

STEPHANOS EFTHYMIADIS, *The Hagiography of Byzantine Cyprus: Saints, Hagiographers and Texts (Fourth to Thirteenth Century)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2025. XI, 346 pp. – ISBN 978-1-109-35560-5 (\$120.00)

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One would be hard pressed to find a more learned scholar of Byzantine hagiography than STEPHANOS EFTHYMIADIS, who has dedicated a prolific career to the study of the writings and traditions that describe the lives and legends of the Christian saints who populated the eastern Roman empire in Late Antiquity through the Middle Byzantine periods. While a native of Greece, EFTHYMIADIS has resided for a long time in Cyprus, working at the Open University of Cyprus, and so his turn to write a book specifically on the saints of the island has resulted in a most welcome scholarly contribution that has deepened our understanding of the development and practice of Christianity on Cyprus and of the veneration of holy figures more broadly. The book under review here is a translation and revision of his 2020 monograph, *Η Βυζαντινή Αγιολόγια της Κύπρου. Οι άγιοι, οι συγγραφείς και τα κείμενα (4ος–13ος αιώνας)*, published through the Cyprus Research Centre.

Cyprus appears in the New Testament in Acts, represented most prominently according to Christian tradition by Barnabas, a native son of the island and a one-time companion to Paul, during the apostle's first missionary journey, which included a sojourn through the island, from Salamis to Paphos. The prime fruit of their labors was the conversion of no less than the proconsul of the island, one Sergius Paulus. Such a feat, one would imagine, would have left quite an impression and had a lasting impact, but the fact of the matter is that the imprint of Christianity on Cyprus from the first through the third centuries was essentially naught. This all changed in the fourth century, when we receive credible reports of Cypriot bishops at the Council of Nicaea, and then a full accounting of the meteoric rise of one of its most famous churchmen, Epiphanius, the infamous heresy-hunter and holy man in his own right. In fact, it was his life story that became the first Cypriot hagiography, and not, as we might expect, of Barnabas. Indeed, the tradition of writing about the holy figures of Cyprus was born in

the fifth century, as EFTHYMIADIS explores in his book, and it flourished thenceforth until the present.

The fifth through the seventh centuries, however, were a particularly vibrant time of hagiographical production on the island, arguably abruptly stifled as a result of the Arab incursions in the middle seventh century. While the late antique saints of the island were initially the subject of hagiographic writing, the catalyst for a (re)discovery of holy figures from the apostolic age came about during the island's clashes over ecclesiastical autonomy with the archbishops of Antioch, who laid claim to Cyprus's right to choose its bishops. The miraculous intervention of Barnabas in a dream to archbishop Anthemios sometime in the late 480s secured the island's autocephalous status once and for all, and hagiological writings about the apostolic saint and others soon proliferated. As EFTHYMIADIS carefully explains (building on a schema developed by VERA VON FALKENHAUSEN), there are thus two distinct strains of Cypriot hagiology, one that centers on the apostolic saints of the first century, and the other, on the prominent monk bishops of Late Antiquity.

The scholarly examination of early and late antique saints in Cyprus began first with the work of the famed Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye (1907), and revived more recently by CLAUDIA RAPP and of course EFTHYMIADIS. At the time of his original Modern Greek publication, another scholar, DIEGO ARFUCH published a massive study of Cypriot hagiography (*Hagiographica et Dogmatica Cypria: estudio sober el cristianismo chipriota del siglo v al vii en la consolidación de la autocefalia* [Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 158]. Rome 2020), which offers an important complement to EFTHYMIADIS's publication, albeit with a more limited chronological scope.

After a new, brief introduction, Chapter 1 lays out the historiography of Cypriot hagiography, and EFTHYMIADIS discusses the concomitant challenges, terminologies, and past scholarship. He also tackles the question of who was a Cypriot saint, noting that in certain important cases, those who were venerated as such were not natives of the island, but transplants, and in other instances, a Cyprus-born saint flourishes in another locale. Another important historiographical issue he raises is the distinction between "hagiography" and "hagiology", the latter being a more expansive categorization that includes not just *vitae*, saints' lives, as most scholars would understand belong to the former, but also other kinds of writings, such as liturgical texts. The remaining chapters are ordered in the historical chrono-

logical timeline of when the subject saint would have lived, even though the dates for the actual compositions of the *vitae* and other texts vary, during the window from the fifth through the thirteenth centuries. In general, EFTHYMIADIS follows a consistent pattern within the chapters, first outlining the narrative of each saint's life, then exploring the thematic content and problems evident in the story, especially as they relate to known geographical data and historical developments, and finally situating the text in the broader tradition of Cypriot and Byzantine hagiology. EFTHYMIADIS also periodically offers important discussions of a text's date and context of composition, if known, the manuscript tradition and transmission, and any translations into other languages.

Chapter 2 examines the lives of the apostolic saints, Barnabas, Herakleidios of Tamasos, and Auxibios of Soloi, while Chapter 3 studies the fourth-century Cypriot saints, including (the lesser-known) Theodotos of Kyrenia, Spyridon of Trimithous, Triphyllios of Ledra, Tychon of Amathous, and at length, Epiphanius of Salamis/Constantia. Chapter 4 explores in depth the life and hagiographical afterlife of John (Ioannes) the Almsgiver, a Cypriot son originally from Amathous who rose to prominence as the archbishop of Alexandria, and who was eventually forced to flee the city due to the Persian invasion of Egypt. The most intact *vita* we have of John was written by Leontios of Neapolis, who wrote about several other saints, and EFTHYMIADIS provides an extended treatment of the historiographical challenges related to Leontios and his writings. A brief Chapter 5 (2.5 pages) considers the "special case" of Artemon, who was not a Cypriot but became connected to the island towards the end of his life and after. Chapter 6 discusses two more seventh-century hagiographers, Theodoros of Trimithous and Anastasios of Sinai, although the latter did not write saints lives per se but included in his compositions "edifying stories" about his homeland of Cyprus. Chapters 7 and 8 are important contributions because they explore Middle Byzantine Cypriot hagiology, the former the *Life of Demetrianos of Kythrea* and the latter the writings of Neophytos the Recluse.

Four appendices provide Greek texts of the epitomes of the *vitae* of Spyridon and John the Almsgiver, a fragment from another *vita* of John, and an "edifying story," plus a bibliography and indices round out the volume. While I first read and benefitted from this work in its Modern Greek original, EFTHYMIADIS has provided a useful tool for scholars and students interested in the history of Christianity in Cyprus working with English. Of particular importance is how he situates the hagiological tradition in the context of the island itself, which in turn functions as a kind of lab-

oratory that allows for the exploration of a genre in arguably a more contained and confined space. By examining the saints of a very specific place, he points us to the distinctives of an insular tradition and how they might vary or in some cases align with developments further afield. STEPHANOS EFTHYMIADIS is an eminent and deeply informed guide through the sometimes bewildering and ever fascinating world of Byzantine saints, and this book is a masterful resource for the history of the saints of Cyprus.

Keywords

Cyprus; hagiography