*. Sofia 2015, pp. 181–199, esp. pp. 187–188.

24. SILVIA PEDONE – VALENTINA CANTONE, The Pseudo-Kufic Ornament and the Problem of Cross-cultural Relationships between Byzantium and Islam. *Opuscula Historiae Artium, Supplementum* 62 (2013) pp. 120–136; ERKAN KAYA, Pseudo-Kûfic Ornament in Byzantine Art. In: ZBIGNIEW BIALAS – HASAN ASLAN – MEHMET A. ICBAY (eds), *Recent Developments in Arts*. Białystok 2017, pp. 174–181.



engraved on the scabbard of a dagger made by a Syrian workshop (pp. 99–102) do not take into account that a Christian could have commissioned an item from a Muslim silversmith:<sup>25</sup> instead, BADAMO presents the object as hard evidence of Saint George’s cult among Muslims.

The lighthearted attitude toward works of art and written sources leads BADAMO to formulate further unsupported hypotheses, e.g. a homosexual context for the *Miracle with a Boy from Mytilene* (BHG 691f) (pp. 112, 114, 125–137). Ignoring important studies on the topic<sup>26</sup> and the lack of any erotic overtones in the text itself, BADAMO suggests that the story should be interpreted in the context of Muslim homoerotic poetry (especially by Abu Nuwas and Attar of Nishapur), where young cupbearers (*sāqis*) are presented as objects of their masters’ desire. However, she is unable to identify any evidence that Greek authors were familiar with this kind of poetry and that they used the motif. Moreover, she disregards the fact that in the earliest version of the legend (BHG 691m–n), the boy, having declined to convert to Islam, is turned into a servant of a lower rank, helping in the kitchen (water carrier and woodcutter: ὕδροφόρος καὶ ξυλοκόπος);<sup>27</sup> he first appears as a young, handsome courtier serving at the table in the legend about a Paphlagonian prisoner of the Bulgarian ruler (BHG 687z–688f),<sup>28</sup> and it was probably this later source that was ‘copy-pasted’ into the Mytilenian version. Devoid of support in the existing historical evidence, BADAMO’s hypothesis has no basis other than the author’s wish to contribute to the currently popular research in gender studies.

The two final chapters (pp. 139–184) are dedicated to the twelfth- and thirteenth-century frescoes in the monasteries of Saint Antony at the Red Sea (Egypt) and Dayr Mār Mūsá al-Ḥabashī near Nebek in Syria, thoroughly studied by ERICA CRUIKSHANK DODD, ELIZABETH S. BOLMAN and partly by the author herself, as well as other scholars.<sup>29</sup> They are

25. BADAMO highlights such a possibility in her earlier essay (*Mobile Meanings*, pp. 162–163), pointing out a *muqarnas* ceiling of the Capella Palatina in Palermo as an example of the work executed by Arab craftsmen for the Christian founder.

26. See esp. LEOPOLD KRETZENBACHER, *Sankt Georg mit dem Jüngling auf dem Streitross. Zur antitürkischen Volksdeutung eines mittelalterlichen Bildmotivs*. *Münchener Zeitschrift für Balkankunde* 1 (1978) pp. 181–196; IDEM, *Griechische Reiterheilige als Gefangenenretter. Bilder zu mittelalterlichen Legenden um Georgios, Demetrios und Nikolaos*. Vienna 1983.

27. AUFHAUSER, *Miracula*, p. 14.

28. *Ibidem*, p. 24.

29. ELIZABETH S. BOLMAN, *Monastic Visions: Wall Paintings in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea*. New Haven – London 2002, pp. 40–47, 91–102, 111–118, figs.

generally well documented (although BADAMO seems to be unaware that the motif of a crusader standards with a red cross on a white field was not limited to Syria and that is also attested in Byzantine art of the Palaiologan period).<sup>30</sup> However, this could not change my overall impression of the book as misleading, superficial, and written without proper study of the phenomena it attempts to describe.

To sum up, each generation of historians writes its own history, asks different questions, and emphasizes different aspects of the past. This is justified by changes in social life and in the interests of scholars, but it cannot by itself justify ignorance of facts. The book under review is based on implausible premises. Vague statements unsupported by evidence produce a false impression of the complicated situation in the medieval Near East, where Christian believers faced great difficulties under Muslim rule.

Medieval cultural and religious studies are an academic discipline that demands wide and precise knowledge of both textual and visual sources. Scholars should constantly control their own opinions, generalisations, and associations between phenomena. Conclusions should be precise and cautious, so as to avoid contradicting the ideas of the epoch (or creating ones that never existed). One must honestly strive for a better understanding of the past. BADAMO's study ignores all of these simple rules and creates a fanciful picture. Rather than reconstructing the actual circumstances of the religious life of people in the Near East during the High Middle Ages, it follows currently popular academic trends and fashions. As such, it is not only weak as a piece of scholarly work but also potentially misleading for young researchers in the humanities, who might base their understanding of Christian-Muslim relations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries on its false conclusions.

#### **Keywords**

Muslim-Christian relations; mediaeval iconography; military saints

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4.5–9, 4.12–15, 4.26, 6.24, 7.15, 7.19, 7.22–23, 7.25, 7.27–28, 7.31; ERICA C. DODD, *The Frescoes of Mar Musa al-Habashi: A Study of Medieval Painting in Syria*. Toronto 2001, pp. 27–29, 46, 51–52, 105–107, 133, pls. IX, 27, 29–33; MAT IMMERZEEL, *Holy Horsemen and Crusader Banners: Equestrian Saints in Wall Paintings in Lebanon and Syria*. *Eastern Christian Art* 1 (2004) pp. 29–60.

30. E.g. on the pennants hanging from the spears of Saints Demetrius and Nestor in the church of St. Nicholas *Orphanos* in Thessaloniki: KARIN KIRCHHAINER, *Die Bilderausstellung der Nikolauskirche in Thessaloniki. Untersuchungen zu Struktur und Programm der Malerei*. Weimar 2001, pp. 106–107, figs. 44, 48.