

Abstract

This book delves into the role of prison in pre-Metaphrastic martyr narratives (dating from the fourth to the ninth century), whose reworkings constitute by far the largest percentage of texts in the tenth-century Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes (ca. 80 of 148 texts). In this literary analysis, comparisons are drawn between pre-Metaphrastic and Metaphrastic text versions, the majority of which is not translated into any modern language and has never received any critical attention. Inspired by the anthropological concept of liminality (Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner), the author argues that prison is a transitional space where both the formation of corporeal endurance and the spiritual maturation of the protagonists take place, contributing to their identity as martyrs. Within the examined martyrdom accounts, prison scenes interrupt the narrative flow and serve multiple functions: a relaxing pause for martyr and audience, insertion of sermon-like exhortations, introduction of additional characters, delay of the martyr's death and suspense for both characters and actual readers or listeners. Through their actions and activities in prison, such as miracles and prayers, the imprisoned martyrs prove to be intercessors between God and man and thus gain their reputation for holiness. A series of chapters discusses key aspects of prison as a liminal space from the perspectives of terminology (chapter 1), narrative (esp. chapter 2), gender (chapter 3), emotions and the senses (chapter 4). All chapters underline the multi-layered transformation of characters as well as of prison spaces that occurs during the confinement of martyrs. Apart from a critical reading of the sources, this work provides German translations of the Greek passages in question and produces new insights into Byzantine hagiographical studies.

