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2021

### Review of Leonora Neville, *Byzantine Gender*, Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019

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#### Custom Citation

Walker, A. 2021. "Review of Leonora Neville, *Byzantine Gender*, Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019." *Speculum* 96.3: 866-869.

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those who have argued for small kingdoms being the building blocks of the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex—and ultimately of England—may wish to revise their arguments in the light of Mirrington’s work, and to reconsider the organization of, for instance, the *Stoppingas* in central Essex, and the relationships of such entities to the seventh-century kingdom of Essex.

When it comes to vikings, Mirrington shows that they seized control of northern and coastal areas, but southern Essex became a war zone. This conclusion differs significantly from the views of historians, such as David Dumville and Ann Williams, who argued that Essex was integrated into the English kingdom from the late 880s, and Mirrington demonstrates that the more densely populated areas of Essex were closely aligned to eastern England with its Scandinavian connections and identities.

In short, for academic readers the book makes a major contribution both in method and conclusions. In showing that heterogeneous/non-elite groups established distinctive networks of power and trade, it raises wider questions on whether the claim for exceptional social mobility in late Anglo-Saxon England may have more to do with such foundations than with benefiting from the achievements of the Anglo-Saxon state between the reigns of Alfred “the Great” (r. 871–899) and Edgar “the Peaceable” (r. 959–975). Local historians will have much to reflect upon too. It is now clear that by the late seventh century, the earlier east-west link between the Thames estuary and valley had been broken, and the footprint of Essex as a county of contrasts was established, hemmed in by rivers, and caught between the incoming tides where it “encountereth the main Ocean” (John Norden, *Description of Essex* [1594]) and the reach of London. Mirrington’s book identifies how these fault lines took shape, and he is to be congratulated.

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LEONORA NEVILLE, *Byzantine Gender*. (Past Imperfect.) Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019. Paper. Pp. 100; 4 black-and-white figures. \$14.95. ISBN: 978-1-6418-9016-8. doi:10.1086/715126

Critical study of gender in Byzantium has received sustained, if dispersed, attention since the publication of the groundbreaking collection of essays in 1997, *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, edited by Liz James. That publication was preceded by extensive foundational work on “women’s history” (by Alice-Mary Talbot, Angeliki Laiou, and Judith Herrin, among others), which focused largely on identifying evidence of women’s lives in Byzantium and incorporating their stories into existing master narratives. In recent years, publications in multiple disciplines have continued to expand our understanding of Byzantine gender and sexuality through focused considerations of masculinity, homosocial and homosexual identities, and the phenomenon of gender manipulation particular to Byzantine eunuchs. Leonora Neville’s *Byzantine Gender* builds from existing scholarship, including her own exceptional contributions to this still-emerging subfield. It is among the first efforts to epitomize the issue of gender for non-specialists, both those who are outsiders to the study of Byzantine civilization, and those who consider themselves Byzantinists but are unfamiliar with scholarship and methods that center on questions of gender.

Though it is increasingly the norm for new publications to be accessed digitally, *Byzantine Gender* merits reading in print because its tone is conveyed in part through the format of the book, a slim, pocket-sized soft cover that fits in the palm of the hand. Like the Arc Humanities series generally, it presents itself as easily digestible and approachable, yet delivers serious engagement and rigorous thinking. Its one hundred pages of reasonably sized font can be read in a single sitting, recommending it as a supplemental text for a survey or topical lecture

*Speculum* 96/3 (July 2021)

course, or a seminar at the undergraduate or graduate level. In the introduction, Neville affirms this commitment to accessibility, inviting the reader to pull up a chair to an imagined table and indulge in a leisurely lunchtime conversation between friends, to “stop worrying that the footnote, caveat, and nuance police are going to pop up from behind the salad bar” (1). She proposes instead “telling you what I think, not what I suppose a consensus among scholars would be” (2). Neville delivers on this promise, offering a lively, at moments bleeding-edge overview of how gender might be understood to have operated in Byzantine society, as well as how biases inherent in Western European medieval and modern gender norms have distorted scholarly interpretation of the historical evidence.

Yet Neville’s decision to have “opted for clarity and forceful expression over hedging and qualifying” (2) left this reviewer lurking behind the salad bar. On the one hand, I applaud her success in rendering painstaking, often innovative analysis of medieval primary sources—not to mention the overwhelming scope of Byzantine history—in manageable terms, while still capturing some sense of the complexity of the issues at play. On the other hand, she smooths the path to accessibility by dispensing with conventions one might expect in a book that—by its own account—does not simply rehearse consensus but summarizes and proposes original arguments. I wanted more “footnote[s], caveat[s], and nuance,” including greater clarity about the sources for arguments featured in the book (whether Neville’s or others’) and firmer grounding of the novel approaches and interpretations she outlines. A total of seventy-eight endnotes dispersed across the introduction, conclusion, and six chapters, as well as an appended list of “Further Reading” provide some context. Still, if used in a course, the book would require further explanation to situate it in relation to both Neville’s own scholarship and the subfield.

In the introduction, Neville sets the chronological parameters (third to thirteenth centuries, with a focus on the ninth to thirteenth centuries). As is increasingly the habit for Byzantinists, she notes that the term *Byzantine* is an early modern invention unknown to the people we commonly call “the Byzantines.” Rejecting the tendency “to impute a false consciousness to the subject of our study” (3), Neville employs “Byzantine” when discussing historiography (i.e., “scholarship that has the ‘Byzantines’ as its subject” [4]) and “medieval Roman” when discussing the historical group that is the focus of the book. One might caution that this exchanges one anachronistic term for another, given that “medieval” is itself an early modern invention.

Similarly, the key term *gender performance* would have benefited from more careful parsing. The notion that categories of gender (and even sex) are socially constructed (rather than prescribed by nature) and reified through everyday acts (of speech, dress, education, etc.) is a commonplace today, but it coalesced in the work of philosopher Judith Butler, whose prominent publications in the 1990s catapulted her to superstar status within and beyond the then-nascent field of gender studies. Analysis of “gender performance” is the lynchpin of Neville’s argument, and the concept serves well as an organizing principle for her interpretations. Yet Butler is absent from footnotes or suggestions for further reading, and “gender performance” is not glossed. This oversight is significant because, as historian Derek Krueger has recently observed during a roundtable dedicated to “rethinking Byzantine masculinities,” Byzantine studies often comes “late to the table” of theoretical conversation. Acknowledging that Byzantine studies is joining an ongoing discussion is imperative, both to recognize the nature and extent of established intellectual discourse, and to build bridges to other subfields and disciplines, however belatedly.

While recognizing that Christianity profoundly transformed medieval Roman society, Neville emphasizes the persistence of pre-Christian Greco-Roman traditions. She understands subjecthood in medieval Roman society to be constituted in large part through imitation of the behaviors of “ancient and biblical characters” (3), which were introduced in elite education and in the repetition of devotional hymns and prayers. Neville’s larger point—that imitating models was not superficial mimicry but instead a crucial act of subject

formation and refinement—lays the groundwork for subsequent chapters, which explore the rhetoric and reality of successful and failed gender performance in “Romanía.”

In chapter 1, “‘Byzantine’ People: Powerful Women and Wimpy Men,” Neville argues that “bad gender performance”—specifically, a failure of masculinity—has been at the core of a Western European, Orientalist misconception of the Byzantine Empire since at least the eighteenth century. For Byzantine women, the corollary has been hyper-virility, manifest especially in their dominance over Byzantine men. Reprising an argument published elsewhere, she analyzes medieval Roman historians’ characterization of the sixth-century Empress Theodora’s bullying speech to her husband, the Emperor Justinian, and his advisers as hyper-masculine. Neville illustrates how poor gender performance must be read in relation to the larger arguments of medieval Roman texts so as to expose the rhetorical motivations (and expectations for gendered behavior) that inform them.

Chapter 2, “Medieval Roman Anthropology,” establishes the ideal characteristics for men and women (which were understood to be dictated by nature). Neville also explores the many ways that gender norms were transgressed and manipulated through, for example, individuals’ regulation of their own behaviors, or modifications to their bodies (most dramatically in the creation of eunuchs but also less invasively through dress and grooming). Chapter 3, “Gender and Virtue,” further develops these ideas by showing how “good” behavior was rooted in conformity to gendered expectations, with men (and not women or eunuchs) being understood as predisposed by their nature to achieve the self-control and prudent judgment that fulfilled ethical standards of emotional restraint. Neville emphasizes, however, that individuals intentionally manipulated and transgressed gender expectations to expand the possibilities of self-expression and personal agency.

Chapter 4, “How Did Medieval Roman Women Get So Much Done?” questions the common characterization of Byzantine women as socially subordinated and limited to reproductive and child-rearing roles. Attending to the ample evidence of women’s social agency, Neville highlights their engagement in professional, political, religious, scholarly, commercial, and devotional activities. Summarizing her earlier pioneering scholarship, she argues that the disconnect between perception and reality stems in part from medieval Roman women’s exploitation of gender expectations, leading them in some instances to claim masculine authority (i.e., women self-consciously behaved like men), and in other instances to manipulate stereotypes of female weakness and simplicity to their advantage. Neville frames masculinity and femininity as behaviors that could be selectively enacted or avoided—by both men and women.

In chapter 5, “Masculinity and Military Strength,” Neville distinguishes medieval Roman masculine ideals from those of medieval Western European societies that exalted military prowess (and judged medieval Roman men as effeminate). While medieval Roman society also celebrated martial skill and valor, it inherited antique Roman constructs of masculinity that prioritized administrative acumen, rhetorical skill, and self-restraint. Neville proposes that, because medieval Roman texts instructed in proper gender performance by presenting both positive and negative examples of ideal masculinity, they must be read against the grain to ascertain their full encoding of social expectations.

Neville begins chapter 6, “Change Over Time,” with a critique of how her preceding discussion elided differences in gender norms across medieval Roman history. She expresses skepticism, however, about previous scholars’ efforts to elucidate patterns of evolution over time. She notes that changes in the nature of textual sources around the eleventh century (coupled with their disproportionately high rate of preservation) might present a false appearance of significant cultural shifts. She suggests they instead evince “change in literary fashion” (89) and “depiction” (90) rather than transformations of actual values and attitudes.

The volume might have been more accurately titled “Gender in Byzantine Hagiography and Historiography,” given that the majority of the sources discussed are saints’ lives and

(modern and medieval Roman) historical texts. Other genres of writing (e.g., the twelfth-century ["Komnenian"] romances, which are, arguably, crucial to the exploration of gender and sexuality medieval Byzantium) are ignored or treated only in passing. Furthermore, art historical or archaeological evidence is not considered, despite the substantial gender-focused scholarship that has accumulated in these disciplines (some of which is cited in the "Further Reading"). For example, the argument of chapter 5 would have directly benefited from consideration of Myrto Hatzaki's *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text* (2009), which explores images of medieval Roman military saints as emblems of ideal masculinity. Aside from the cover image from the tenth-century Paris Psalter (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 139), the interior black-and-white illustrations are all modern; most are nineteenth-century paintings that persuasively, if somewhat redundantly, demonstrate how modern historians approached medieval Roman evidence by way of an Orientalizing discourse that read Byzantium as effeminate and corrupt.

Recommended for "Byzantinists" interested in issues of gender—and for outsiders to the field who seek entry to these discussions—*Byzantine Gender* embraces a refreshingly idiosyncratic approach to the topic, and delivers it in an engagingly conversational style. Neville makes a compelling case for the fundamental importance of gender in the ongoing reappraisal of Byzantine history, and she highlights promising pathways toward a more accurate understanding of how gender identities shaped medieval Roman culture and society.

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W. MARK ORMROD, BART LAMBERT, and JONATHAN MACKMAN, *Immigrant England, 1300–1500*. (Manchester Medieval Studies.) Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019. Paper. Pp. xi, 300; 5 black-and-white figures and 4 tables. £19.99. ISBN: 978-1-5261-0914-9.

doi:10.1086/715087

This monograph represents one of the splendid outcomes of the AHRC-funded project, England's Immigrants 1350–1550: Resident Aliens in the Late Middle Ages, that ran from 2012 until 2015 at the University of York. The core data that the work draws on comprises a series of taxes levied on aliens in England between 1440 and 1550, as well as the denization letters. This material was compiled by the three authors, the late W. Mark Ormrod, Bart Lambert, and Jonathan Mackman, along with other members of the project, into a comprehensive database which was made available electronically. This book sets out to examine the presence and lived experiences of foreigners who settled in England in the later Middle Ages by undertaking a detailed analysis of the available evidence from the database, supplementing it with relevant information from a wide range of other royal and urban records. If we exclude case studies focusing on one particular group (Italian merchants, Flemish textile workers), or incidental mentions in studies on brewing, metal working, or individual towns, the principal works on immigrant presence in medieval England (including Alice Beardwood's and William Cunningham's pioneering works) were published a century ago. As such, this book is an important contribution, not only because of the salience of the subject, but for the reason that it is the first comprehensive study about the life experiences of the newcomers who decided to embark on a journey and find their livelihood in England.

After an introduction that provides the project background and historical context, the following chapter discusses the position of strangers within the English realm and outlines the legal framework for pre-modern immigration. Chapters 3–5 provide us with the estimate of resident aliens' number, their origin and geographical distribution in England during the fifteenth century. The next two chapters assess the degree to which the status (gender, wealth, or class) of the immigrant communities reflected the way in which they were integrated into