

Iohannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1976, pp. 287 + 182 Ills, [Byzantina Neerlandica, fasciculus 6].

Studies in Byzantine portraiture have not been too common. This fact is somewhat surprising because of the information it can supply not only for the dating, provenance, and style of works of art—questions of critical importance for the art historian—but also, and more generally, for the social history of Byzantium. Since Spatharakis' recent study seems to represent the first monograph devoted specifically to portraiture in Byzantine illuminated manuscripts, art historians and other historians will welcome it as a valuable body of material on which to draw for their own purposes and as an important and indeed fundamental addition in itself to the historiography of the Empire.

The author limits his investigation of portraiture to imagery in illuminated manuscripts. He excludes all other media unless they contain representations of the same personalities shown in the manuscripts. He is concerned only with portraits of known historical figures, not with those of religious figures such as Christ, the Virgin, or the evangelists, and then only if it can be ascertained with reasonable accuracy that the images were executed during the lifetime of the person portrayed; posthumous portraits are dealt with only if they show the actual features of the person portrayed.

Examining some sixty-one manuscripts, he arranges them according to the content—Old Testament, New Testament, theological, scientific, historical, chrysobulls, typica, and a small heterogeneous group of other types such as an *epithalamion*, a funeral oration, and the *Patria Konstantinopoleos*. Examining firsthand all of these examples whenever possible, he properly focuses on the relation between text and miniature in a manner reminiscent of the methodology of Kurt Weitzmann, and his close study offers new and occasionally controversial findings not only about the identities of some of the persons portrayed but also about the physical makeup of the codices, their provenance, chronology, iconography, and repaintings. On the whole sound methodology is combined with reasoned judgment. His descriptions of the portraits are carefully detailed and are especially useful for the information they provide on the colors used by the miniaturists. Black and white illustrations of all the portraits he discusses, including some fine details of the heads, accompany the book; the quality of the illustrations is generally very high. The study opens with a survey of scholarly opinion on what constitutes a portrait and is strengthened with a full bibliographic apparatus, an appendix on Byzantine garments (a closer study of which the author correctly sees as needed), and a usefully detailed index.

With two exceptions all the manuscripts date from the post-Iconoclastic period. The earliest preserved portrait of a living historical personality is Juliana Anicia in the Vienna Dioscurides manuscript, and the author rightly observes that many others existed in pre-Iconoclastic times; in fact lost specimens of that period exemplified a matrix of types. The oldest preserved portrait of an emperor in a Byzantine manuscript appears in the Coptic Bible in Naples, a frequently discussed work for which the author accepts a *terminus ante quem* of 629. Following Delbrueck, he identifies the family portrait in this manuscript with the family of the emperor Heraclius.

Spatharakis calls our attention to some interesting and even surprising aspects of portraiture in Byzantine manuscripts. Some miniatures depict a person who was scribe, illuminator, and donor of the manuscript (figs. 18, 43, and 69) and are therefore self portraits. Occasionally Byzantine artists would adopt the portraits of ruling emperors to serve as models of saints or other religious persons (e.g., figs. 5 and 41), a phenomenon also known in other media (p. 72). In one case a miniaturist even used a portrait of an empress to repre-

sent a personification (p. 80 and fig. 46). Imperial portraits occasionally form anthropomorphic initial letters (figs. 9, 10, and 47). "Portraits" of the evangelists appear to have furnished models for portraits of living historical personalities, e.g. Nicetas Choniates (?) in *Vind. Hist. gr.* 53 (fig. 98). Some manuscripts present thorny iconographic problems, sometimes involving prosopography (e.g., pp. 210ff.). Others contain narrative scenes with living persons (e.g., *Vat. gr.* 1851), but these are rare.

The author's major conclusions may be summarized as follows. First, the study of portraiture can illuminate the occasions on which a manuscript was executed, imperial coronations, (e.g. *Barb. gr.* 372), installation of a *hegoumenos* (e.g. *Paris gr.* 74), presentation as a gift to a person or a place (e.g. Louvre, Ivories 100), replacement of a manuscript destroyed for one reason or another (e.g. the Lincoln typicon). Some portraits depict not actual coronation events but the symbolic coronation of an emperor.

Second, manuscripts containing images of an individual portrayed in the act of offering a codex were probably presented to a person or a foundation and not retained for private use (e.g. *Coilsin* 79). Concomitantly, the act of receiving the book is not depicted in the majority of manuscripts commissioned for private devotion (e.g. *Marc. gr.* Z 17 and *Paris, gr.* 510).

Third, *ktetorika* are invariably represented in dedication miniatures of manuscripts with theological contents (including psalters) in front of Christ or other figures from the New but not the Old Testament. Pictures of such figures were normally placed at the beginning of codices.

Fourth, imperial portraits in chrysobulls are known to appear first in the Palaeologian period and seem to reveal a chronological development from portraits of the emperor alone to imperial family portraits. These images were probably made not in monasteries but in palace scriptoria, and their miniaturists adopted existing iconographies of ruling emperors and families.

Fifth, authors other than emperors are shown in the act of presenting their works, or addressing the person for whom they were composed, or are shown in *proskynesis*. Some of these types derive from ancient author portraits.

Sixth, manuscripts with historical texts were illuminated with images corresponding to the text passages they illustrate.

Seventh, the iconography of portraits of the deceased is identical to that of the living. Such a connection is established as early as the Macedonian dynasty.

Eighth, Spatharakis rightly challenges André Grabar's thesis (see *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 14, 1960, pp. 123ff.) that portraits of the imperial family in Byzantine, Armenian, and Slavic manuscripts of the Palaeologian period derive from contemporary iconography of the families of the Byzantine aristocracy in their residences. Examples of imperial portraits of the late antique period are recorded in literary sources (p. 252), and although Spatharakis does not mention it, the type was already established in the Roman period, as is attested by second—and third—century frescoes discovered in the 1930s at Dura Europos and the fourth-century frescoes from the villa at Lullingstone in Britain. These Roman group portraits of high-ranking families and the military surely evolved from the realm of imperial art, but on the basis of evidence on hand we cannot determine whether the imperial group portrait originated in Roman manuscripts or, as seems far more likely, either monumental art or *laurata* such as the one of Septimius Severus and his family in the Staatliche Museen in East Berlin. But Spatharakis is surely right in concluding that the tradition of imperial family portraits survived into the Palaeologian period and influenced family portraits of the aristocracy. What remains for future studies of portraits of the Byzantine nobility is to

ascertain which examples were based on imperial sources and which examples on aristocratic sources.

The final and major conclusion of the monograph is based on the problem of whether Byzantine miniaturists were preoccupied with the task of reproducing genuine likenesses of their sitters. This is an important and yet difficult and intricate issue. Spatharakis rightly observes that the style of portraits of known historical figures differs from the style of "portraits" of religious figures in manuscripts, sometimes in one and the same codex. The former tend toward abstraction and the latter toward Hellenistic naturalism. As the author points out, Kitzinger has made the same observation for portraits surviving from the pre-Iconoclastic period, especially for those made in Italy and northwestern Yugoslavia. Thus Spatharakis finds that this tradition emerging in Byzantine artistic practice as early as the fifth century and rooted in it from 550 A.D. onwards survived into post-Iconoclastic times and was not restricted to imagery in manuscripts; it also typifies other artistic media. Consequently he accepts the fact that the majority of portraits of historical persons in Byzantine manuscripts are not as literal in their representativeness as those of religious figures. It is therefore perhaps surprising to find him going on to maintain that Byzantine artists intended to and "in most cases succeeded in representing a genuine likeness of the person portrayed so convincingly as to satisfy even a modern critic" (p. 256). He reaches this conclusion by comparing the manuscript portraits whenever possible with descriptions of sitters in literary sources and with images in other artistic media. True, many of these artists seem to have accurately recorded the countenance and the color of the eyes, the beard, or the hair of their sitters. In these terms we are confronted with real rather than imaginary images. But would faithful adherence to such salient external features of the physiognomy satisfy a modern critic? Spatharakis himself demonstrates that Byzantine miniaturists applied three different colors for the beard to suggest the age of a male sitter: dark for the younger, grey for the middle aged and white for those of advanced age, presumably even if that was not the actual color of the beard. He rightly admits the difficulty of Byzantine artists to represent the age of a woman and their incapability to represent children *qua* children. He also convincingly shows that the majority of the historical portraits represented in scenes accompanying chronicles or homilies do not provide objective likenesses of emperors or other high officials; a satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon is not provided. Moreover, Byzantine manuscript portraits range from the conventional to the highly individualistic and deeply humanistic. But a modern critic would feel compelled to inquire of the author whether he thinks Byzantine miniaturists tried to reveal their sitters in time, in the very moment of life, with characteristic flash of personality and inner spirit. Given the above mentioned observations, it is apparent that they did not and were perhaps incapable of doing so. Not only did Byzantine portrait painters as a rule adhere steadfastly to artistic conventions which prevented them from achieving "genuine likenesses", but they were also probably prevented from doing so, at least in cases of the ruling emperor and his family, by the simple fact that their subjects did not actually sit for them! Byzantine portraits constitute rough proximations which were executed as it were by remote control. Nonetheless, they must have constituted visual records that satisfied their subjects and have been sufficiently objective in the information they supplied to serve their purpose and meet their requirements.

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