

***Imagining the Byzantine Past: The Perception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses.*** By Elena N. Boeck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xviii, 314 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. Maps. \$120.00, hard bound.  
doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.191

This important and well-researched book (emerging out of a Yale PhD thesis of 2003), very successfully compares two medieval illuminated manuscripts with provocative suggestions for understanding both western European as well as Bulgarian and Slavic receptions and manipulations of Byzantine history. The argument is that by analyzing a set of images from 12th century Sicily and 14th century Bulgaria, it is possible to deduce how ambitious rulers and their supporters might use the visual arts to show their desire to succeed to the position of conspicuous power that had been previously held by the Byzantine Empire centered in Constantinople. Boeck claims that they consciously subverted Byzantine historical texts by adding images where previously there had been none, for, as far as we know, there were never any manuscripts of histories or chronicles produced in Constantinople with attached cycles of illustrations. The thesis of this book is that the two manuscripts represent a new political visual genre unknown in Byzantium, yet using texts written in Constantinople as a foil.

The first, and more extensively illustrated manuscript, is the 12th century codex now in the National Library at Madrid (gr. vitr. 26–2), which contains the Greek text of the 11th century *Chronicle* of John Skylitzes and also 574 miniatures (painted by several artists), although the production was never fully completed. The second manuscript is an edition of the 12th century book of Constantine Manasses produced in Bulgaria in the 14th century and now in the Vatican Library (vat. slav. 2). This contains a text of the *Historical Synopsis (History of the World)* which was originally written in Greek iambic verses in the mid-12th century by Constantine Manasses, but is here translated into prose in Bulgarian. The manuscript has 69 miniatures and dates to soon after 1345 (one miniature commemorates the death of Ivan Asen in 1345). Most likely produced in Turnovo, it has survived in an almost complete condition, but with some flaking of the miniatures.

For Boeck's thesis, it is an essential premise that the Skylitzes was a one-off production in Palermo for the delectation of the Sicilian King Roger II (1095–1154) and that the Manasses equally was made specifically for the Bulgarian emperor Ivan Alexander during his reign (1331–71). This is argued in each case through codicology and art historical analysis of a selection of miniatures. The Skylitzes has no colophon or information about the patron. Ever since the paleographic study of Nigel Wilson in 1978, the consensus of opinion is that the script indicates it was written on Sicily. Boeck opts for Palermo as a production of the royal court intended for Roger II, unfinished due to his death in 1154, whereas the study by Vasiliki Tsamakda in 2002 opted for a monastic environment and production in Messina between 1159 and 1183. Boeck's case for her attribution depends on her detailed analysis of the meaning of her selection of images, which she believes constitute an outsider's concept of the nature of power in Byzantium, emphasizing the secular aspects of imperial policies, and so dovetailing with the Norman king's attitudes to his road to power. The art history chapters of this study cover the ideology of Byzantine Orthodoxy, iconoclasm, the nature of imperial behavior, and the symbolic presentation of the city of Constantinople. The conclusion is that the design and content of the manuscript was all in aid of flattering and supporting the king, though in the event no presentation to

Roger II ever happened. It assumes the king had the mentality to engage with a visual document of this kind, and implies his active patronage in the endeavor.

In the case of the *Manasses*, the argument is that Tsar Ivan Alexander had a view of Byzantium that is explicated in the miniatures—that the Orthodox model of empire was to be emulated, and that Bulgaria was destined by history to be the site of a new renewed Rome. It is argued that his personal participation in the manuscript is shown not only by the choice of images, but also because he may have initiated the translation of the Greek text into Bulgarian, and is documented in the provocative frontispiece miniature (folio 1v) where Ivan is the central figure crowned by an angel, witnessed by the flanking figures of Christ and Constantine Manasses.

I do agree the Madrid Skylitzes was an original production, not a copy of a fully illustrated archetype brought from Constantinople, but it might equally be a nostalgic recreation of past history for a Greek community on Sicily rather than a piece of political propaganda. The case of a connection between the ruler and the production is stronger for the *Manasses* book, though not without difficulties in deducing the actual agency of production. The method of this book is what the ancient historian Keith Hopkins once playfully designated as a “wigwam” theory. It seems to stand in place, but the removal of just one prop would cause the whole edifice to fall. This book is a must read—but the challenge to all readers is to test every prop. For me, the very attractive idea here is that the motivation for the representation of power is not to impress the ordinary viewer, but primarily to confirm to themselves the legitimacy of the holders of power.

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***The Bible in Slavic Tradition.*** Eds. Alexander Kulik, Catherine Mary MacRobert, Svetlina Nikolova, Moshe Taube, and Cynthia M. Vakareliyska. *Studia Judaeslavica* Vol. 9, ed. Alexander Kulik. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016. 576 pages. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Tables. \$234, hard bound and e-book. doi: 10.1017/slr.2017.192

This book contains two dozen articles arising from a scholarly conference organized in 2009 by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Broadly speaking, the works are focused on the cross-cultural transmission and historical impact of texts and ideas generated throughout the Middle Ages by the creation of the Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets in the ninth century and the subsequent translations of canonical biblical books, apocryphal works, and pseudepigrapha into Slavonic from Hebrew and Greek. The editors divide the 24 articles into two uneven sections: “Slavonic Bible” (15 articles) and “Cyrillo-Methodian Traditions” (9 articles). This division is largely artificial, given the broad nature of the term Cyrillo-Methodian and the methodological similarities in textual analysis in articles of both sections. Nevertheless, it handily groups five articles about texts related to Cyril and Methodius with several pieces on historical events important for the development of medieval Slavonic letters, such as Angel Nikolov’s discussion of the Church Council of Preslav of 893. The first article in the book, Serge Ruzer’s analysis of the authoritativeness of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek translation in the Septuagint in early Christian writings, does not deal with the Slavonic tradition.

The production values of the book are excellent. The text, photographs, illustrations, tables, diagrams (stemmata), charts, lists of abbreviations, detailed endnotes,