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Book Review: George E. DEMACOPOULOS, Colonizing Christianity: Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the Era of the Fourth Crusade, New York: Fordham University Press, 2019

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G. E. DEMACOPOULOS, *Colonizing Christianity: Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the Era of the Fourth Crusade*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2019, pp. v + 184. ISBN 9780823284429

George Demacopoulos's short and readable monograph sets out to employ postcolonial theory to reflect on the relationship between Greek/Orthodox and Latin/Catholic religious identity during and after the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The theoretical and methodological conservatism of Byzantine studies means that, despite the rapid growth of postcolonial studies since the 1980s, this is a somewhat novel enterprise. With the notable exception of Edward Said's *Orientalism* – which is regularly cited if not always seriously engaged with – postcolonial theory has had a surprisingly limited impact on Byzantine studies¹. Byzantine studies has yet to engage in a serious and sustained manner with postcolonial thought, although some of Said's (largely deradicalized) concepts have been semi-institutionalised – as in many areas of the humanities – as a sort of disciplinary common sense. The absence of postcolonial theory in Byzantine studies is genuinely surprising, given the geographical and discursive position of Byzantium and its study, supposedly bridging (or separating) East and West, not to mention the imperial nature of the Byzantine state. Consequently, Demacopoulos breaks new ground by offering an explicitly postcolonial critique, in which he draws on the work of postcolonial theorists Homi Bhabha and Robert Young, in addition to Said. Throughout, Demacopoulos draws inspiration

1. E. SAID, *Orientalism*, London 1977. For recent developments in postcolonial theory and Byzantine studies see the activities of the *New Critical Approaches to the Byzantine World Network*, concerning 'Imperialism, Colonialism and Postcolonialism in the Byzantine World' (17.05.19), 'Subalternity and Byzantine Studies: Critically Imagining the Masses in History' (15.04.19), and 'Balkanism: Approaching Southeastern Europe' (15.03.19), <https://torch.web.ox.ac.uk/new-critical-approaches-to-the-byzantine-world-network>.

from western medieval and crusader studies, which have prepared some of the theoretical ground for this important project (p. 136, n. 20).

Demacopoulos's central argument is that the Fourth Crusade produced a colonial encounter and that Greek-Latin religious polemic can only be understood in this postcolonial (socio-political and economic) context, rather than in abstract theological terms. Demacopoulos is Professor of Theology at the Orthodox Christian Studies Centre of Fordham University, New York, however, the monograph laudably ignores disciplinary boundaries to combine theological and historical concerns. Demacopoulos offers a mixture of historicising-empiricist and more discursive readings in what he explicitly characterises as a thought experiment. These readings are divided into six chapters, each of which deals with a different text or collection of texts from the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Although the monograph ranges across disciplines, this thought experiment is underpinned by the author's (theological) liberal Orthodox ecumenism, a fact most visible in the book's closing pages where he mentions that "the legacy of the colonial encounter of the Fourth Crusade continues to overshadow contemporary Orthodox discourse" (p. 129)².

The first two chapters of *Colonizing Christianity* deal with the discursive construction of Byzantium and its people (Constantinople and Constantinopolitans in particular) in two texts that narrate the Fourth Crusade, namely *La conquête de Constantinople* by Robert of Clari and the *Hystoria Constantinopolitana* by Gunther of Paris. The former tells the story of a middle-ranking knight, who participated in the Fourth Crusade; the latter narrates how the abbot of a Cistercian monastery in Alsace returned from Constantinople in 1205 with a host of venerable relics. Demacopoulos demonstrates how Byzantium and its inhabitants are orientalised and sexualised in both texts. The East is the exotic home to effeminate Greeks, ripe for and deserving of everything they receive at the hands of the virile Latin knights of the Fourth Crusade. Demacopoulos's analysis is convincing and largely follows the now established literature of crusader/western othering of Byzantium in erotic and exotic terms³. Most interesting are Demacopoulos's readings of the homoerotically charged interactions between Gunther and a beautiful Byzantine

2. A subject on which he has already published, see G. DEMACOPOULOS – A. PAPANIKOLAOU, *Orthodox Naming of the Other: A Postcolonial Approach*, in: *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, ed. G. DEMACOPOULOS – A. PAPANIKOLAOU, New York 2013, 6.

3. For example see S. KINOSHITA, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*, Philadelphia 2006.

priest and his brief examination of the phallic dimension of Gunther's lingering description of the obelisk of Theodosius. The principal theoretical interlocutors for these chapters are Said and medievalists he has inspired. As such it is probably the least controversial and most confident section of the book.

Underwriting Demacopoulos's argument throughout the first two chapters is the belief that in analysing these crusader texts he is explicating "the cultural presumptions of colonial expansion and exploitation" (p. 47). It is to these cultural presumptions that Demacopoulos turns in his third chapter, in which he analyses the papacy's opportunistic transformation of policy towards the Greeks in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade. Demacopoulos frames the Fourth Crusade as a "postcolonial enterprise" (p. 49) in his interrogation of its management from Rome through a critical reading of the *Gesta Innocentii III*. The anonymous compiler of this work sought to justify Innocent III's decision, once faced with the reality of a new Latin state, to endorse the outcome of the crusaders' actions. At the end of the chapter, Demacopoulos deploys Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence to read the papacy's attempts to manage this new colonial situation. Bhabha's subversive tool equips Demacopoulos to read the text against itself, exposing the impotency implicit in the domineering colonialist discourse of papal sovereignty and Latin superiority in the *Gesta Innocentii III*. After a relatively lengthy introduction to the material, this section of explicit engagement with postcolonial theory is tantalisingly brief (pp. 69-72). It does, however, clearly illustrate the heuristic potential of Bhabha's concept.

The next two chapters exchange the textual production of the crusaders for that of the Byzantines, dealing in turn with texts written in the Byzantine states of Epiros and Nicaea, which emerged around the time of the Fourth Crusade. In chapter four, Demacopoulos reads two canonical rulings from the collection of the Epirot Archbishop of Ochrid, Demetrios Chomatenos, which Demacopoulos understands as concerning the sacramental miscegenation of the Latins and Greeks⁴. The first ruling deals with a problem on Mount Athos, where the monks of the Georgian monastery of Iviron had recognised papal authority. Chomatenos ruled that the other monks should not only break off communion with the monks of Iviron, but also any of their fellow monks who maintained communion with the offending monks of Iviron. In the second ruling, Chomatenos determines that the

4. Demacopoulos uses the now less often used Chomatianos. On this see *Demetrii Chomateni, Ponemata Diaphora* [CFHB 38], ed. G. PRINZING, Berlin-New York 2002, 43*-5*.

marriage between a Greek man and the unnamed daughter of a Latin-sympathising Greek could be canonically dissolved, because Latin sympathisers could never enter into a marriage in good faith (thus invalidating the union). Demacopoulos contends that this second ruling, therefore, also implicitly forbids direct Greek-Latin intermarriage. He further argues that together these rulings illustrate an attempt by Chomatenos to create a new epistemic framework of differentiation to police “cultural integrity and purity” (p. 86). In much the same manner that modern colonial regimes sought to police racial miscegenation, Demacopoulos sees Chomatenos as policing the Orthodox community against sacramental (i.e. confessional) miscegenation. He argues that the new realities of Latin colonialism saw the creation of “a Greek/Latin binary... in which there is no middle space” (p. 81) for traditional co-mingling, whether liturgical or sexual. Demacopoulos consciously inverts the concept of miscegenation, as deployed by his principal interlocutor Robert Young, since it is here the colonised Greek subject, who polices difference, rather than the Latin coloniser (p. 87)⁵. In a further departure from his theoretical model, Demacopoulos exchanges racial for sacramental miscegenation. This move seeks to distinguish between Young’s modern case studies and Demacopoulos’s medieval examples. However, in assuming an epidermal definition of race, he limits his argument, which might have been better served by a broader definition of race, such as that deployed by Geraldine Heng⁶. This chapter demonstrates the potential of postcolonial theory for the analysis of Byzantine texts most clearly, through its compelling reading of the combination of liturgical and sexual anxieties at play in the early thirteenth century. Again, the chapter could have been improved by a more prolonged and integrated discussion of the theoretical material under discussion.

In chapter five, Demacopoulos examines the *History* (*Χρονική συγγραφή*) of George Akropolites. Written after the conquest of Constantinople in 1261, the *History* narrates the period between 1204 and 1261 from the perspective of the city’s Nicaean conquerors and, in particular, its post-1261 ruler, Michael VIII Palaiologos. Demacopoulos argues that the *History* “does not explicitly read as postcolonial” (p. 100) because it situates itself in a longer tradition of Byzantine historiography, relying primarily on a pre-existing framework rather than seeking

5. R. YOUNG, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, London 1995.

6. G. HENG, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2018, frames her definition in tripartite political, epistemological, and heuristic terms.

to frame the Byzantines in opposition to the Latins. Accordingly, he treats the *History* as a counterexample to Chomatenos's rulings, even suggesting that it has the potential to disrupt the central argument of his book, namely that this period was a postcolonial moment (p. 99). Only in the background of Akropolites's *History* does Demacopoulos discern the shadow of Latin colonialism and the new realities of the post-1204 Aegean world. Although his discussion of the *History* is thought provoking, this lengthy text cannot be comprehensively analysed in a single chapter in the same way as Chomatenos's short rulings. The same problem occurs in the final chapter, in which Demacopoulos considers the *Chronicle of Morea*. This long and complex text narrates the history of the principality of Achaëa, the Latin/crusader polity centred on the Peloponnese, which was founded in 1205 shortly after the conquest of Constantinople⁷. Demacopoulos sees the *Chronicle of Morea*, or rather its various versions, since it survives in numerous different linguistic and manuscript forms, as seeking to justify and authorise Latin territorial annexation and colonial rule. Demacopoulos argues that the text, like those examined in chapters two and three, presents the Franks of the Morea as honourable, courageous, and manly in comparison to the Byzantines, who are portrayed as treacherous, cowardly, and effeminate. However, he additionally notes that the *Chronicle of Morea* also depicts treacherous Franks and martial Byzantines and in so doing brings the ideological justification of colonial rule into question. Further, he argues that the *Chronicle of Morea* expresses the ideas and ideals of a mixed (i.e. Greek/Latin) feudal society and its rulers through both Greek (linguistic) terminology and Byzantine rituals of rulership. This final point deserves expansion, but once again, Demacopoulos's explicit engagement with postcolonial theory, in this case Bhabha's attempt to demonstrate how colonial society is transformed by its encounter with the colonised, is squeezed into the last fraction of the chapter (pp. 118-21). As in his treatment of Akropolites's *History*, readers will be intrigued by Demacopoulos's analysis.

In a short conclusion, Demacopoulos summarises his study before offering the upbeat tripartite conclusion that the theological divide was not as great as has been assumed, that the break was principally due to this colonial encounter rather than theology, and that cohabitation was clearly possible in the Greek East. Despite the persistent influence of the Fourth Crusade over contemporary theology,

7. T. SHAWCROSS, *The Chronicle of Morea: Historiography in Crusader Greece*, Oxford 2009.

Demacopoulos sees hope for liberal ecumenism in a historicist analysis of the thirteenth-century past and its textual production.

Demacopoulos frames his study, a little too apologetically for this reviewer, as a “thought experiment” (pp. 1; 123), expressing anxiety about the reception of postcolonial theory. Given the conservative disciplinary contexts into which this work is being inserted, this is perhaps unsurprising. However, it is regrettable, because it means that Demacopoulos misses some of the opportunities that the theoretical apparatus of postcolonial studies offers. Throughout explicit theoretical discussion is largely limited to the final pages of each chapter. This not only marginalises the theoretical discussion, which could have been integrated better from the start of each section, but also leaves limited space to fully make the book’s core argument. At a practical level, the book would have been rendered more reader friendly by the inclusion of a bibliography and the replacement of endnotes with footnotes, not least because so much of the contribution of the monograph is the introduction of new theoretical literature to Byzantine studies.

These critiques notwithstanding, this is an excellent book. Byzantine studies desperately need to engage more seriously with critical theory. Demacopoulos more than demonstrates the potential of postcolonial theory for analysing his chosen corpus of texts, making this monograph a thought-provoking study in its own right. Its biggest contribution, however, is to demonstrate the potential for future research that engages with this period in colonial terms and deploys postcolonial theory to read its texts.

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