

ADAM J. GOLDWYN, *Byzantine Ecocriticism: Women, Nature, and Power in the Medieval Greek Romance*. (The New Middle Ages.) Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pp. xv, 240. \$99.99. ISBN: 978-3-319-69202-9. doi:10.1086/705205

This book is a pathbreaking study in the field of Byzantine literature. Adam Goldwyn successfully offers a close reading of a number of Byzantine texts within the theoretical framework of ecocriticism. The first part of the title of the volume, *Byzantine Ecocriticism*, sounds somehow ambitious but is aptly chosen, as this book aims at analyzing Byzantine texts through the lenses of interpretative theories that have so far not been applied systematically to Greek medieval literature.

The volume consists of five chapters, the first of which, “Byzantine Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis” (1–38), represents an appropriate and thorough introduction to what follows in the remaining sections of the book. In this first chapter, Goldwyn provides the readers with an orientation to the theoretical framework that he chose to conduct his analysis of Byzantine romances. He recalls the main steps of the development of ecocriticism and its application to literary studies, to provide a solid base to the crucial question of how the experience of nature differed in the ancient world from the modern experience. One may quibble about the length of this introduction, but the overview of modern environmental ideologies and their application to literary studies is clear and a necessary background to set into context and validate the core research question: how Byzantine studies can play a role in the so-called ethical turn of cultural studies (26).

Chapters 2 to 5 are chronologically arranged, as each of them deals with some of the major Byzantine romances dated up to the late Palaiologan period. In particular, chapter 2, “Zoomorphic and Anthomorphic Metaphors in the ‘Proto-Romance’ *Digenis Akritis*” (39–84), starts with a fascinating comparison of the protoromance *Digenis akritis* with two stories taken from the *Canterbury Tales* and sheds light on the role of hunting within *Digenis*, as a fitting paradigm of the relationship between humans and animals in the romance. The supremacy of humans over animals is mirrored by the uneven relationship between men and women. Scenes of rape occur repeatedly in the romance and on an interpretative level, they often pair with those of hunting.

The analysis of gender-related issues in Byzantium is a central topic in chapter 3, “Rape, Consent, and Ecofeminist Narratology in the Komnenian Novels” (85–146). Goldwyn carries out a close reading of some passages of the romances *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* and *Drosilla and Charikles*, which share significant overlaps in plot, as well as of *Hysmine and Hysminias*. The author’s attention focuses on the role played by women in the Komnenian romances and on the lack of subjectivity of the female characters, which makes these romances suitable case studies to an ecofeminist reading.

In chapter 4, “Witches and Nature Control in the Palaiologan Romances and Beyond” (147–90), a group of witches depicted in *Kallimachos and Chrysorroï* and *Livistros and Rodamni* are analyzed from an ecofeminist and ecocritical point of view and become, in Goldwyn’s acute reading, a paradigm of the marginalization that unprivileged people suffered in the Middle Ages. In the second part of the chapter, a fresh reading of the Greek *War of Troy* in the broad context of European literature is offered, and Goldwyn underlines how Jason’s quest is “fundamentally a mission of environmental exploitation” (177). By means of an accurate comparison of a number of translations originating from different cultural and linguistic contexts, the author shows that in Byzantine romances, the exploitation of women and of the environment are inextricably linked.

In the last chapter, “Byzantine Posthumanism: Autopoiesis, Sympoiesis, and Making Kin in the Gardens of Romance” (191–233), Goldwyn goes beyond ecocritical analysis and applies a posthumanistic approach to some characters of the aforementioned romances, whose

identities transgress the boundaries of humanity and are not easily classifiable. The very last section of the book (221–31) is devoted to an enthusiastic and fully embraceable plea for an ethical commitment in the future of Byzantine studies.

Goldwyn's valuable volume surprisingly lacks a proper conclusion, which would have been appropriate to summarize the observations spread through the previous chapters. The texts of Goldwyn's corpus share remarkable affinities in the ways the natural world is depicted and approached, and the author rightly emphasizes recurrent motifs when dealing with different romances, but the reader could have benefited from a more thorough synthesis of the results at the end of the volume, as well as from a coherent structure and systematic cross-references.

It could have been rewarding to frame the stimulating findings presented in this volume within a wider diachronic analysis of the possible models for the Byzantine appreciation of nature. The intriguing question of how the depiction of the natural world in Byzantine romances relates to earlier texts, or to different literary genres, remains unfortunately unanswered.

The author regrettably neglects non-English secondary literature, which could have provided a broader overview of current scholarship, especially as far as specific passages of some Byzantine romances are concerned.

Since the numerous quotations from the primary sources are skillfully translated, the book is meant to be accessible also to a nonspecialist audience. However, it is remarkable that Goldwyn has omitted to provide a general account of the romances he discusses. This constant scarcity of basic information and contextualization might be confusing for non-Byzantinists.

All in all, Goldwyn's volume on Byzantine ecocriticism is a successful attempt to apply an innovative approach to medieval Greek romance and to show how meaningful modern ideologies and theoretical elaborations can be in interpreting premodern texts.

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SANTIAGO GONZÁLEZ SÁNCHEZ, *Algunos problemas y retos de la Iglesia castellana en los comienzos del siglo XV (1406–1420)*. Madrid: Dykinson, 2017. Paper. Pp. 148. €11. ISBN: 978-84-9148-148-5. doi:10.1086/705709

In this short book—exhaustively researched and rich in its potential, but, because of its brevity, closer to an outline for a larger project than the final word on the topic—Santiago González Sánchez sketches the state of the Castilian Church at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Following on the waves of violence against the Jews in 1391—with Juan II still in his minority—and the assault on royal and ecclesiastical prerogatives and domains made by some of the very members of the royal family and the nobility, the period was one of widespread turmoil. In ten short chapters, the author describes the challenges and systemic problems faced by the Castilian Church in the early 1400s. Drawing from archives in Murcia and the National Archive in Madrid (AHN), but mostly depending on the author's masterful mining of a vast secondary literature (books and articles, many of them little known outside Spain), González Sánchez's book is an excellent guide to the history of the topic as well as serving as a brief case study of the state of the Castilian Church at that time.

At a quick pace, González Sánchez lists, providing useful examples, the specific issues besetting the church. Absenteeism was the first. For a variety of reasons, ranging from royal service to assignments to the papal curia, and to sheer neglect, most of Castilian Church high dignitaries were chronically absent from their positions, leaving the running of their dioceses to lesser men. While the lower clergy were equally negligent, there are no examples given to illustrate this problem, which was prevalent in the Castilian and European churches and deeply affected secular spirituality. Second, the author reviews the “intellectual formation”