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GEORGE E. DEMACOPOULOS, Sacralizing Violence in Byzantium:Hymns, Empire, and the Narrowing of Christian Identity (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 51). Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 2025. VII, 244 pp. – ISBN 978-0-88402-523-8

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GEORGE DEMACOPOULOS's latest book is the fruit of more than a decade of research, as he notes in the foreword. Taking his cue from the 'liturgical turn' within the study of early and medieval Christianity, the author outlines a 'genealogy' (distinguished from a 'narrative history') of approaches to violence in liturgical hymns of the Greek-praying Christian east. He proceeds chronologically, taking into consideration the oldest material from Jerusalem – including the *oktoechos* of the *Iadgari* and the Good Friday *idiomela* – and several *kontakia* by Romanos, who wrote at the imperial capital. He then looks at hymns for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, including the archaic *troparia* of the Ecclesiastic Rite of the Great Church of Constantinople and a *kanon*, perhaps written a little later in Palestine. Finally, he presents two largely unknown *akolouthiai* – one for soldiers going into battle and one for those killed in battle, the latter to be sung on the second Saturday before the Great Fast. The volume also includes three appendices (totalling nearly 50 pages), which provide translations of some of the hymns investigated; the first and second are translated by collaborators (STEPHEN SHOEMAKER – one of a very few living readers of the *Iadgari* in Georgian – and JOHN KLENTOS).

The book seeks to advance a line of scholarly argument that has already problematised the idea (prevalent in certain modern Orthodox circles) that the Byzantines were more ambivalent towards war and violence than their neighbours and thus preserved at least the memory of an original Christian pacifism, thought lost to most Western Christians. DEMACOPOULOS's overarching thesis is that, as Christian and Roman identities were collapsed into one another in the eastern empire over the centuries after Constantine, and especially during and after the reign of Herakleios, one can observe a profound shift in the way that violence is presented in the liturgy. Thus, he argues that in the earliest period for which we have evidence, Christian hymns focus on the voluntary suffering of Christ and its soteriological effects, including destruction of spiritual adversaries; then, we see an increas-

ing identification of the victory of Christ with the victory of the Roman empire over political enemies; and, finally, the sacralisation of war and those engaged in it. There is, of course, no straightforward linear development, and the author acknowledges and explores Greek hymns from beyond the empire and even late Byzantine hymns that complicate this picture.

The biggest challenge for DEMACOPOULOS as a historian is the contextualisation of the material – as he freely and frequently admits. Most of it is anonymous, the hymns themselves offer very few clues about their origins, and the extant manuscript witnesses invariably postdate the presumed periods of composition. DEMACOPOULOS generally does a good job at flagging these issues for readers, but some may still be swept along by a narrative that is perhaps a bit too smooth in places. Possible consequences of the relationship between the earliest material from Jerusalem and Constantinople, as well as the current debate over 'cathedral' and 'monastic' traditions, might have been explored more deeply. Some tropes about Romanos, *kontakia*, and *kanones*, are rehearsed without full acknowledgment of how tenuous the evidence and the scholarly consensus is. For example, the attribution of the *kanon* for the Exaltation of the Cross to Kosmas and the identification of this figure with Saint Kosmas of Maiuma is reported without comment, although the attributions of hymns are notoriously unreliable and the identification of 'Monk Kosmas' with the aforementioned Kosmas (and 'Monk John' with the Damascene, for that matter) is held in considerable suspicion by most liturgical scholars. Furthermore, at points, possibility seems to morph via plausibility into probability. Thus, Herakleios is a key figure in DEMACOPOULOS's narrative, and much is made of his recovery of the relic of the cross and promulgation of the feast of the Exaltation as a potential context for the composition of new, theologically innovative, hymnody. This is certainly a possibility – and one tantalisingly pregnant with historical significance – but there is no positive evidence connecting these developments and the composition of any hymns, so it must remain a hypothesis.

Another point that should be underscored for those unfamiliar with this material is that the study brings into conversation hymns that not only come from different times and places, but also occupy quite different stations within the liturgical tradition. I mean, firstly, that some are occasional (such as the *kontakia* of Romanos and the *akolouthia* for fallen soldiers) and were intended to be used only once a year, whereas others were heard with regularity (such as the hymns of the *Iadgari oktoechos* and the *troparion* Σῶσον Κύριε, which has been chanted daily at Matins for centuries). Secondly,

while some hymns are widely attested and have remained in regular use, across a swathe of territory, from the earliest recorded evidence until the present (again, like the *troparion* Σῶσον Κύριε, and the *kanon*), others fell into disuse soon after composition or are known from perhaps only a single manuscript, which implies a very muted reception (this includes the *kontakia* and the two *akolouthiai* for soldiers). While historians often pay little attention to the material evidence for their textual sources, liturgists tend to be more sensitive to dynamics of distribution and perpetuation of texts, especially when making claims about what might have been influential. DEMACOPOULOS notes these issues in passing but their significance for the interpretation of his argument might easily be overlooked by some readers.

While DEMACOPOULOS's thesis is clear and relatively narrow, the scope of study is nonetheless ambitious. It incorporates texts composed over a span of perhaps as much as 500 years, some of which are little known or studied. The book will undoubtedly introduce this material – perhaps liturgical material altogether – to many who are not specialised in liturgy. Such an audience is clearly intended for the book, which presumes little prior knowledge, either of the primary sources or scholarship. Since the field of liturgical studies can seem somewhat impenetrable to outsiders, DEMACOPOULOS should be commended for his efforts to make the material accessible and his study appreciable to a wide audience. Scholars of liturgy will certainly find details with which to quibble – for example, the technical term *idiomelon* does not mean 'idiomatic' but 'having its own melody' (p. 49); in received practice, Σήμερον κρεμᾶται is sung twice during Holy Week, not thrice (p. 51); 'Typikon of the Great Church' is a scholarly misnomer and the *kanonarion-synaxarion* does not correspond well to the brief definition provided (p. 114); overwhelmingly, the *kanones* of the Great Fast consist of three or four odes, not nine (p. 123, n. 52) – but these points do not detract from the overall argument.

The book succeeds in furthering a consequential claim, which continues to gain traction – namely, that liturgy is an important historical source that has been too long neglected outside specialist circles. DEMACOPOULOS clearly demonstrates the potential of sustained scholarly engagement with this material, adding nuance and fresh insights to discussions of violence and Christianity that – as he observes – have not only historical but also contemporary significance.

Keywords
Byzantine hymnography