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GEORGI P ARPULOV, *Middle-Byzantine Evangelist Portraits : A Corpus of Miniature Paintings (Manuscripta Biblica, Paratextus Biblici 7)*. Berlin – Boston: De Gruyter 2022. XIV, 167 pp., 79 plates. – ISBN 978-3-11-075463-6

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This book is a much valuable *instrumentum studiorum* for the study of Byzantine illuminated manuscripts. It updates earlier studies on the iconography of the Gospels and their authors which go back to ALFRED MATTHIAS FRIEND's seminal articles (1927 and 1929) and were expanded in the late 1970es from liturgical and semantic perspectives by GEORGE GALAVARIS and ROBERT NELSON. The *raison d'être* of this book is the endeavor for a full record of biblical Byzantine manuscript production in the framework of the ERC on Byzantine Biblical paratexts. This context allows to understand the print publication of a data base which is however by far a hybrid work since much of the material is referred to online. The print version of this important repertoire, which hopefully will be available and extendable online, is necessarily limited to the most basic elements for each entry for the sake of a homogenous and coherent presentation. 469 entries of manuscripts from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the mid-of the 13<sup>th</sup> c. and seven manuscripts heavily repainted constitute the core of the book, introduced by the editor's preface and by a short explanatory mode by the author regarding the order and the composition of the catalogue.

The book gathers a great amount of information as it brings together an almost exhaustive repertoire of Greek manuscripts with authors' portraits mainly from codices of the four Gospels or Lectionaries. This huge material is unevenly known from library catalogues or publications from various perspectives, and, many of them, are understudied. Indeed, the reader can easily realize how digitization has facilitated the accessibility of manuscripts and their study in context as many of the listed books are fully online and allow a thorough and global observation. However, albeit the praise of such an investigation in context in the preface, P ARPULOV's book is rather limited to the raw material for a comprehensive study of the evangelists' portraits as paratexts. "Instead of using the manuscripts as a quarry from which precious stones are extracted" as the author of the preface emphasizes, the book takes the reader to the quarry showing glimpses of the

deposits to prospect. There seems to be a gap between the project's agenda on biblical paratexts and the corpus's compilation. The definition of the paratexts adequately backed by the literary theory of GERARD GENETTE does not resonate with a kind of neo-structuralist presentation of the material by keywords. Hopefully in the next years GEORGI PARPULOV will publish a major comment on the iconography of the evangelists as authors, scribes and churchmen, figures of authority and workers of divine wisdom. The corpus as it is published is a much useful tool but difficult in practice. The chronological order is problematic as is the limitation to the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century which is not argued. Is there a turn in the depiction of the evangelists near 1250 or in 1261? One can think of the appearance of the "left handed evangelist" and of the increasing representation of the authors in wall painting but manuscripts seem to show an overall consistency with the Middle Byzantine tradition. The overview of Byzantine art through the evangelists's portraits, alleged in the introduction, seems elusive as the materiality and the spatial dimension of the paintings have been overlooked. The author's introduction highlights the homogeneity of the evangelists ("readily comparable") and the importance of the *realia* which, indeed, set these remote witnesses into the professional framework of the medieval scribes. This is obviously the reason for which the visual apparatus to the corpus opens with three different sets of writing material from liminal areas of the Eastern Roman Empire (Georgia, Egypt), though unexploited beyond the reproduction of high-quality images. The author also assumes the chronological order of the presentation which obviously has been a serious challenge but remains an open question: an accurate and reliable chronological order of such an extensive corpus is hardly possible, as most of the manuscripts are dated approximately. The systematic observation whether the images are original to the manuscripts or later additions is valuable, although the reasons for the reuse or the addition may vary from one codex to another. Moreover, the scope of this publication does not enable to argue about dating or to develop the criteria of the listing: this follows the date of the evangelists miniatures and not that of the text if they are not contemporary as for example no 3 (Princeton Garrett 6) with 9<sup>th</sup> c. paintings in a 12<sup>th</sup> c. codex. In several cases the proposed dates do not meet those found in scholarship and in any case the suggestions are not discussed. The corpus comprises some dated manuscripts, pertinently listed in a separate index, but the majority are of unknown origin and date. Very few are attributed to the 9<sup>th</sup> century while the production during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries is highly dense, divided between the first and second half. Thus, cat. no

13 (the “Berat Gospels”) is recorded with manuscripts of the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century against the prevailing date in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, refined to the last quarter, of the the 9<sup>th</sup> century or the early years of the 10<sup>th</sup> (NADEZHDA KAVRUS-HOFFMANN, “Producing New Testament Manuscripts in Byzantium” ; KATHLEEN MAXWELL, “Illustrated Byzantine Gospel books”, following DZUROVA’s quoted publication). Bnf grec 93 (no 358), a rather unknown Gospel book, is dated to the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, while the BnF catalogue provides the date 1150–1200 and a 13<sup>th</sup> century date cannot be precluded. Technical elements such as the dimensions of the manuscripts and the miniatures as well as the numbering system (there is no distinction between folios or pages) would have helped the reader in eventual further enquiries. The scant presentation of the manuscripts and their illumination is counterbalanced by the links to online images, more effective on the PDF online, and by a set of 87 plates, mostly in color, which make the copy deluxe. They add value to the book as they illustrate rather little-known manuscripts or, in some instances, lost leaves. The images speak by themselves and brightly show the care for the scribal environment emphasized by the author. The constant tension between stereotyped patterns and their interpretation, in order to seize their experience and its transmission, is sometimes enhanced by the epigrams which accompany the portraits. Unfortunately, the epigrams are seldom mentioned and never discussed: for instance, those of Vat. gr. 358 compose the paratext together with the depictions of the evangelists while in other cases they are written on the verso or on one of the surrounding leaves (cf. no 35, Messina, Bibl. regionale universitaria Giacomo Longo F. V. 18f). Other paratexts, such as the monograms behind the portrait of Luke or the ornate strip and the kephalaia above Mark’s portrait on no 12 (Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Q 743) are noteworthy and the reader needs to look for them throughout the digitized manuscripts. The reader should not be limited to the easy access online which sometimes is complicated (for instance the Lambeth palace library requires subscription); moreover, for some of the BnF manuscripts of which the platform Gallica provides black and white digitized microforms, color images can be found on BnF image database and on the the database Mandragore. Black and white photographs provide however precious records for the history of the collections as does the book locating manuscripts beyond major libraries and repositories or lost collections as those formerly in Berlin, now accessible at Cracow (nos 39, 319).

The input of GEORGI PARPULOV's book is definitely highly important for Byzantine manuscript studies. It refines and supplements evidence from major library catalogues and corpora. Nevertheless, two major issues need further consideration: first the geography of the Byzantine book, limited here to Greek script but expanding beyond the empire. Noteworthy are the Georgian manuscripts produced in Constantinople such as the famous Vani Gospels from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenian Andrinople Gospels (Venice, San Lazzaro, Mekhitarist Congregation ms 887, produced in Thrace in 1007, *Glory of Byzantium*, cat. 239, displaying evangelists holding open codices written in Greek and identified in Greek captions) or the series of Slavonic Gospels from the period the book deals with among which the deluxe codices of Ostromir and Mstislav.

More importantly, the challenging consideration of the evangelists' portraits as paratexts raises the question of the definition, the extension, and the implementation of all-elements beyond the text itself. Thus, the rendering of space (for instance in no 23 with desks and footstools projecting to the fore of the frame), the different forms of writing and copying media (bound book, scroll, codex) sometimes in the same painting (no 102, Patmos 79) and, last but not least, ornate frames, figural, floral, animal or geometric motives within or around the canon tables (for example Morgan 748, no 70), as well as textile covers of miniatures (cf. no 10, Cambridge, Univ. Lib. Dd. IX. 69; no 38 Cracow, Jagellonian Library olim Berolinensis gr. 4) or bookmarks are promising perspectives for our understanding of Byzantine book production as well as for the unique story conveyed by every single book.

#### **Keywords**

Evangelist portraits; illuminated Greek manuscripts; Greek Gospel manuscripts