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ATHENAIS-EUDOCIA – THE AUGUSTA OF PALESTINE

(remarks on the book: Т.Л. АЛЕКСАНДРОВА, *Византийская императрица Афинаида-Евдокия. Жизнь и творчество в контексте эпохи правления императора Феодосия II (401–450)* [Byzantine Empress Athenais-Eudocia. Life and Works in the Context of the Reign of Theodosius II (401–450)], Алетейя, Санкт-Петербург 2018, pp. 415 [Новая византийская библиотека. Исследования])

Tat'jana Lvovna Aleksandrova is associate professor at the Department of Ancient Languages and Ancient Christian Literature at Saint Tikhon's Orthodox University of the Humanities in Moscow. She has authored many studies on Late Antique ecclesiastical writers as well as published several editions and translations of their works¹. The book on Athenais-Eudocia is the fruit of many years' worth

of research, whose results have partly been published in earlier smaller articles².

The protagonist of Aleksandrova's book is certainly a multi-faceted and controversial figure. Probably born after 400 in the family of pagan philosopher Leontius, she was given the name Athenais. Tradition has it that she was born in Athens, although some scholars³ have proposed Antioch as another possible location. Her father made sure she received an education and developed her literary interests. Athenais also had two brothers, Gessius and Valerius. After her father's death, Athenais remained in the custody of the mother's sister; with her, she traveled to Constantinople, where she was in turn taken care of by the sister of her late father. Some sources maintain that she was received (in the company of her aunts) by Theodosius II's sister Pulcheria, to whom she com-

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¹ АМБРОСИЙ МЕДИОЛАНСКИЙ, *Собрание творений* [AMBROSE OF MILAN, *Collected Works*], vol. II, introd. ed. et. Т.Л. АЛЕКСАНДРОВОЙ, Москва 2012; АМБРОСИЙ МЕДИОЛАНСКИЙ, *Собрание творений* [AMBROSE OF MILAN, *Collected Works*], vol. IV.1, trans. Т.Л. АЛЕКСАНДРОВОЙ, Москва 2014; ГЕРОНТИЙ, *Житие преподобной Мелании* [GERONTIUS, *Life of Melania*], introd., ed. et trans. Т.Л. АЛЕКСАНДРОВОЙ, ВПСТГУ 3.3 (43), 2015, p. 71–107; ГРИГОРИЙ НИССКИЙ, *Аскетические сочинения и письма* [GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Ascetical Works and Letters*], ed. et introd. Т.Л. АЛЕКСАНДРОВОЙ, Москва 2007; ГРИГОРИЙ НИССКИЙ, *Послание о жизни святой Макрины* [GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Epistle on the Life of St. Macrina*], trans. et ed. Т.Л. АЛЕКСАНДРОВОЙ, Москва 2002; *Феодосий II и Пульхерия в изображении Созомена. (К проблеме датировки «Церковной истории»)* [Theodosius II and Pulcheria as Depicted by Sozomen. (Revisiting the Chronology of "Historia Ecclesiastica")], ВДИ 76.2, 2016, p. 371–386.

² E.g.: *Императрица Евдокия и почитание Богоматери в V в. по Р.Х.* [Empress Eudocia and the Veneration of the Theotokos in the 5th Century AD], СМу 7, 2015, p. 88–95; *Императрица Афинаида-Евдокия: путь к трону* [Empress Athenais-Eudocia: the Path to the Throne], ПИФК 1, 2017, p. 75–87; *О времени и причинах удаления императрицы Евдокии во Святую Землю* [On the Dating and Reasons for Eudocia's Leaving for the Holy Land], ВДИ 77.1, 2017, p. 106–125.

³ K.G. HOLUM, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1982, p. 117.

plained regarding her father's unjust testament, favoring her brothers⁴. She reportedly charmed Pulcheria with her beauty, stature and erudition; in effect, the empress recommended her to her brother – emperor Theodosius – as a potential wife. Theodosius fell deeply in love with Athenais and indeed decided to marry her. Before this happened, however, she had to renounce her ancestors' religion and convert to Christianity. At her baptism – officiated by Atticus, bishop of Constantinople – Athenais received her new name, Eudocia. The marriage ceremony took place on June 7, 421; the emperor celebrated it by holding races at the Hippodrome and arranging numerous theatrical spectacles. There can be little doubt that Theodosius's marriage was a political act of utmost importance. It was so because in February 421, in the western part of the Empire, Theodosius's uncle Honorius bestowed the title of emperor on Constantius, the husband of his half-sister Galla Placidia; subsequently, they jointly conferred on her the title of *augusta*. The imperial couple had had a male child – Valentinian – for two years already, while an heir was yet to appear at the court in Constantinople. As a result, Eudocia faced the task of ensuring the dynasty's continuity.

Thus, 422 saw the birth of Eudocia and Theodosius's first child – Licinia Eudoxia. Later, the imperial couple had one more daughter (Flacilla) as well as a son (Arcadius), but both died in early childhood, so that all of Theodosius and his wife's hopes rested on Licinia Eudoxia. The birth of the first child certainly fortified Eudocia's position at her husband's side. On January 2, 423 she was proclaimed *augusta*; her image started appearing on coins. From that point onwards, two women held the title of *augusta* in the East: Eudocia-Athenais and her sister-in-law Pulcheria. The status of Eudocia's family also increased considerably: her uncle Asclepiodotus was appointed praetorian prefect of the East, her brother Gessius – praetorian prefect of Illyricum, while Valerius became *magister officiorum*.

One of the effects of Eudocia's influence on Theodosius was reportedly the founding of

the university in Constantinople in 425. The empress was famous for her love of books: as we learn from Socrates Scholasticus, *she had excellent literary taste and had been instructed in every kind of learning by her father*⁵. In fact, she was an active writer herself, having authored e.g. an epic on the 421–422 war against the Persians, a paraphrase of the Old Testament, a work on St. Cyprian, or a history of the passion of the Christ. These works may not have been of superior quality, but they nevertheless testify to the author's extraordinary skills when compared with the general status of women at the time. Theodosius's wife is also credited with having brought to Constantinople a number of eminent orators and philosophers (including pagans), who enjoyed the support of the imperial court.

In 437, Eudocia participated in her daughter Licinia Eudoxia's wedding to Western Roman emperor Valentinian III, son of Galla Placidia and Constantius III; the ceremony was held in Constantinople. Soon afterwards, the empress left the capital. According to the tradition, her departure was connected with an oath she had made – namely, that she would embark on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land as soon as she saw her daughter married. It seems, however, that the *augusta's* position at the court had been deteriorating steadily since 431; the one benefiting from this was Pulcheria, her rival, whose influence had grown stronger. Some scholars argue that Theodosius – indubitably a devout ruler, deeply concerned with matters of religion – may have resolved to remain in celibacy (following the example of his sister), which automatically made it impossible for Eudocia to give birth to a male heir to the throne. Unable to stand the atmosphere at the court and seeing her influence on her husband wane – it is claimed – Eudocia decided to leave for Jerusalem, which happened in February or March 438. While on her way to the Holy Land, she stopped in Antioch, whose inhabitants celebrated her presence by erecting two statues in her honor (of gold and bronze, respectively); on her part,

⁴ *Ioannis Malalae chronographia*, XIV, 4, ed. J. THURN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2000 [= *CFHB*, 35] (cetera: MALALAS).

⁵ SOKRATES, *Kirchengeschichte*, VII, 21, ed. G.C. HANSEN, Berlin 1995 [= *GCS*, 1] (cetera: SOKRATES); SOKRATES, *Church History from AD 305–438*, trans. A.C. ZENOS, [in:] *NPFC* II, vol. II, ed. P. SCHAFF, H. WACE, New York 1890, p. 164.

the *augusta* spent some of her financial assets on covering the needs of the Antiochene community. When she reached Jerusalem in May 438, her closest associates came to include Melania the Younger (an organizer of women's monastic life, whom she had met back in Constantinople) and Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria (with whom she participated in the consecration of the temple of Stephen the Martyr). Furthermore, she made contact with Syrian archimandrite Barsauma, whose clothes she later brought to Constantinople alongside the relics of Saint Stephen the Martyr. The empress visited numerous holy sites, took part in religious ceremonies, and distributed donations; Socrates Scholasticus asserts that *on her visit to the sacred city, [she] adorned its churches with the most costly gifts; and both then, and after her return, decorated all the churches in the other cities of the East with a variety of ornaments*⁶.

Eudocia's arrival in Constantinople in 439 was in fact triumphal: she returned as an empress who, like Constantine the Great's mother Helena, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, was venerated by the Antiochenes with statues, mingled with saints, and brought their relics with her. She was greeted exceptionally cordially by the people of Constantinople, led by none other than emperor Theodosius (as stressed by 6th-century historian Marcellinus Comes⁷). It appeared that Eudocia could hope to recover the lost position at her husband's side – all the more so because her return coincided with one of her close allies, Cyrus (of Panopolis in Egypt), assuming the post of prefect of Constantinople. This was not to be, however, as the rivalry between Eudocia and Pulcheria rekindled and was noticed by Theodosius's eunuch Chrysaphius, an immensely ambitious and power-thirsty figure. He decided to manipulate the conflict between the two *augustae* to his own benefit – in order to assume full control over the emperor. As remarked by Theophanes⁸, Chrysaphius talked Eudocia into demanding that her husband transfer Pulcheria's court *praepositus*

under her command. In practice, this would have been tantamount to annihilating the independence of her rival's palace retinue. When Theodosius refused, Eudocia suggested – again, following Chrysaphius's advice – that he make Pulcheria a nun, given that she had sworn virginity anyway. The ruler consented, but Proclus, the patriarch of Constantinople at the time, managed to warn Pulcheria of the impending danger. Thus, aware of the emperor's intents, his sister left the court on her own and relocated to the palace in Hebdomon, outside Constantinople. As it later turned out, this was by no means the final chapter of the empress's political career; in fact, in the long run, it was Pulcheria who was to emerge victorious from the confrontation with Eudocia and Chrysaphius. For the time being, however, the latter two were triumphant.

Meanwhile, Chrysaphius – having done away with a dangerous rival with Eudocia's help – now turned against his ally and her associates. In 443, Cyrus lost his post of prefect of Constantinople and was exiled (his wealth forfeited). Some sources⁹ maintain that the empress herself faced serious trouble, as Theodosius purportedly came to suspect her of having an affair with *magister officiorum* Paulinus (the famed story of the Phrygian apple¹⁰). This information is entirely untrue, however; it was fabricated in order to make the empress look bad. On the other hand, it is a fact that Theodosius first exiled the *magister officiorum* to Cappadocia (443) and subsequently sentenced him to death; Paulinus was probably executed in 444 in Caesarea. In all likelihood, the reason for these harsh measures was his plotting against the emperor.

Sometime after Paulinus's demise, but independently of this event, Eudocia left Constantinople and once again made her way to the Holy Land (with her husband's permission). She remained there for the rest of her life. Owing to her efforts, the walls of Jerusalem were renovated and strengthened. She also spent considerable amounts of money supporting the monks and the clergy, for whom she constantly acted as a patron. Her donations enabled the building of a bishop's palace as well as shelters for pilgrims and for the poor; they also made it pos-

⁶ SOCRATES, VII, 47 (translation p. 178).

⁷ *Chronicle of Marcellinus*, a. 439, trans. et ed. B. CROKE, Sydney 1995 [= BAus, 7].

⁸ THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, AM 5940, ed. C. DE BOOR, vol. I, Lipsiae 1883.

⁹ MALALAS, XIV, 8.

¹⁰ MALALAS, *loc. cit.*

sible to adorn a number of churches. The most spectacular of those – as reported by Evagrius Scholasticus¹¹ – was the: *very great sanctuary of Stephen the first deacon and martyr, outstanding in size and beauty, not one stade distant from Jerusalem*. This church had been inaugurated already in 438, when Eudocia had visited the city for the first time. The empress also commenced the construction of the church of St. Peter as well as of a large cistern two miles away from the monastery of St. Euphemius.

In her final years – after the death of Theodosius II, during the reign of Marcian and Pulcheria – Eudocia got involved in the struggle for the bishop's throne of Jerusalem. The contenders were Juvenal, a follower of the Council of Chalcedon backed by the imperial court in Constantinople, and Theodosius, supported by Eudocia as well as by a large part of Palestinian monks, adhering to the Monophysite heresy (we may add that the empress herself apparently sided with the latter as well). It took a military intervention to restore Jerusalem under Juvenal's control. In 455, Eudocia – beseeched by her relatives, implored by pope Leo the Great, and advised by Simeon Stylites as well as St. Euphemius – decided to return to the Orthodox faith and to recognize Juvenal as patriarch. That being said, we know that she kept supporting the Monophysites, offering them sites for new monasteries.

In the last year of her life, the empress persuaded Anastasius, patriarch of Jerusalem and successor of Juvenal, to consecrate the still unfinished church of St. Stephen, and subsequently to embark on a journey across Palestine to sanctify all churches she had funded there, including those still under construction.

Eudocia died in 460 in Jerusalem, retaining the dignity of *augusta* until her death. The above brief outline of her biography and accomplishments should suffice to justify our previous statement that she was a most interesting figure – both in view of her turbulent life and her ecclesiastic and literary activities. It should be

pointed out, however, that the available sources make it challenging to conduct research on Eudocia: the material is not only scanty, but also irregularly distributed (only shedding light on certain stages of the empress's life) as well as largely tendentious (to wit, unfavorable towards Eudocia).

Aleksandrova's book grew out of her fascination with the Byzantine empress and her achievements. The Russian scholar divided her work into five essential parts. In Chapter I, *Athenais-Eudocia's Path to the Throne* (*Путь Афинаиды-Евдокии к трону*, p. 17–67), Aleksandrova depicts the intellectual environment of Athens, where the young Athenais grew up (the author subscribes to the view that the future empress was born in this city); besides, she analyzes the circumstances that ultimately led Athenais towards the imperial palace. According to Aleksandrova, the figures behind her ascent included her uncle Asclepiodotus as well as the group of people that the scholar refers to as the "Christian Hellenists" (p. 37): they expected that Athenais would weaken the position of Pulcheria, a rigorous Christian. Leontius's daughter caught Theodosius's attention due to both her beauty and her intellectual pursuits, which the emperor happened to share. In Chapter II, *Eudocia – the Empress of the Romaioi* (*Евдокия – царица империи ромеев*, p. 68–153), Aleksandrova presents the story of her protagonist against the backdrop of the political and religious life of the Empire from the year 421 until the late 430s, when Eudocia began her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In this part of the book, the Russian scholar devotes considerable space to the issue of Theodosius and Eudocia's son Arcadius: she agrees with the view that the imperial couple indeed had a male descendant and presents certain new arguments in support of it. In Chapter III, *The Dark Decade* (*Темное десятилетие*, p. 154–218), the author attempts to reconstruct Eudocia's life during the 440s, poorly and often ambiguously reflected in the sources. Aleksandrova focuses especially on the circumstances of the empress's second voyage to the Holy Land. The comprehensive analysis of the sources leads the scholar to conclude that the journey may well have taken place only in the late 440s and that it certainly had nothing to do with Paulinus's

¹¹ *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia*, I, 22, ed. J. BIDEZ, L. PARMENTIER, London 1898 [= ByzT]; *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, trans. et ed. M. WHITBY, Liverpool 2000 [= TTH, 33], p. 52.

fall from grace. Moreover, Aleksandrova is of the opinion that even if there was indeed some sort of conflict between Eudocia and Theodosius, it would have hardly precluded the empress's return to Constantinople. It was only after the emperor's untimely death that the possibility was no longer available. In Chapter IV, *Eudocia in Jerusalem* (Евдокия в Иерусалиме, p. 219–279), Aleksandrova recounts the empress's final years, discussing her acts of donation, her stance on the Council of Chalcedon, as well as the question of her canonization. Chapter V, *Eudocia's Poetic Works* (Поэтическое творчество Евдокии, p. 280–381), features an extensive analysis of the extant remains of the empress's literary output. As regards the latter's artistic value, Aleksandrova comes to the balanced and presumably legitimate conclusion that *as a poet, Eudocia was no 'first-class' figure; still, the hyper-critical attitude toward her works, dominant in the last decades, is unjustified*¹². The book is complemented by an *Introduction* (p. 5–16), *Conclusions* (p. 382–386), indices (p. 387–388), list of abbreviations (p. 398–401) and bibliography (p. 402–413).

Tat'jana Lvovna Aleksandrova's book is an interesting attempt to present the biography and literary oeuvre of empress Eudocia in a comprehensive manner. The work utilizes an ample body of secondary literature¹³ as well as – even more importantly – an exhaustive source base; through the meticulous analysis of the latter, Aleksandrova is able to construct novel and original views

on a number of issues relevant for present-day scholarship. Thus, the book will no doubt inspire other researchers to participate in further discussion on the 'Augusta of Palestine'.

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¹² Как поэт Евдокия не принадлежала к фигурам "первого ряда", но гиперкритическое отношение к ее творчеству, преобладавшее в последние десятилетия, неправомерно (p. 379).

¹³ However, we should note that the bibliography lacks several works by K. TWARDOWSKA, *Religious Views of the Empress Athenais Eudocia*, [in:] *Hortus Historiae. Księga pamiątkowa ku czci Profesora Józefa Wolskiego w setną rocznicę urodzin*, ed. E. DĄBROWA, M. DZIELSKA, M. SALAMON, S. SPRAWSKI, Kraków 2010, p. 621–634; *Athenais Eudocia – Divine or Christian Woman?*, [in:] *Divine Men and Women in the History and Society of Late Hellenism*, ed. M. DZIELSKA, K. TWARDOWSKA, Kraków 2013, p. 149–158; *Religious Foundations of Empress Athenais Eudocia in Palestine*, [in:] *Within the Circle of Ancient Ideas and Virtues. Studies in Honour of Professor Maria Dzielska*, ed. K. TWARDOWSKA, M. SALAMON, S. SPRAWSKI, M. STACHURA, S. TURLEJ, Kraków 2014, p. 307–317.

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MAŁGORZATA SKOWRONEK, *Średniowieczne opowieści biblijne. Paleja historyczna w tradycji bizantyńsko-słowiańskiej [Medieval Biblical Stories. Palaea Historica in the Byzantine-Slavic Tradition]*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2017 [= Series Ceranea, 4], pp. 396.

The monograph by Dr. Małgorzata Skowronek (Department of Slavic Philology, Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz), entitled *Medieval Biblical Stories. Palaea Historica in the Byzantine-Slavic Tradition*¹ [*Średniowieczne opowieści biblijne. Paleja historyczna w tradycji bizantyńsko-słowiańskiej*] and published by Lodz University Press, constitutes a continuation of the author's previous research: earlier, in 2016, the Lodz-based philologist published a commented critical edition of the second Slavic translation of the *Palaea Historica*².

¹ The translations of all titles in the book under review follow the ones provided in the English summary at the end (translator's note).

² M. SKOWRONEK, *Palaea Historica. The Second Slavic Translation: Commentary and Text*, trans. Y. LOSKE, Łódź 2016 [= SeCer, 3]. The scholar's other key works include: *Średniowieczne herezje dualistyczne na Bałkanach. Źródła słowiańskie [Medieval Dualist Heresies in the Balkans. The Slavic Sources]*, ed. et trans. G. MINCZEW, M. SKOWRONEK, J.M. WOLSKI, Łódź

The literary monument that Skowronek is interested in is a collection of Old Testament narratives – based in part on the Scripture as well as on certain non-canonical texts, but also drawing on assorted other sources. The *Palaea Historica* was written in the 9th century in Greek, by an unknown author. Subsequently, two Slavic translations of the work arose independently of each other. Both in her most recent work and in the above-mentioned source edition, Skowronek deals with the second Slavic translation (referred to using the abbreviation PH II in the work), comparing it extensively with the Byzantine original (PGr) as well as the first Slavic translation (PH I). The scholar undertakes a meticulous analysis of the text, striving to uncover its exact sources as well as to identify the

2015 [= SeCer, 1]; "Świat cały ma Cię za obrońcę". *Michał Archanioł w kulturze Słowian prawosławnych na Bałkanach* ["The Whole World Has a Guardian in You". *Archangel Michael in the Culture of Orthodox Slavs in the Balkans*], Łódź 2008.