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***Ascetismo y santidad en el Cercano Oriente cristiano (siglos IV–XIII),***  
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**A**s the editors of the monograph state in the introduction (p. 7–10), it was intended as a survey of the influence of religion on the life of various communities established around the Mediterranean basin in the first millennium after Christ. In the concluding section of the introduction, the editors briefly outlined the thematic layout of the book, disclosing that it was *de facto* divided (although this is neither indicated in the table of contents, nor in the structure of the monograph itself) into three sections: concerning Jewish-Christian relations, the use of religion in socio-political contexts, and thematically related to issues of Syriac Christianity. To begin with, a few technical notes. The various chapters of the book lack abstracts in commonly used congressional languages (not even in English), and the book contains texts not only in Spanish but also in Portuguese. Key-words are missing as well, but above all, neither a separately listed bibliography for each article, nor thematic indexes, even personal and geographical, are featured.

The book is divided into nine chapters/articles. As mentioned above, despite the promise to distinguish the three main parts of the monograph, we do not encounter this in the text itself. In the first chapter (p. 11–38), Gilvan Ventura da Silva of Brazil's Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (the text was published in Portuguese) presented an essay on the use of the motif of the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in the writings of John Chrysostom. In a rather extensive introduction to the main body of the text, the author addressed, among other things,

the issue of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism at the level of the empire as a whole, arguing quite successfully against the theses claiming the disappearance of the latter at the expense of the favoured denomination. He presented a wealth of information on the situation of the Jewish community in Antioch, reasoning that in Chrysostom's time we were witnessing its growth rather than its decline. The author strongly opposed the theories according to which the purpose of writing of the *Adversus Iudaeos* was to stop the phenomenon of Judaisation of the Antiochean Christians, pointing out that the arguments raised by John were intended to strike first and foremost at Judaism and the Jews themselves. Gilvan Ventura da Silva then went on to explain the methodological assumptions of his reinterpretation of Chrysostom's work from the perspective of the idea of heterotopia as an unfriendly, inhospitable place, according to the theories put forward by the sociologist Henri Lefebvre, well-known to proponents of various urban movements. This is the starting point for a discussion of the passages in *Adversus Iudaeos* in which John discouraged Christians from participating in Jewish festivals by emphasising that these celebrations were deprived of their metaphysical meaning if they ceased to take place in Jerusalem. In turn, as the Jews were expelled from the Holy City and it was itself razed as a punishment for their misdeeds (understood as participation in the death of Jesus Christ), then later rebuilt as Roman and as Roman Christianised (a large part of the text is an overview of the history of Jerusalem after the Jewish uprising of 66–73)

it became heterotopic for the Jews, hostile and inhospitable, which would in fact deprive their religion, Judaism, of its *raison d'être* as such. The essay prepared by Gilvan Ventura da Silva is an interesting interpretative proposal using modern sociological theories, but at times the author seems to become too involved in the topic he is tackling, especially in the context of his participation in the debate concerning the possible anti-Semitism of John Chrysostom. This seems to be an issue that requires a much more extensive examination relating to the semantics of the various words used in such debates, which necessarily could not be undertaken in this article due to the intended form of the text<sup>1</sup>.

The second chapter (p. 39–46), by Andrea Simonassi Lyon, is a continuation of the points made about John Chrysostom's writings on Jewish matters, and at the same time seems to be the second part of an article she had published in the same centre a year earlier, on the similar subject of the relationship between the actual Jews living in Antioch contemporaneously with the saint and those outlined in his writings, whom she had called 'rhetorical Jews' in her previous text<sup>2</sup>. There would be nothing surprising in this; after all, such divisions are often made for the sake of clarity of the lecture and the themes addressed, were it not for the fact that the article in the volume under discussion here is actually a summary of the conclusions presented in the previous one. In the third chapter, which is another text of the 'Jewish' part of the monograph, Ignacio Rosner dealt with another

influential Christian hierarch of the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria, analysing the way in which his actions of 415 towards the Jews are presented in the works of Socrates Scholasticus and John of Nikiu (p. 47–59). Discussing the aforementioned accounts of other persecutions at the beginning of the fifth century, as well as later accounts indicating the functioning of the Jewish community in Alexandria, the author postulates that the expulsion of Jews in 415 from the city named after the great Macedonian was of a limited nature, possibly affecting only representatives of the elite or groups directly involved in the political dispute taking place in the city at the time.

In the second part of the book, Guido Torena addressed the interpretation of the accounts of Theodoret of Cyrhus in the context of the meaning given to the miracle-like events he described and the way they were used in the narrative, which, according to the author, had as one of its aims the maintenance of the social *status quo* in the empire regarding the existing stratification of society (p. 61–72). In his work, G. Torena presents several examples of descriptions of miraculous interventions by well-known ascetics, which ultimately lead to the restoration of the existing order, regardless of whether this order would seem just or not according to contemporary standards. The researcher also notes that the lower strata are merely the backdrop of events for Theodoret, while the main characters, apart from the saints, monks, and ascetics naturally, are representatives of the aristocracy, the upper classes. While the theory seems extremely elegant and has been clearly laid out, the question of Theodoret's approach to the lower classes itself seems somewhat more complex, given both the actions he took personally<sup>3</sup>, and the cases of misery of the lower classes he noted and described<sup>4</sup>. In the second text of this section, Uriel Nicolás Fernández

<sup>1</sup> It is worth adding, however, for the sake of completeness, that the author discussed the problem of John Chrysostom's attitude towards the Jews, also in the context of the idea of heterotopia, in a number of articles published earlier, e.g.: *Uma comunidade em estado de alerta: João Crisóstomo e o apelo aos cristãos de Antioquia no combate aos judaizantes*, Pho 20, 2014, p. 129–151; *A sinagoga como heterotopia segundo João Crisóstomo*, Pho 18, 2012, p. 134–156; *Sementes da intolerância na Antiguidade Tardia: João Crisóstomo e o confronto com os judeus de Antioquia*, Dim 25, 2010, p. 63–81.

<sup>2</sup> A. SIMONASSI LYON, *Judíos reales y judíos retóricos en la Antioquia de Juan Crisóstomo*, [in:] *Cristianos, judíos y gentiles. Reflexiones sobre la construcción de la identidad durante la Antigüedad Tardía*, ed. R. LAHAM COHEN, E. NOCE, Buenos Aires 2021, p. 47–61.

<sup>3</sup> J. ŻELAZNY, *Kościół domem a biskup ojcem w świetle Konstytucji Apostolskich i innych pism syryjskich od I do V wieku*, VerV 20, 2011, p. 223–238; I. MILEWSKI, *Kilka uwag o roli biskupa w mieście późnoantycznym (na przykładzie prowincji wschodnich)*, VP 21, 2001, p. 407–424.

<sup>4</sup> I. MILEWSKI, *Wczesnobiazyński system podatkowy w świetle wybranych relacji hagiograficznych*, SGd 43, 2018, p. 87–95.

addressed the question of how representations of imperial piety were produced in hagiographic works, using the example of the way Leo I is depicted in the Life of Daniel Stylite (p. 73–91). The discussion of the motifs found in the work in the context of this emperor, indicating his piety and special relationship with the saint, does not seem original and has already been analysed many times, both by the authors mentioned in the article (e.g. Rafał Kosiński and Mirosław J. Leszka) and more recently by Katarzyna Sadurska<sup>5</sup>. It is worth noting, however, that Uriel Nicolás Fernández favours the hypothesis that the initiator behind the work, which so strongly emphasises Leo's merits for orthodoxy and the Chalcedonian creed, may have been his daughter, Ariadne, who, as the wife of two emperors, Zeno and Anastasius, became, as it were, the sole advocate for the continuation of her father's religious policy. As the author wrote: *Ariadna aparece como garante de ambos gobernantes, estableciendo su conexión con la dinastía leónida y con la ortodoxia de la fe, demostrando el compromiso doctrinal que ninguno de sus dos esposos fue capaz de mantener* (p. 91).

The next text in the volume, also the second in Portuguese, by Renato Viana Boy, is actually more of an essay of sorts than a research text, addressing the use of Christianity for the purpose of expanding imperial power (p. 93–115). It includes themes such as the use of the same orthodox beliefs to realise diplomatic alliances, the idea of defending Christianity against external enemies, the use of religion as an element to assert the empire's influence beyond the borders of the lands it actually administered, and the construction of a new Roman identity based on faith in Jesus Christ in opposition to their enemies, including religious ones, such as the Persians, Arabs, and Goths. All these remarks lead the author to conclude that the commonly used chronological and geographical divisions concerning the history of the Roman empire are somewhat unfounded, pointing out that, among other things, thanks to religion Constantinople did not give up its influence in the West long after the formally accepted collapse of the

Western Roman empire in the second half of the fifth century.

In the final chapter of this part of the book (which we could consider to be dealing with the relationship between imperial power and religion), Victoria Casamiquela Gerhold presented her thoughts on the methods of constructing a narrative on Constantine the Great in the context of his complicated relationship with the representatives of the Nicene Creed and the Arians (p. 117–134), focusing especially on the testimony left by opponents of the iconoclasts, such as Theophanes the Confessor. The author discusses the accounts of the *Chronography* relating to Constantine, paying particular attention to the way in which the circumstances of the emperor's baptism were presented in such a way as to remove his person as far as possible from any suspicion of links with the Arians. When also discussing the transmission of works such as *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* or the *Vita Metrophanis et Alexandri*, the author joins a number of scholars who note a tendency among iconodule writers to link opponents of the orthodoxy of centuries ago with iconoclastic views. Turning then to the special veneration for images supposedly shown by Constantine's supporters, she ponders why iconophiles were so keen to portray the founder of Constantinople as a supporter of icons. According to the author, this was a response to the programme of the iconoclasts, who considered the figure of Constantine to be part of their agenda, both as a symbol of the Christian warrior and as the one who venerated the cross, one of the essential emblems of the iconoclastic upheaval pursued by the Isaurian dynasty. The article basically repeats the theses that have already resounded on the subject in the English- and French-language literature<sup>6</sup>, moreover, the author herself emphasises in the conclusion that: *esta breve discusión, como*

<sup>5</sup> K. SADURSKA, *Między Rzynnem a opozycją antychalcedońską. Zasadnicze kierunki polityki religijnej cesarza Leona I (457–474)*, VP 71, 2019, p. 423–446.

<sup>6</sup> At the same time, it is worth mentioning that in Polish scholarship we can also find similar texts referring, at least fragmentarily, to the ideas of Constantine in the context of later iconoclastic disputes. Cf. e.g.: S. TCHOREK-BENTALL, *Choroba ikonoklazmu i lekarstwo obrazu*, M 76, 2021, p. 101–138; S. BRALEWSKI, *Porfirowa kolumna w Konstancyntopolu i jej wczesnobizantyńska legenda*, VP 30, 2010, p. 95–110; J. SPRUTTA, *Gloryfikacja władzy ziemskiej w ikonie*, SChr 16, 2009, p. 197–212.

*resulta claro, no permite (ni pretende) abordar adecuadamente la compleja cuestión de la eclesiología bizantina. Nuestra intención se limita, simplemente, a recordar que el conflicto en torno a la memoria de Constantino* (p. 133).

The final section of the book begins with an article by Sebastián Alejandro Vitale, whose subject matter takes us beyond the territories of the Empire to Sassanid Persia and the history of the Syriac Christian communities there (p. 135–147). In particular, the author analyses the *Ecclesiastical History* of Barhadshabb Arbay, one of the teachers of the school of Nisibis at the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries, who was a historian and theologian associated with the Church of the East, in the context of his construction of the image of Nestorius as well as emphasising a kind of ‘chain of transmitters’ of the orthodox (according to the Nestorians) creed, the links of which would include for example Diodorus of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. The portrayal of Nestorius as a victim of persecution, not an active but rather a reactive party to the dispute, is also significant. In the second text of this section, Daniel Asade has dealt with some excerpts from the medical works of Sergius of Resh’ayna (Theodosiopolis), concerning certain pharmaceuticals (p. 149–163). However, this is *de facto* only a pretext for discussing the transmission of Greek texts on healing methods through Syriac translations to Arabic medical treatises, from where the same content would in turn reach not only, for example, Christians in western Europe or the Byzantine Empire, but return to the Syrians themselves during the so-called ‘Syrian Renaissance’ of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It should be noted that the text may be difficult to read for those dealing strictly with Byzantine history, as the quotations given in the original include not only Greek, but also Arabic and Syriac.


In conclusion, the presented volume covers quite distant topics, but nevertheless, despite some inaccuracies pointed out above, it is worth reading, especially in the context of complementing certain perspectives in the study of the relations between imperial power and religions.

*Translated by Łukasz Pigoński*

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