

REVIEW

Helena Bodin and Ragnar Hedlund (eds.) 2013: *Byzantine Gardens and Beyond* (series: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia, 13), Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 256 pp. ISBN 9789155486273. SEK 289.00.

What immediately strikes one upon opening this book are the many beautiful full colour illustrations accompanying each of the nine papers. Seven of these papers were presented in 2011 at a symposium organised by the Nordic Byzantine Network, with the Swedish Collegium of Advanced Studies situated in the Botanical Garden of Uppsala providing an appropriate venue. Just as the symposium, the volume aims to bring together different perspectives on Byzantine garden culture, taking Byzantium as a starting point for discussing a wide range of topics from different disciplines, languages, and periods. With papers from Byzantine Studies, Archaeology, Landscape Architecture, and Literary Studies, using sources in Greek, Slavic, Arabic, and Swedish languages, a multifaceted image is presented of the Byzantine garden and its significance beyond the temporal and geographical boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. It is for the first time that the Byzantine garden is studied in such an extensive and varied way.

Ingela Nilsson (Uppsala University) opens her paper “Nature Controlled by Artistry: the Poetics of the Garden in Byzantium” with the violation of a garden and all that it symbolises. In his account of the capture of Thessalonike by the Normans (1185) Eustathios, at the time archbishop of Thessalonike, describes how the Latins destroy his garden, the full impact of which can only be understood if one takes into account the cultural value of gardens in Byzantium. By means of a number of Byzantine texts, Nilsson explores this cultural value of the garden with its associations of peace, harmony, and eroticism, and introduces motifs that recur in other papers in the volume. The next paper, too, can be regarded as presenting a backdrop for the other articles: Antony Littlewood (University of Western Ontario) brings together an impressive amount of literary, archaeological, and visual sources so as to paint a vivid picture of virtually every aspect of Byzantine garden culture, demonstrating what we know – and do not know – about gardens and gardening in Byzantium. With its extensive bibliographical references, this paper provides a convenient introduction to Byzantine garden culture. In “A Homeric Garden in Tenth-Century Constantinople: John

Geometres' Rhetorical Ekphraseis of his Estate" Kristoffel Demoen (Ghent University) takes the reader to the literary world of tenth-century Byzantium. Demoen reads two letters by Geometres on his garden against the background of ancient literature and rhetorical instructions, both of which were of great importance for Byzantine literature of the time. Demoen's interpretation focuses on the references to classical literature and the way Geometres refers to and foregrounds himself as an author. He demonstrates how Geometres alludes to various works of ancient literature, with a central role reserved for the gardens found in Homeric epic, and draws an analogy between gardening and writing, between the pleasure of the garden and the verbal pleasure of his own rhetoric.

The next four papers move from real gardens and gardens in secular literature to the symbolic and metaphorical meaning of gardens in religious contexts. Helena Bodin (Stockholm University) examines the complex functions and ambiguous meanings of the garden of the Theotokos in Byzantine hymnography: the garden of the Theotokos is presented as a fulfilment of its old testament *typos*, the Paradise of Genesis; used as a metaphor and metonymy; and associated with the literary *topos* of the *locus amoenus* and the literary motif of the garden as a place of love-making. In a hymn one or more of these literary devices can be at work at the same time, always paradoxically playing with the enclosed garden's possibility of being opened. Staying within the realm of Byzantine orthodoxy, Jørgen Bakke (University of Bergen) explores the role of gardens as visualizations of spiritual objects of devotion in his paper "The Vanished Gardens of Byzantium: Gardening, Visual Culture, and Devotion in the Byzantine Orthodox Tradition". Bakke starts from the assumption that 'devotional gardening' can be considered to be analogous to venerating icons and proposes studying Christian visual and verbal images of enclosed gardens not, or not only, as physical gardens of the terrestrial world but as recollections of the prototype of a garden, the spiritual garden of Paradise. The paper "Guarding and Gardening: Syria from Byzantine to Islamic Rule" by Olof Heilo (University of Vienna) moves from Christian to Muslim Gardens of Paradise, seeking their Byzantine roots. Heilo explores how the Umayyads after conquering former Byzantine provinces strove to legitimate their rule by depicting themselves as warriors and keepers of peace, as gardeners of the terrestrial Paradise in Syria, while at the same time searching for a religious legitimation of their power. Per-Arne Bodin's (Stockholm University) paper, too, takes the reader beyond Byzantium, focusing on the garden as a *topos* in Russian Medieval Culture. The paper focuses on two texts, a letter by the Novgorodian archbishop Vasilii and "The Story of Two Monks from Novgorod", both of which describe Paradise as a terrestrial garden and provide it with a geographical dimension. Connecting this image of Paradise with the idea of a church interior as a garden and with Russian icons featuring gardens, Bodin concludes that the garden plays a role in the complex and ambiguous Russian discourse on the relationship between heaven and earth. Its ontological status, with Paradise both existing and not, being real and symbolic at the

same time, has much in common with the status of icons. A similar parallel between gardens and icons was proposed by Jørgen Bakke, which is indicative of the volume's coherence.

The final two papers return to Littlewood's tangible Byzantine garden and address the physical and practical reception of Byzantine plants and plant names in Western Europe. In "Beyond Byzantium: Swedish Medieval Herbalism and Plant Names" Inger Larsson (Stockholm University) traces foreign influences on Swedish herbalism. After identifying various ninth-century sources from a monastic context, Larsson admits that the next step back to the Byzantine and late antique sources is a difficult one. It is, however, likely that much classical knowledge had been transmitted and amplified with contemporary knowledge by the Byzantines. In the second part of the paper Larsson traces many Swedish plant names back to their Latin and Greek roots, attributing to Byzantine authors, compilers and translators the role of mediators in the process of conveying this classical knowledge from the South to the North. Kjell Lundquist (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp) discusses "White and Red Lilies from Constantinople", exploring how 'Byzantine' the "Lilium album Byzantinum" and "Lilium rubrum Byzantinum" actually were, both of which were popular in late sixteenth-century Western Europe. Lundquist traces the real and symbolic presence of lilies in Byzantium, only to conclude that the sixteenth-century label 'Byzantine' served first of all as a trademark, referring to the place where the flower had been discovered and purchased.

Taken together, these nine papers present a (literally) colourful and vivid image of real, literary, and symbolic Byzantine gardens, while at the same time addressing their physical and conceptual reception at various times and places. Despite the wide variety of topics there is a considerable amount of coherence, not in the least due to Littlewood's programmatic paper. This coherence is manifest not only in recurrent themes but also in recurrent bibliographical references, which are therefore presented in one collective bibliography. As such the volume is not only a valuable contribution to the fields of, among others, Byzantine history and garden history, but also a pleasure to read.

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