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GABRIEL RADLE, Marriage in Byzantium: Christian Liturgical Rites from Betrothal to Consummation. Cambridge University Press 2024. 468 pp. – ISBN 978-1-009-46956-2

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GABRIEL RADLE is well known for his studies of Byzantine liturgy, particularly marriage rites and liturgical manuscripts from the Byzantine periphery. In the present volume, he offers a synthesis of the liturgical rites of marriage in the Greek-speaking Christian East.

Part I, 'The Christianization of Ancient Marriage Ritual' (pp. 11–88), opens with Chapter 1, 'Pre-Christian Marriage Ritual in the Mediterranean World' (pp. 13–48). Here, RADLE reconstructs the history of Jewish marriage primarily from Biblical (canonical and extra-canonical) literature, notably the Song of Songs and Tobit. With regard to the 'pagan' world, evidence derives largely, though not exclusively, from visual sources. RADLE examines such aspects as prayers, dowry, ritual baths, veils and garlands, wedding processions and bridal chambers. Although the sources leave considerable room for speculation, the author nevertheless demonstrates that objects and gestures associated with marriage throughout the ancient Mediterranean world were steeped in symbolic meaning.

In Chapter 2, 'Early Christian Weddings in the Eastern Mediterranean' (pp. 49–88), RADLE argues for the continuity of pre-Christian domestic customs, albeit with adaptations and theological reinterpretations. Patristic writings suggest that it was not uncommon for Christian families, especially wealthy ones, to invite clerics to offer prayers at weddings. Although we do not know what these prayers looked like, they would not yet have possessed the standardized form characteristic of later wedding rites. The presence of clerics was not necessary for a wedding to be considered valid.

Part II, 'Byzantine Marriage Rituals before and beyond the Liturgical Books' (pp. 89–180), further explores the process of the Christianisation of marriage ritual in the Byzantine era. RADLE argues that the formal rite of marriage gradually absorbed rituals previously performed in the domestic sphere. The textual and visual sources examined in this section complement the evidence of the liturgical manuscripts (*euchologia*) discussed in Part III

and, moreover, shed light on the centuries preceding the earliest surviving *euchologia*.

Chapter 3, 'Marriage Ritual in Law and Literature' (pp. 91–135), opens with an examination of betrothal in legal texts. At the Council of Trullo (691), betrothal was regarded as a kind of irrevocable 'inchoate marriage' bond. In the long term, this development resulted in betrothal and marriage being celebrated consecutively, which in turn encouraged the emergence of private arrangements prior to ecclesiastical betrothal. A central question concerns the validity and necessity of a nuptial blessing in church for Byzantine Christians. By the end of the fourth century, clerical involvement in marriage rituals had become common. Yet it was only in the ninth century, under Leo VI, that the long process of the liturgisation of marriage reached completion: in Novel 89, the emperor decreed that only marriages blessed by the Church were legally valid.

The historiographical tradition, the *De cerimoniis*, and epithalamic poetry describe primarily weddings within the imperial household. RADLE examines in detail the accounts of the wedding of Maurice and Constantina (582) given by Evagrius Scholasticus and Theophylact Simocatta as evidence for an early patriarchal marriage service.

One question left largely unexplored is the marriage of enslaved persons. An illuminating perspective on this issue, as well as on attitudes toward ecclesiastical versus common-law unions, is provided by the story of Theodora, the deceased servant of Basil the Younger, and the debate concerning the status of her common-law marriage to a fellow slave. During her posthumous journey through the aerial tollhouses, Theodora encounters the tollhouse of fornication, where demons accuse her of having slept with men other than her own. Their common-law union itself is not disputed; on the contrary, conjugal fidelity is required in her case as well. The real issue arising from the canonical status of the union is whether her infidelity should be classified as fornication or as the much graver sin of adultery. The accompanying angels, eager to defend Theodora, argue that because she was a slave, her union 'was not blessed by a priest. She did not legally marry her mate, by being deemed worthy of a priest's blessing, nor did he take her after receiving the marriage crown in a church of God';[1] consequently, the

1. DENIS F. SULLIVAN – ALICE-MARY TALBOT – STAMATINA MCGRATH (eds.), The Life of Saint Basil the Younger: Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Moscow Version (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 45). Washington DC 2014, pp. 238–239 (§§ 33, 20–21): οὐχ ὑπὸ ἱερέως ηὐλόγηται. Οὐ νομίμως ἱερολογίας ἀξιωθεῖσα τὸν ἴδιον σύνευνον ἔγημεν, οὐδὲ ἐν τῷ ναῷ Κυρίου στεφανωθεὶς ταύτην ἔλαβεν.

union did not constitute a true marriage and her transgression amounted to fornication. The demons counter that a master stands in the place of God for a slave (!) and that the man assigned to her by her master should therefore be regarded as her husband. In the end, the angels prevail and Theodora proceeds onward without being condemned for adultery. Even if the episode reflects the familiar *topos* of merciful angels and unfair demons at the posthumous judgement, the passage nevertheless bears witness to shifting attitudes toward marriage rites in mid-tenth-century Constantinople.

Chapter 4, 'Marriage in Visual and Material Evidence' (pp. 136–180), opens with visual representations of married couples and weddings. RADLE wisely refrains from treating these images as straightforward evidence for actual wedding practices. Instead, he explores possible connections between iconography and the symbols employed in marriage rituals. The chapter then turns to objects associated with marriage, examining their symbolic meanings and cautiously hypothesising about their possible ritual and non-ritual uses. Rings, for example, were strongly associated with marriage, though not necessarily intended for continuous wear; some were so bulky that this would have been impractical. They may instead have functioned as gifts or as exchanges of wealth between families. Early rings with marriage themes do not necessarily imply the existence of an exchange of rings within betrothal or marriage rites themselves. Belts, too, were associated with marriage and consummation, although there is no conclusive evidence regarding their ritual function. Nor is there definitive evidence for the use of glass and ceramic objects decorated with marriage-related themes, though they may have served as wedding gifts. While surviving evidence points to the use of metal crowns in marriage ceremonies, floral garlands were probably also common.

The lengthiest section of the book is Part III, 'Marriage Rites in Byzantine Liturgical Manuscripts' (pp. 181–351), which lies closest to RADLE's principal area of expertise. Marriage rites were typically preserved in the liturgical book known as the *euchologion*. Chapter 5, 'The Euchologion: Sources and Methods' (pp. 183–210), begins with an examination of the *euchologion* tradition, with particular emphasis on questions of regional history. RADLE focuses primarily on Greek manuscripts, seeking to examine all early manuscripts up to ca. 1200, as well as a representative selection of later witnesses. He also draws upon Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and Georgian sources, both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian. In his own words, RADLE seeks to strike a 'balance between narrating the gen-

eral history of liturgical rites as practiced across the broad span of the religious tradition we know today as "Byzantine" and also highlighting the multiplicity of local forms' (p. 210).

Chapter 6, 'Rites of Betrothal' (pp. 211–240), examines the location of betrothal ceremonies (whether domestic, in the narthex, or in the main body of the church), the gradual combination of betrothal and marriage rites from approximately the twelfth century onward, as well as the prayers and ritual gestures associated with betrothal, notably the exchange of rings and the earnest payment. Across regions and periods, the basic structure of the rite remained relatively stable, consisting primarily of a prayer recalling the biblical story of Isaac and Rebecca together with a *kephaloklisia* prayer interpreting the union of Christ and the Church as a form of betrothal. Some Palestinian *euchologia*, however, preserve additional local prayers.

Chapter 7, 'Rites of Marriage' (pp. 241–309), discusses the marriage rite proper. By the Middle Byzantine period, Constantinopolitan sources commonly equated the marriage rite with the act of crowning. Compared with betrothal, the marriage rite displays considerably greater regional variation. RADLE examines the 'mainstream' elements of the rite, including the entrance, marriage prayers, crowning, joining of the right hands, biblical readings, communion, and the common cup. He also discusses customs attested only in certain manuscripts, such as nuptial investiture, initial offerings, and veiling. The two Constantinopolitan marriage prayers attested in numerous versions throughout the Byzantine world elaborate on the themes of Adam and Eve and the wedding at Cana. Eastern prayers transmitted alongside the Constantinopolitan material are often more vivid and expansive, employing rich biblical and cosmological imagery and situating the present wedding within the broader chain of marriages in salvation history. The various ritual gestures, moreover, were frequently accompanied by prayers, which display considerable regional and textual variation.

A section is devoted to the question of communion within the marriage rite. Contemporary liturgists, particularly in some Orthodox circles, have often assumed that weddings originally took place within the Eucharistic liturgy and that the common cup of wine in present-day practice is a distant reminiscence of Holy Communion. RADLE demonstrates, however, that evidence for the Eucharistic liturgy as part of the formal wedding rite is only sporadic, although several sources do attest to the couple receiving presanctified Communion.

The marriage celebration continued in the household after the couple had

departed from the church building, and the liturgical rites likewise extended into the domestic sphere. These ceremonies are examined in Chapter 8, 'Rites of the Bridal Chamber' (pp. 310–351). The liturgical manuscripts preserve a variety of prayers associated with gestures performed in the bridal chamber, including the hanging up of the marital crowns as part of the decoration. Over time, the rites of the bridal chamber either declined or were absorbed into the marriage rite itself. A notable example of the latter development is the 'Dance of Isaiah' in contemporary Orthodox weddings.

The concluding section, 'Byzantine Marriage beyond Byzantium' (pp. 352–355), reflects on the tension between later liturgical uniformity and the plurality of Byzantine texts and practices revealed throughout the study. The volume includes two appendices: a 'Chronological List of Liturgical Manuscripts Consulted' (pp. 356–363) and a 'Sample of Marriage Rites in the Manuscript Sources' (pp. 364–390). At the end are a particularly rich bibliography (pp. 391–437) and an index (pp. 438–452).

RADLE adopts the tripartite model of Constantinople – Syria/Palestine – Southern Italy, while also acknowledging its limitations, particularly its focus on patriarchal sees and its tendency to privilege the 'Constantinopolitan' rite. Overall, although RADLE's analysis of rites preserved in Syro-Palestinian and South-Italian *euchologia* is exemplary, some ambiguity remains concerning the notion of a 'Constantinopolitan' tradition. RADLE appears to oscillate between several understandings of the term 'Constantinopolitan.' At times, it designates the 'mainstream' tradition that is neither specifically Syro-Palestinian nor South-Italian. At other times, it refers more specifically to the rite of the imperial and ecclesiastical capital itself. In this sense, RADLE fruitfully combines the testimony of the *Euchologion* of Strategios, presbyter of the Great Church and the patriarchal oratories (Paris, BnF, Coislin 213, a. 1027), with historiographical sources and the *De cerimoniis*. Elsewhere, however, 'Constantinopolitan' seems to denote the broader Balkan region, including the northwestern shores of the Bosporus; thus, he refers to 'regions close to Constantinople', by which he apparently means the Balkans (p. 293).

Each of these approaches has merit as an interpretative tool. The combined reading of *euchologia* alongside accounts of imperial weddings is particularly productive, while the hypothesis of a distinct Balkan liturgical sphere closely connected to Constantinople is worth pursuing. Nevertheless, further clarification is necessary. The criteria governing the classification of manuscripts as 'Constantinopolitan' are likewise not always ex-

plained. RADLE refers, for example, to 'later manuscripts traceable to the city of Constantinople' (p. 216), yet provides only a reference to MIGUEL ARRANZ's *Eucologio* or similarly vague indications elsewhere (p. 306).

With regard to the 'Constantinopolitan' marriage rites, one may also wonder whether greater attention to social class as a category would have proved useful. Constantinople was home to the wealthiest and most powerful representatives of Greek-speaking Orthodoxy, and the surviving sources portray their weddings as highly elaborate events. It seems plausible that provincial aristocracies may have looked to imperial weddings as models, in which case Constantinopolitan influence on the periphery may have extended beyond the broader processes of Byzantinisation observable in other rites. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the betrothal rite in the Coislin *Euchologion* bears the title Τάξις γινομένη ἐπὶ μνήστροις βασιλέων καὶ λοιπῶν, a rubric reproduced in several later *euchologia*. To the many examples collected by ALEXEI DMITRIEVSKII,[2] one might also add the *euchologion* Patmos 811 (ff. 191v–211r).

This volume constitutes an important study of a central moment in the lives of Byzantine laypeople and communities, written in a compelling manner. RADLE's close reading and contextualisation of liturgical texts are exemplary throughout. Drawing upon a wide range of sources, he consistently acknowledges their limitations and the uncertainties they entail, while nevertheless constructing a convincing broader picture of developments such as the liturgisation of marriage rites, the changing significance of betrothal, and the gradual decline of the rites associated with the bridal chamber. RADLE also engages critically with an extensive bibliography. The book ultimately offers a more nuanced understanding of Byzantine attitudes toward marriage, sexuality, and family life, providing a necessary corrective to the image conveyed by hagiography and predominantly monastic edifying literature.

Keywords

East Christian liturgy; rites of marriage

2. ILIAS NESSERIS et al. (eds.), Dmitrievskii's *Euchologia*: A Modified English Version of Volume 2 of Aleksei Dmitrievskii's *Description of Liturgical Manuscripts Preserved in the Libraries of the Orthodox East* (Kyiv 1901). Lviv 2023.