BOOK REVIEW

Cyprus between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (ca.600–800): An Island in Transition, by Luca Zavagno (London: Routledge, 2017; pp. 228. £110).

Luca Zavagno's monograph on early medieval Cyprus develops ideas and views that have long been present and persistent in the relevant literature but were never articulated in such a thorough manner. These pertain to the fate of the island after the prosperous late antique period, when the types of evidence routinely employed by historians and archaeologists become far less forthcoming—while the changing conditions in the Mediterranean, with the advent of Islam, introduced a set of new parameters. The author challenges the traditional view of a sudden and catastrophic collapse of the island's economy and thriving urban culture as a result of the mid-seventh-century Arab raids. Instead, he argues for continuity through an age during which Cyprus was transformed into a 'middle ground' between the Byzantine Empire and the Arab Caliphate. This is no trivial matter, for what happened on the island is crucial to our understanding of the transformations of the Mediterranean world as it moved away from the well-studied ancient Roman into a fragmented medieval set-up. At the same time, the author shifts the focus away from the typical concerns of historians of Cyprus, who have tended to concentrate on a small number of issues, including the division of taxes between Empire and Caliphate, the transplantation of the population to the Sea of Marmara by the Byzantine authorities towards the close of the seventh century, and the role of the church in shaping society and loyalties beyond the island's shores.

Zavagno approaches his topic through the testimony of the available evidence, namely ceramics, coins, lead seals, inscriptions and other archaeological material, together with excavated or surviving structures and texts, exploiting the wealth of previous studies on all of these and building on their conclusions, which he frequently fine-tunes or revises in the light of more recent research. The outcome is a compelling interpretation and synthesis that is, moreover, placed within a comparative framework, which seeks to extract pertinent clues from appraisals of the same period in other parts of the Mediterranean (primarily other islands).

In the two opening chapters, Zavagno sets out the scope and methodology of his approach, providing an overview and critique of past literature as well as justification of the temporal limits of his investigation. The latter constitute an important aspect of the author's perspective, for he places the period of the raids and their contentious impact at the chronological heart of his coverage, prompting a most fruitful discussion. In the third chapter, the problems of the sources and archaeology are dissected (dating, reliability, purpose) and the associated misconceptions and preconceptions are unravelled, while Chapter Four dwells on the administration of the island and its institutions. Chapter Five focuses on the contribution of archaeology, including surveys and excavations, bringing to the fore the variety of developments across the island's territory and the lack of uniformity in the evolution of particular areas

or settlements. The fortunes of Salamis-Constantia, administrative capital in this period, are then discussed in some detail. This is a site that yields signs of continuity into the eighth century, and the discussion closely follows Zavagno's findings as set out in his earlier publication (*Mediterranean Historical Review*, xxix, 2014). Similarly, Chapter Six, which deals with the economy, owes a lot to the author's *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* article (2011–12), and employs the ceramic and numismatic evidence to argue for persisting contacts and exchange with the surrounding mainland (Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine, Egypt). The concluding chapter focuses on the subsequent period (9th/10th centuries) expressing preliminary, and perhaps overly optimistic, thoughts on the possibility that the resilience of the island's pattern of economic development extended beyond the eighth century, well into the middle Byzantine period and the upturn of the Comnenian era.

As noted above, this is a study that seeks to overturn long-held assumptions and to move the discussion forward, in the light of ground-breaking studies of the period pertaining to both the wider Byzantine world (not least those by Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, frequently referred to by the author) and to the island itself. Indeed, the reader needs to become familiar with the latter in order to appreciate fully Zavagno's somewhat abstract argumentation which uses broad brushstrokes that tend to dilute the granularity of the subject-matter. The author rarely provides detailed information on the archaeological or other material that he discusses, which makes recourse to these earlier studies imperative (a good recent addition is Michael Decker's *The Byzantine Dark Ages* [2016]). An indication of the number of seals, coin hoards or inscriptions and of their context, and of comparative data from earlier or later periods, would have been of immense help in putting them into perspective. Michael Metcalf's *Byzantine Cyprus 401–1191* (2009), in particular, forms a most pertinent pendant to Zavagno's book, for that author's markedly different approach results in a contrasting set of conclusions with which the author of the study reviewed here engages extensively and takes issue on several occasions.

A final observation on editing and presentation: one would have expected a renowned publisher such as Routledge to pay more attention or to alert its authors to problems with formatting, spelling consistency and outright spelling mistakes. Foreign titles and the names of authors in the bibliography are riddled with infelicitous slips. Within the main text there is hardly a page without missing words, errors in the (all too frequent) citations from the secondary literature, misspelt place-names and other such irksome distractions from what is undoubtedly a stimulating and most inspiring discussion.

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