

NEKTARIOS ZARRAS, *Ideology and Patronage in Byzantium. Dedicatory Inscriptions and Patron Images from Middle-Byzantine Macedonia and Thrace* (Βυζάντιος. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization 21). Turnhout: Brepols 2023. 176 pp. 44 figs. – ISBN 978-2-503-60532-6

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NEKTARIOS ZARRAS has written a fine study of thirty-nine middle-Byzantine inscriptions. Fourteen of these are associated with civic structures,¹ while the rest have to do with the building or decorating of churches. Except for one (pp. 142–143), all were published in the past by others but are transcribed here anew, using the special font *Athena Ruby*, and illustrated with (generally legible) black-and-white photographs.² The collection is representative despite missing a few relevant pieces, such as a ninth-century record of repair work on the city walls of Mesembria.³

The author sets out to investigate what underlay individual acts of patronage. One is not surprised to find out that a patron's motivation could in part be selfish. '[S]uccessful discharge of the duty of repairing defensive works frequently secured the professional career of military officials' (p. 45). An emperor 'sought to impose himself ideologically and economically through the founding of monasteries' (pp. 124–125). A dedicatory scene 'emphatically states the meaning of the patronage: to promote his [the donor's] personality through... his personal prayer to Christ and the Virgin for his salvation' (p. 122). And so on.

1. ZARRAS does not cite the recent doctoral dissertation of CHRYSOULA MERSINOGLU, *Επιγραφές σε κτίρια οχρωματικού χαρακτήρα από την Ανατολική Μακεδονία και Θράκη από τον 5ο μέχρι και τον 15ο αιώνα μ.Χ.* Kavala 2020.

2. Three of the inscriptions (pp. 42–43, 45, 50) are now lost, so no photographs of them are included in the book. An extant inscription from Edirne (p. 46) is not illustrated, either.

3. ANDREAS RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein* (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung 3). Vienna 2014, pp. 116–119, 915 (cat. BG2).

Beside revealing specific personal motives, the inscriptions and portraits of donors, we are told, ‘project profusely in word and image the ideology of an entire society’ (pp. 108–109). At this point our writer could have defined his terms more clearly. If ‘ideology’ means ‘the interests of a dominant social class’, how exactly were group interests (mis)represented as the common interests ‘of an entire society’? If the word stands for the notions through which the Byzantine state legitimised its power, how does a privately formulated dedicatory inscription articulate general political concepts? Without answering such questions, ZARRAS’s book is all the more valuable for raising them.

The author’s approach is exemplified by his analysis (pp. 37–40) of a versified inscription from the fortress of Christoupolis (Kavala), which I print here with normalised spelling:⁴

Τὰ πρὶν φθαρέντα καὶ πεπτωκότα τείχη
 ἴστησι στερρῶς Βασίλειος ὁ Κλάδων,
 ὁ στρατηγέτης Στρυμόνος ὁ ἀνδρεῖος,
 ἐπὶ Ῥωμανοῦ, Κωνσταντίνου, Στεφάνου
 καὶ Χριστοφόρου αὐθίς τε Κωνσταντίνου,
 τῶν πενταρίθμων εὐτυχῶν βασιλέων.
 Ἔτους ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου ςυλδ´, ἰνδικτιῶνος ιδ´.
 Ἐγράφη διὰ χειρὸς Στεφάνου βασιλικοῦ σπαθαρίου.

ZARRAS assumes that the oblong marble block carrying this text (whose fine lettering he leaves without comment) once adorned ‘the central gate of the city’s walls’ (p. 39). He notes stark antithesis between φθαρέντα καὶ πεπτωκότα on the one hand and ἴστησι στερρῶς on the other: a fortress once *wrecked and fallen* has now (AD 925/6) been *solidly* rebuilt. ‘The ideology of imperial patronage is acknowledged in the person of Kladon’ (PmbZ 20926), whom the verses term ἀνδρεῖος, i.e. *manly* and *valiant* (p. 38): ‘Basileios’s bravery is presented in the inscription as guarantor of the safety of the city’s walls’ (p. 39). The corresponding epithet εὐτυχεῖς for the five reigning emperors is not discussed. The monetary underpinning of their ‘ideology’ remains in this instance unclear: we do not know if funding came, as it did on another occasion (pp. 42–43), from the royal fisc (αὐτοκρατορικὸν ταμεῖον), or if Basil paid for the edifice himself (cf. p. 30). In any case, [t]he Kavala inscription bespeaks an eloquent and honourable officer, and makes a significant contribution to our understanding

4. Cf. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, pp. 240–243, 928 (cat. GR63); MERSINOGLU, *Επιγραφές σε κτίρια οχρωματικού χαρακτήρα*, pp. 46–50 (cat. 4).

of the role of military officials in maintaining fortification works, as well as of these officials' use of propaganda to promote their image in Byzantine society' (p. 40).

All of this is correct as far as it goes, but it would apply in the same degree to countless other building inscriptions. One located in the very same city of Kavala makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the role of military officials in maintaining civic establishments. The ideology of imperial patronage is acknowledged in the person of Muhammad Ali, an eloquent and honourable officer who makes use of propaganda to promote his image in Ottoman society:

The ruler of the world, Mahmud Han [Sultan Mahmud II], the architect of justice,

he reinvigorated and redesigned an aging world.

All of his servants endeavor to engage in useful and benevolent works.

One such, who follows the path of engaging in good works, is his Governor of Egypt.

He has expended money on the [re]building of the Kavala fortress...

Ali Paşa [Muhammad Ali] has scattered the treasure of his munificence for God's path 1236 [AD 1820/21]...⁵

Nine hundred years separate the inscription of Basil Klados from that of Muhammad Ali. To understand what actually changed in the long course of these centuries, we need an analysis more detailed and more subtle than that of Professor ZARRAS.

Keywords

epigraphy; patronage

5. HEATH W. LOWRY – İSMAIL E. ERÜNSAL, *Remembering One's Roots. Mehmed Ali Paşa of Egypt's Links to the Macedonian Town of Kavala*. Istanbul 2011, p. 79.