

Gregory TUCKER, *The Hymnography of the Middle Byzantine Ecclesiastic Rite & its Festal Theology. Introduction – Edition & Translation – Commentary (Studies in Eastern Christian Liturgies 5)*. Münster: Aschendorff 2022. XXVI, 661 pp. – ISBN 978-3-402-21772-6 (€ 68.00)

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Research on Byzantine hymnography usually focuses on the lengthy hymnographic genres of Kontakion and (more recently) Kanon, with a preference for compositions by known authors. This volume fills a gap by examining a type of hymns that had previously attracted only sporadic attention: “small” hymnographic genres (TUCKER avoids the word “small”).

The book is dedicated to hymns of one strophe belonging to the non-monastic rite of the Church of Constantinople. For this rite, TUCKER introduces already in the title the term “Ecclesiastic”. The chronological frame of the book is the Middle Byzantine period. This has to do with TUCKER’s methodological approach: he focuses on a time from which we already have a significant number of manuscript witnesses. The hymns transmitted in these manuscripts are of varying chronological and geographical origin. For many of them, the origin is unclear. Others originated from contexts other than “Ecclesiastic”. By limiting the scope to the Middle Byzantine period, TUCKER wisely avoids a “purist” attitude and focuses on the liturgical practice as reflected in his earliest and main sources; this practice was already a product of hybridisation or synthesis.

The book consists of an introduction (ch. 1, pp. 1–20), followed by the two main parts. Part I (ch. 2–4, pp. 23–360) seeks to establish a corpus of “Ecclesiastic” hymnography. It is an edition with translation of an anthology of hymns, preceded by a comprehensive introduction. Part II (ch. 5–7, pp. 361–561) is a literary – theological commentary of a selection of the hymns edited in the first part.

Part I begins with Chapter 2, a useful “brief overview of what is known about the pre- and early history of Ecclesiastic hymnody” (pp. 23–85). This includes a sub-chapter on the few early hymns known from fragments and/or narrative sources (2.1.2.2, “Exceptional early hymns”), and whose origins are often obscured by myth. A sub-chapter on the Kontakion (2.1.3

“Kontakia”, pp. 49–62) and its liturgical performance explains, why Kontakia were excluded from the present anthology (save for the monostanzaic remnants): based on existing evidence, it is far from clear that Kontakia were a regular part of the “Ecclesiastic” Rite. As a Byzantinist / philologist, I found the sub-chapter on the terminology of the smaller hymnographic genres particularly valuable (2.2, “Genres of hymnography in source documents of the Ecclesiastic Rite”, pp. 63–71). The terminology of the smaller genres is usually not based on formal features of the hymns, but rather on their place in the liturgy. Moreover, it is not uniform, but reflects varying liturgical traditions. It is thus not unusual that the same hymn appears with different genre designations in different manuscripts. TUCKER, who has a solid knowledge of liturgical manuscripts and modern liturgical scholarship, succeeds in giving an overview of the history of the genres, the complexity of the tradition, and the limitations of what can be reconstructed. Chapter 2 can be used as a work of reference for scholars working on Byzantine hymnography and beyond.

Chapter 3 (pp. 87–149) is the introduction to the edition. The largest part of this chapter introduces the manuscripts used, sorted by the type of liturgical book (3.7, “Manuscripts”, pp. 97–147). This goes beyond the manuscript description usually preceding editions: as the manuscripts in question were liturgical books, TUCKER seeks to specify the liturgical tradition that produced them – an essential point in his selection of witnesses, as he focuses on the “Ecclesiastic” Rite. Thus, he dedicates almost 20 pages discussing the localisation of his main witness, cod. Patm. 266, arguing that it is an early witness to the Ecclesiastic Rite of Constantinople and refuting previous arguments that it had a non-Constantinopolitan and/or monastic origin. TUCKER introduces his own terminology or adopts recent, but not commonly established terms. This begins with the term “Ecclesiastic” in the title. He convincingly explains why he finds the established terminology inadequate; the terms he proposes indeed make more sense. This can, however, require some effort from the reader, who has to have the corresponding terms in mind, e.g., that “Ecclesiastic” Rite corresponds to what was at times called “patriarchal”, “cathedral” or “asmatic” rite, that “kanonarion-synaxarion” corresponds to what Mateos edited and established as “Le Typicon de la Grande Église”¹, etc. It remains to be seen if the proposed terminology will be adopted in scholarship.

1. JUAN MATEOS, *Le Typicon De La Grande Église* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 165–166). Rome 1962–1963.

Chapter 4 (pp. 151–360) is the edition proper, beginning with an introduction that explains the sigla, the abbreviations, and the system used for the apparatuses (pp. 151–155). TUCKER introduces his own system of apparatuses and abbreviations to do justice to the complexity of the tradition: he excerpts short texts, which may be found in the same or in different manuscripts, for the same or for different services, and for the same or for different feasts. Moreover, often it is only the incipit that it is transmitted. TUCKER chooses to provide information on the liturgical context of the hymns. Thus, instead of picking only the witnesses that provide the full text, he names in the apparatus all instances in which a hymn is mentioned, whether in full or abbreviated. He also provides the feast and service, in which the hymn was performed in each of its occurrences, in the apparatus. This is a viable solution to the old problem in the editions of hymns: editions as anthologies of hymns (i.e., not editions of entire liturgical manuscripts) usually ignore the liturgical context of the texts they edit. The edition is “comparative”, meaning that it takes into account all witnesses, but does not attempt to reconstruct an Urtext or the text of a single manuscript. This works, because the text of the hymns is quite stable: there is hardly any difference between the text of the Middle Byzantine manuscripts and that of modern liturgical books, and the entries in the apparatus rarely include something more than the point at which the incipit in the various witnesses ends.

Something I realised while reading about the transmission of hymns is how rarely the text of the hymns is given in full in the manuscripts. Especially when it comes to well-known hymns, few manuscripts have more than the incipit, since the practitioners are expected to know them by heart, having learned them primarily from hearing. This is something to bear in mind when thinking about the interplay of written and oral textual tradition of liturgical texts. Occasionally, we have nothing more than an incipit in a single manuscript; in these few cases, the text of the hymn is lost for us. This could be an indication that a hymn which was considered well-known in the Middle Byzantine times fell out of use in later centuries. Much more often is the case in which none of the manuscripts used in the edition transmits more than an incipit, but the editor is able to provide the rest of the text based on modern liturgical books.

Each hymn has a parallel English translation. It is mostly accurate but prioritises readability. This makes TUCKER’s translations suitable for use in English-speaking Orthodox parishes, from which TUCKER has personal

experience. Sometimes, however, concerns of usability lead to not-so-accurate translations that could distort historical analysis. For example, Ἅιδης is translated as hell (Hymns 1.9.30, p. 193, and 1.9.32, p. 194); this may make more sense to 21st-century parishioners who would find Hades too exotic or archaic, but it is a common personification in Byzantine literature and visual art that is lost in this translation. Also, the anti-Jewish polemic of the original texts for the Holy Week is mitigated. For example, in hymn 1.9.24 (6.7.4 in Part II) for the Friday of the Holy Week, “Σήμερον τοῦ ναοῦ τὸ καταπέτασμα· εἰς ἔλεγχον ῥήγνυται τῶν παρανόμων” is translated as “Today the inner veil of the temple is rent as a reproof to the transgressors” (p. 191 and p. 486). The word “παράνομοι” is a standard anti-Jewish attribute, as νόμος in Byzantine theological literature typically means Moses’ Law, and the use of the term in connection with the veil of the Temple leaves little space for other interpretations. The translation “transgressors”, however, does not make it very clear that the Jews are meant, and the commentary in Part II mentions it as one of many possibilities.

Part II, “Towards a theology of the festal hymns of the Great Church” (pp. 361–561), is a literary-theological commentary of selected hymns. TUCKER provides a brief historical survey of the composition and/or transmission of the hymns, and analyses them in the context of the scriptural readings of the celebration for which they are meant. Many of these texts, which were hitherto mostly ignored in scholarship, are elegant, concise rhetoric compositions. Their festal theology is often different, e.g., from the “penitential mode” promoted in other Byzantine liturgical texts and contexts. Part II ends with the “General conclusions” (ch. 7, pp. 551–561). The study concludes with five appendices pertaining to questions on the Akolouthiai included in the manuscript witnesses (pp. 563–593), a list of manuscripts (pp. 595–597), a rich bibliography (pp. 599–633), Indices of the hymns by incipit, date, and saint (pp. 635–656), and a general index (pp. 657–661).

An issue that is perhaps the publisher’s rather than the author’s fault pertains to the Greek font in the last part of the book, which sometimes renders combinations of spirits and accents in a way that reminds of earlier attempts to write Greek polytonic with a computer.

TUCKER’s publication draws attention to a hitherto neglected part of Byzantine literary and theological production. It is a comprehensive study that offers a rich material. Some of the excurses and appendices could have been

spin-off articles – whether this would have enhanced usability, or whether it is better to have the material together, are approaches that both have their merits. In any case, TUCKER's work – the introduction, the edition and the commentary – will be useful to scholars working on Byzantine literature, liturgy, and theology.

Keywords

Byzantine hymnography; Byzantine liturgy