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The tenth-century Life of Basil the Younger offers a rich repository for Byzantine social and religious history, a source to be mined for details and puzzled over in its entirety. Its concatenation of various genres into a single text challenges assumptions about the purposes and functions of hagiography in medieval Orthodoxy. This new edition, with its deftly wrought English translation on facing pages, provides opportunities not only for Byzantinists but also for students of comparative medieval Mediterranean cultural history to reexamine a number of key issues. Among topics for further inquiry, the Life of Basil contains critical evidence for the history of gender, sexuality, slavery, eunuchs, spiritual direction, and anti-Judaism, as well as individual and collective eschatology. It also provides important portraits of household and urban life.

The editors have judiciously emended the text preserved in Moscow, Synodal Library gr. 249, a 16th-century witness to the longest version of the work, which they reasonably conclude to be closest to the original composition. Their introduction lays out various scholarly controversies surrounding the text without advocating with unwarranted certainty about date, authorship, or historicity. Section summaries and a thorough index will make dipping into this enormous text relatively easy for scholars from other disciplines. The edition identifies and
distinguishes biblical quotations and echoes. Though very frequent, these allusions generally hew closely to the parameters of the Bible as read out in the tenth-century lectionary, and may provide more evidence for the author and his audience. Of some interest is the reliance on Revelation for some details in the description of heaven, indicating the increased influence of that work as it became canonical. Further research would likely identify a large number of tags drawn from the liturgy. The translation, the first into any modern language, renders the text accurately, capturing the liveliness, character, and register of the original Greek. Sullivan and Talbot are two of the most experienced medieval Greek philologists working in English. One will occasionally quibble with their word choice (such as "homosexuality" for andromania and "homosexuals" for arsenokoitai when the Greek means something more like "men who have engaged in homosexual activity," that is, as a class of sinners, not an orientation), and occasionally the notes to the translation are a bit sparser than ideal to convey broader contexts to nonspecialists. But these issues hardly detract from the editors' herculean achievement and invite further research. While scholars have worked with the text for some time, this translation will no doubt increase its use by and importance for Byzantinists.

Some 350 pages of Greek in this edition, Life of Basil the Younger constitutes one of the longest medieval saint's lives in any language. The flow of the saint's narrative, however, is interrupted by two long apocalypses, revelatory visions provided to the author by the saint's request. With their accounts of the fate of the soul after death and of the general resurrection and Last Judgment at the end of time, these apparent digressions offer vivid--if somewhat longwinded--portraits of popular and official teachings. The text itself wonders about its generic hybridity: the saint himself instructs the author to include the two long apocalyptic digressions, "in a unified manner and sequence" (709). Byzantinists have recently engaged in much debate about literary genres, and this work deserves reconsideration as evidence for indigenous literary critical discourse about what might (or might not) hold a text together.

Although the author, an otherwise unidentifiable Gregory, presents himself as Basil's disciple and spiritual advisee, he has little information about the origins and early life of the holy man. Brought in chains from Asia Minor to Constantinople at the end of the ninth century on suspicion of espionage, Basil was tortured before being hurled into the Bosporus at what is now Seraglio point. Dolphins rescued him and brought him to the town of Hebdomon, west of the city. Much of his subsequent activity took place in succession of private households on the western edges of the city, within the Theodosian walls, as well as some of the monasteries near the imperial palace. Basil's life presents precious evidence for lay support for holy men and a portrait of domestic religious life. Basil performed a fairly standard repertoire of healing miracles and achieved fame as a spiritual advisor both to aristocrats--including some prominent eunuchs--and their slaves and servants. Written in the 950s or 960s, the text refers to a number of recent events. Historical personages known from other sources include the brothers Anastasios and Constantine Gongylooi, both eunuchs, who led a failed military expedition against the Arabs in
Crete in 949, and the patriarch Theophyllact (d. 956). The emperor's relative Romanos Saronites, who persecutes the saint, is known also (and more accurately) from the history of John Skylitzes. Despite some confusion, the author refers to the expedition against the Kievan Rus' in 941. The work shares concerns and themes with the roughly contemporary Life of Andrew the Fool, and indeed the work shows some interest in the practitioners of holy folly.

After the death of Basil's own servant woman, Theodora, Gregory worries about the fate of her soul and is granted an elaborate vision (190-277) in which he observes her progress through a series of heavenly tollbooths where guardians exact payment for a variety of sins. While her good deeds compensate for the first few penalties, after a while her passage depends on the saint's spiritual assistance and capital. At each tollhouse, angels and demons argue her case. She owes penalties for lying, idle chatter, secular songs, even the "secret snacks of [her] youth" (233). While she is innocent of engaging in same-sex sexual activity, even when sharing a bed with other girls in her childhood, she is guilty of fornicating with a fellow slave and with other young men. The text observes that few souls make it past the tollhouse of fornication without penalty (245). The narrative of the tollhouses enumerates and catalogues Byzantine Christian moral concerns, and reinforces the importance of confession, repentance, and intercessors. As for virtuous deeds, the text stresses the importance of charity, especially almsgiving.

While the author returns to a more conventional narrative of Basil's miracles, the flow of the text is once more interrupted after Gregory reasons himself to the problematic proposition that because Jews have been faithful to God's laws, God does not condemn them. It is possible that such a philo-Jewish attitude was common among Byzantine Christians. In any case, Basil is furious at the thought, and arranges for the author to be disabused of this falsehood with the most complete revelation of the Last Judgment and the heavenly Jerusalem to survive in Byzantine literature (434-699). Although the ostensive pedagogical purpose of the vision is to illustrate the damnation and punishment of all Jews since the time of the incarnation who have not accepted Christ, the narrative teaches an entire theology of rewards and punishments in the world to come according to classes of people. Christ welcomes the Virgin, John the Baptist, the disciples, martyrs, the chaste, good monks, ancient Hebrews, baptized Christians, and repentant sinners. Working through the Beatitudes, the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and pure of heart enter into the Heavenly City. Sinners of all sorts, drawn from seemingly exhaustive lists, are hurled into the fires of Hell, including all those enumerated in the early vision of the tollhouses. Many monks and nuns fail to make the grade, and the text provides a moving description of those whose good and bad deeds do not quite balance out. While the descriptions are conventional--and attested in other Byzantine apocalyptic literature and moral exhortation--the Life of Basil presents a comprehensive and well-ordered account, an ideal set piece that can easily be used in classroom teaching. The listed sinners include a catalogue of late ancient heretics, iconoclasts, and Jews. Muslims make a cameo appearance. Descriptions of the Last Judgment and the throne prepared for Christ complement emerging iconographies
on the walls of Byzantine churches, revealing that the teachings contained in the text participated in an apocalyptic imagination both visual and verbal. The text ends by returning to the life--and death--of the saint, who predicts his own demise and charges the author regarding the importance of charity.

We must commend the skillful team of editors and translators for their diligent and careful service. This is an excellent volume. All academic libraries should own a copy, and given the reasonable price all Byzantinists should have one too. I sincerely hope that Western Medievalists will discover and profit from this text.

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