Greek and Byzantine Storytelling – at the crossroad of two research projects

Paris, 12-13 May 2016

Thursday 12/5

9.00-10.30: Project presentations (Collège de France, salle Levi Strauss)

Julie van Pelt, “Romance Structures and Fictionalization in Byzantine Saints’ Lives of Late Antiquity: Cross-dressers and other Saints in Disguise”

Myrto Veikou, “Byzantine Literary ‘Lived Spaces’ through the Study of Hagiographical Texts (4th-12th c.)”

Klazina Staat, “Partners in Chastity: Heroism and sanctity in Latin late-antique Lives of virgin spouses”

10.30: Coffee break

11.00-12.30: Project presentations

Flavia Ruani, “Syriac Hagiography as Literature: Westward and Eastward Directions of Research”

Ghazzal Dabiri, “Embedded Narratives and Sacred Space in 12-13th c. Sufi Hagiographies”

Nunzia di Rienzo, “Holiness and Political Power in Syriac Hagiographic Collections”

12.30: Lunch

14.30-16.00: Project presentations (salle 2, site cardinal Lemoine)

Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksen, “Entering the Sacred Story: Performance and participation in early Byzantine liturgical texts”

AnnaLinden Weller, “The Narrative of Medieval Empire on the Frontier: Byzantine and Armenian Literatures in the 10th-11th Centuries”

17.00: Open lecture (Collège de France, salle Levi Strauss) by Ingela Nilsson (Uppsala) and Koen de Temmerman (Gent), “Novel Saints: from Greek novels to Byzantine storytelling”
Friday 13/5

9.30-10.30: Project presentations (EHES, 105 boulevard Raspail, salle 9)

   Ellen Söderblom Saarela, “The French Partonopeu de Blois and the Byzantine novel”

   Charis Messis, “Thématiques romanesques dans les sagas hagiographiques italiotes du VIIIe siècle (Grégoire d’Agrigente, Grégence de Taphar, Pancrace de Taormine)”

10.30-11.00: Coffee

11.00-13.00: Future collaboration: discussion (internal, not open for audience)

13.00: Lunch

16.00-18.00: The seminar of Prof. Bernard Flusin (Paris-Sorbonne) hosts two project presentations (Sorbonne, stairs E, 1st floor). Abstract for both papers below.

   Julie van Pelt, “Representations of Secret Sainthood and Performance in three Lives of Saints in disguise”

   Myrto Veikou, “Space and identity – a located negotiation: Lived spaces in the Life of Lazaros of Mt Galesion (11th century)”

Novel Saints: Studies in Ancient Fiction and Hagiography
(www.novelsaints.ugent.be/)

Text and Narrative in Byzantium (www.grekiska.net/byzantine-narrative/)
Julie Van Pelt, Representations of Secret Sainthood and Performance in Three Lives of Saints in Disguise

The Greek Lives of female cross-dressing saints and those of the (male) so-called ‘holy fools’ have been studied from various angles, often with a strong focus on gender issues. Moreover, the similarities between the two saintly types have not gone unnoticed and have recently started to induce comparative studies of both types of texts by raising the concept of ‘secret holiness’ (e.g. Dahlman 2007, 70). However, the full scope of this concept has yet to be explored, e.g. by extending the corpus to other relevant texts, a need that is revealed by Bernard Flusin’s concept of ‘le serviteur caché’ (2004) which pertains to other saints besides fools and cross-dressers. Indeed, there exist a number of Lives of saints which also feature ‘saints in disguise’ and share some important features with the Lives of cross-dressers/holy fools, but which, nevertheless, have not been studied in relation to those or to each other. Such a combined approach would shed a different light on texts that have been studied either in isolation or as part of a particular group of texts defined by specific gender patterns.

In this paper, I will conduct a comparative analysis of three texts, each representing one of the three categories of texts described above, in an attempt to establish ‘secret holiness’ as a narrative category within Greek hagiography. The texts I have chosen as test-cases are: the Life of Theodora of Alexandria (BHG 1727), a cross-dressing saint, the Life of Symeon Salos (BHG 1677), a holy fool, and the Life of John Kalyvites (BHG 868-9h), a saint who keeps his identity hidden from his family by pretending to be a beggar. More specifically, by revealing the structures and functions of each text and by highlighting their common features, I aim to identify some of the distinct narrative strategies employed to build a narrative of a saint in disguise. Moreover, I intend to refute traditional claims of late antiquity as a so-called ‘fictional dark age’ (MacMullen 1986) by reading the motif of secret sainthood as a marker of fictional narrative.

To meet these goals, the analysis of the texts will focus on representations of performance on two different interpretative levels, provided by the narratological concept of ‘Performativity II’ (Berns 2012), which denotes non-corporeal modes of representing action either on the level of the story or on the level of the narration. I will first analyze the performance of the saint in the story, using analytical tools and concepts provided by Erving Goffman’s social performance theory (1959), in order to demonstrate that Lives of secret saints use performance as a device to construct their narratives. Next, I will interpret Goffman’s theory metaphorically to analyze the ‘textual performance’ of the Lives by looking for self-conscious and meta-narrative discourse that foregrounds the act of narration itself and aligns the holy performance of the saint in disguise with the performance of the text, in order to see how these texts construct themselves as literature and as fiction.

References
Myrto Veikou, Space and identity – a located negotiation: Lived spaces in the Life of Lazaros of Mt Galesion (11th century)

The significance of spatial mobility in medieval hagiography has already received much academic attention. Since Eleanor Shipley Duckett’s book on medieval ‘wandering saints’ (1959), several scholars have offered interpretations of aspects of spatial mobility in Western European hagiographical texts (e.g. Craig 2009; Cassidy-Welch 2011). Elisabeth Malamut has presented the most complete outline and commentary of the geography of Byzantine hagiographical texts, including aspects of spatial mobility which she named ‘itinéraires de sainteté’ (1999).

In this paper, I will look at several kinds of spatial mobility (relocations, personal- and social space re-constructions etc.) in the eleventh-century Vita of Lazaros of Mt Galesion by Gregory the Cellarer (ed. Delehaye 1910; English translation by Greenfield 2000) as performative tools within the narrative. Based on theories of social performance and performativity (Goffman 1959; Butler 1990; Nelson 1999), I will comment on the links between emerging identities, social change and spatially embedded, intentional human practices, narrated in the text. I therefore intend to look not at the performativity of the Vita as narrative (Berns 2012), but mainly at the performativity of spaces by human agency (e.g. Nelson 1999) at the story level, as narrated in the Vita. Through a specific focus on relocation, a key narrative strategy in the Vita, I hope to show that identity in this text is performed as an iterative, non-foundational process, in relation to intentional human practice.

My main tool towards an understanding of these performed spaces is to consider space not as a ‘setting of action’ or ‘backdrop to plot’, but as a part of human agency. In that direction, I use the analytical category of ‘lived spaces’, first suggested by Henri Lefebvre in 1974 and built upon by later scholars in cultural geography. Lived space (or representational spaces) – an integral part of a dialectic triad for the study of space, which also includes ‘perceived space’ (or spatial practices) and ‘conceived space’ (or representations of space) – is used so as to allow the integration of unidentified cultural features into human spaces (Lefebvre 1974). Thus, this particular concept of lived space brings Lefebvre’s approach close to contemporary non-representational (Thrift 2007) and space-performativity theories (Nelson 1999).

References


Cassidy-Welch Megan, 2011. ‘Incarcération du corps et libération de l’esprit: un motif hagiographique’. In Isabelle Heuillant-Donat, Julie Clautre and Élisabeth Lusset, eds., Enfermements: le cloître et la prison (Vie-XVIIIe siècle). Actes du colloque international organisé par le Centre d’études et de recherche en histoire


