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***Transmitting and Circulating the Late Antique and Byzantine Worlds*,
ed. MIRELA IVANOVA, HUGH JEFFERY, Brill, Leiden–Boston 2020
[= *The Medieval Mediterranean*, 118], 35 maps and illustrations,
list of contributors, index, pp. XII, 302**

This book offers a collection of eleven articles on the transmission and circulation of goods, ideas and peoples in Late Antiquity and Byzantine times, highlighting the enduring social, cultural and economic networks linking the various spheres of the Eastern Mediterranean. The presented volume is based on selected papers firstly presented at the *Transmitting and Circulating the Late Antique and Byzantine Worlds* conference organized in February 2017 by the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research, the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity, and the History Faculty at Oxford. The book, edited by Mirela Ivanova (University of Oxford) and Hugh Jeffery (University of Edinburgh), is divided into three Parts: (1) *Movement of People*; (2) *Transmitting Traditions*; (3) *Contact*, and it is preceded by the authors' *Introduction* (p. 1–8).

As a starting point for all considerations in the volume, M. Ivanova and H. Jeffery present the research on Byzantium from a global perspective, focusing on the search for spheres of international exchange and long-distance contacts, but bearing in mind that it is hard to say that in the Middle Ages, the Mediterranean connectivity was fully globalised (p. 7). Moreover, they show criticism in the presented research approach, expressed by posing questions of whether such scope of research could, in turn, lead to marginalization of what is local and stabilization of regionality; and whether it would not limit research to the history of elite actors? Thus, the authors propose to reflect on the studies of Catherine Holmes and Naomi

Stande¹, in which they: *sought to start from the local and look out, rather than start from a global narrative and look in* (p. 3). The two main methodological concepts used in the work are the fairly fluid categories of “transmission” and “circulation”, which, according to the authors, have the main advantage of allowing cooperation between historians and archaeologists, acting as a *platform for interdisciplinary communication* (p. 3).

Without depreciating the role of interdisciplinary research at the interface between history and archaeology, it is worth referring to the words of the authors who state that: *We share the belief that a category difference between text and material is impossible to maintain, and that theoretical insights should be shared and applied between fields* (p. 3). In this perspective, the question should be posed: how may historians eliminate the difference of categories between text and material in the case of transmission of the content of manuscripts, circulation of literary *topoi* and intertextual borrowings, etc.? Many historians in their studies of Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages frequently refer to archaeological sources that they confront with the details of historiographic narratives. However, the narrative studies necessarily belong to a different discourse than the study of artifacts obtained through excavations. Therefore, the archaeological sources, by themselves, usually do not allow, i.a., to learn the specifics of group

¹ *The Global Middle Ages*, ed. C. HOLMES, N. STANDEN, Oxford 2018 [= PPS, 13].

ties, the circulation of content in literary sources and do not correspond to literary statements. In consequence, the authors' approach also has its limitations and raises many doubts, especially at the interface between history and literary studies, and such a rigorous statement as in the *Introduction* is impossible to maintain². As can be observed in the book, not all contributors share the belief of M. Ivanova and H. Jeffery, especially in Part 2, where all the articles do not even touch upon the issue of combining the archaeological artefacts with the historical narratives.

Part 1, consisting of four articles, is opened by Grace Stafford's study on the female pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Menas at Abu Mina in Late Antiquity (p. 11–43). She argues that the female pilgrimage was a broad socio-cultural phenomenon and was not limited only to the participation of the elite group of women; women of the middle- and lower-classes also made pilgrimages to this sanctuary, as evidenced by numerous archaeological finds and literary sources. The article by Julia Burdajewicz analyses the role of traveling painters' workshops using the example of late antique Porphyreon in modern Lebanon (p. 44–77). She points out that wall paintings and works of monumental art can only be made and viewed on the spot, and therefore constitute an excellent object of research on the transmission and circulation of people and ideas. She emphasises the contribution of migrating artists to the process of sharing the iconographic schemes, the techniques of execution of wall paintings and material culture. Katinka Sewing's article concerns the phenomenon of pilgrimage to Ephesus in Late Antiquity as an example of transmission of religious ideas (p. 78–101). She introduces the newly investigated church in Pamucak

from the 5th c. as a pilgrimage complex, which shows the infrastructural and organisational religious development of Asia Minor in that time. Adele Curness takes into account the captives' status in Byzantine Calabria and their constant circulation between South Italy, Sicily and North Africa (p. 102–122). She points out that the analyzed case falls outside of the traditional definitions of "slavery" or "slave trade", and should be rather considered a ransom, which was of considerable economic importance for Islamic Sicily and Ifriqiya.

Part 2 contains four articles and begins with Alex MacFarlane's study on fantastic creatures (such as, e.g. "shocking lobster") in the Armenian *Alexander Romance* tradition (p. 125–148). The author shows that the translation of Pseudo-Callisthenes' work from Greek into Armenian in ca. 5th c. was only the beginning of the process of the transmission of literary tradition; moreover, it was also its transformation and adaptation to the local discourses. Then, Jovana Anđelković's article examines the influence of heritage of ancient rhetoric on the shape of John Mauropous' letter to the patriarch (letter 64), written in the 11th c. (p. 149–169). In this detailed study, the author shows the effective deployment of assumptions of ancient rhetoric on the field of structural background, stylistic solutions, use of subtle allusions, etc. by Mauropous, presenting him as a true Menander's student of rhetoric. In the next article, Mathew Barber considers the Arabic accounts for the Byzantine-Fatimid conflict of 1054–1055 (p. 170–198). He illustrates that the information about the Fatimid-Byzantine relations, as well as about important Byzantine political figures or events, such as change of dynasties, had its place in the Egyptian historiography, which may be an important factor in the study of this period of Byzantine history³. Peter Bara analyses the

² E.g. cf. G.M. SPIEGEL, *Introduction*, [in:] EADEM, *The Past as Text. The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*, Baltimore–London 1997, p. XI–XXII; EADEM, *Theory into Practice: Reading Medieval Chronicles*, [in:] *The Medieval Chronicle. Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle, Driebergen/Utrecht 13–16 July 1996*, ed. E. KOOPER, Amsterdam–Atlanta 1999 [= MChr, 1], p. 1–12.

³ Surprisingly, J. Mackechnie (Queen's University, Kingston), in the review of the presented volume, confused the content of the articles by M. Barber and J. Anđelković, writing that *Matthew Barber explores how literary traditions from the ancient world, such as the use of ancient rules of composition, shaped the work of the 11th c. writer Ioannes Mauropous*, while *Jovana*

narration about the Byzantine defeat at the Battle of Dristra/Dorostolon (1087), which appears in the Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* (p. 199–223). The author argues that Anna explained the military disaster by mundane, not divine circumstances, and the fact that she re-used a lost family account of the Doukai proves Anna's creativity in transmitting Byzantine literary and political inheritance⁴.

Part 3 contains three articles and it is opened by Matteo G. Randazzo's case study of the circulation of Sgraffito Ware, i.e. a specific category of 12th-century Byzantine tableware mainly crafted in Peloponnesian and Euboean "professional" workshops between Norman Sicily and Komnenian Greece (p. 227–250). The author, by showing the spread of Byzantine ceramics, even in the face of hostile relations with the Kingdom of Sicily, shows the lasting economic and socio-cultural ties in the Mediterranean basin, but also notes the need for further studies on the issue. Then, Carl Dixon examines the case of Paulicians' identity as an example of the transmission of religious and socio-cultural ideas in the Byzantine world (p. 251–273). The author argues that it is doubtful that the Paulicians were ever a unified community, and their presentation as heretics in the Byzantine sources should be viewed in terms of a historical phenomenon strongly rooted in the context of socio-political events and imperial religious policy in the 8th c. In the last article of the volume, Anna Kelley takes the issue of the cotton economy in the Mediterranean world during the early medieval period (p. 274–297). She

challenges the view that the cotton crops were largely unknown throughout the ancient world prior to the Islam's expansion in the 7th and the 8th c. The author argues that cotton as a cultivated plant was known in the Mediterranean basin and, on the other hand, she points to the commercial circulation of cotton from India in the Mediterranean world long before the spread of Islam. However, she also notes that the centralization of the economy of Islamic lands under the rule of the Abbasids, and the growth of crops in Iran, undoubtedly contributed to the spread of trade in this commodity.

The volume introduces several multidimensional aspects of transmission and circulation of ideas, peoples and goods in the Mediterranean world, providing a robust chronological perspective, giving a certain overview of the issue raised, and thus constitutes a valuable insight into the matter. The high level of innovation of the topics covered should be emphasized, which may constitute a starting point for further considerations. It is important because it should be stated that the presented work as a whole does not exhaust the topic and that further, in-depth studies are still needed. Perhaps the book would benefit if it contained a greater number of papers presented at the conference. Knowing the conference programme, it is still surprising that only eleven articles were chosen; obviously this is not meant to question the editors' right to make the selection of articles included in the volume. However, it is surprising that the extremely broad conference programme actually did not have an effect on the book's content; out of a total of forty-nine researchers and as many as twenty-three from the centres outside United Kingdom (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Serbia and Turkey) are mostly unrepresented in the volume. Consequently, the transmission and circulation in Late Antiquity and Byzantine times could be examined even more thoroughly and in more detail.

Andelkovic explains how the Byzantine-Fatimid conflict of 1054–55 can be re-appraised using Arabic accounts (sic!), cf. J. MACKECHNIE, [rec.:] *Transmitting and Circulating the Late Antique and Byzantine Worlds (Medieval Mediterranean)*... – *AIM* 32, 2020, p. 372–374.

⁴P. Bara offers an alternative interpretation than P. Buckley, who claims that Anna Komnene presented the defeat at the Battle of Dristra/Dorostolon, and the apparition of Leo, Bishop of Chalcedon, in the middle of the battle, as a sign of a divine punishment of Alexios I, cf. P. BUCKLEY, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene. Artistic Strategy in the Making of a Myth*, Cambridge 2014, p. 154–156.

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