



Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium: Monks, Laymen, and Christian Ritual (Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture)

By Claudia Rapp

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Among medieval Christian societies, Byzantium is unique in preserving an ecclesiastical ritual of *adelphopoiesis*, which pronounces two men, not related by birth, as brothers for life. It has its origin as a spiritual blessing in the monastic world of late antiquity, and it becomes a popular social networking strategy among lay people from the ninth century onwards, even finding application in recent times. Located at the intersection of religion and society, brother-making exemplifies how social practice can become ritualized and subsequently subjected to attempts of ecclesiastical and legal control.

Controversially, *adelphopoiesis* was at the center of a modern debate about the existence of same-sex unions in medieval Europe. This book, the first ever comprehensive history of this unique feature of Byzantine life, argues persuasively that the ecclesiastical ritual to bless a relationship between two men bears no resemblance to marriage. Wide-ranging in its use of sources, from a complete census of the manuscripts containing the ritual of *adelphopoiesis* to the literature and archaeology of early monasticism, and from the works of hagiographers, historiographers, and legal experts in Byzantium to comparative material in the Latin West and the Slavic world, *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* examines the fascinating religious and social features of the ritual, shedding light on little known aspects of Byzantine society.

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Review

"Rapp has taken hold of a theme that binds early monasticism to later Byzantine secular life and forms a nexus of its religious, personal, and political history. Through an admirable command of sources that span a millennium, including narratives and little-studied prayer books, she presents Byzantium at its most unfamiliar and yet most intimate. The book is among a rare few that make Byzantium more intriguing and more accessible for anthropological study." --Anthony Kaldellis, The Ohio State University

"A masterly combination of historical anthropology and textual scholarship, which lifts the lid on social values in Byzantium. With clear and sympathetic insight, Professor Rapp shows how the cultural simulation of a biological kinship bond evolved from the consecration of spiritual togetherness to the strategic crossing of social boundaries for mutual support in a competitive world." --Paul Magdalino, University of Saint Andrews

About the Author

Claudia Rapp is Professor of Byzantine Studies at the University of Vienna and Director of the Division of Byzantine Research, Institute for Medieval Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences. She was awarded the 2015 Wittgenstein Prize, the most prestigious scientific award in Austria.

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