

Hagit Amirav: *Authority and Performance. Sociological Perspectives on the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2015 (Hypomnemata 199). 233 S. € 80.00. ISBN: 978-3-525-20868-7.

In recent years, the Acts of the fifth- and sixth-century Church councils have attracted the attention of secular historians, for they allegedly are the verbatim records of conciliar proceedings and thus provide invaluable rich, first-hand evidence of Late Antique society and politics. The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon (451), published as the second volume of the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* by Eduard Schwartz (1933–1938), have notably been the subject of an annotated translation by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (*The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, Liverpool 2005), a collective volume edited by Richard Price and Mary Whitby (*Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400–700*, Liverpool 2009), alongside several articles and book chapters by the likes of Fergus Millar and G.E.M. de Ste. Croix.

As far as the subject matter is concerned, the present book by Hagit Amirav has been produced in their wake. As for the approach, Amirav's book explicitly follows in the steps of such scholars as Averil Cameron and Elizabeth Clark, for it presents itself as an 'interdisciplinary historical study' that tries 'to apply modern sociological and anthropological theories to the study of ancient societies' (p. 11). In the lengthy introduction (almost half of the book), the author first defines the scope and audience of her work. The modern theories that Amirav takes into consideration are numerous and she conveniently goes through them on pp. 62–89: as the study focuses on texts recording verbal exchanges in a mass gathering, such aspects are looked at as referential and social functions of language, performative consciousness, non-verbal gestures, speech-acts, and the purpose of group gatherings especially as far as ceremonial aspects and the creation of consensus are concerned. The main guiding theory is discourse analysis, which the author applies to these ancient texts 'both intuitively (...) and methodologically' (p. 20). It is interesting to see how, throughout the book, Amirav makes an effort to fill in the gaps of the written records by conjecturing about extra-textual elements such as gesticulation and tonality of speakers, which are helpful to understand the modes of communication at the Council.

The introduction also includes an instructive historical section on the background, procedure and documentation of Chalcedon, that offers some commendable additions to the introduction and commentary of Price and Gaddis (2005), such as a detailed description of the location of the Council (pp. 37–41), that proves helpful in the framework of environmental psychology, and a profile of the emperor Marcian (pp. 50–61).

The second chapter contains prosopographical research on some of the imperial officials at the Council alongside some remarks on dynamics of political and social networking (pp. 90–102). An example of how socio-anthropological theory can help us understand the dynamics of the Council is the way Amirav applies the observations of White and Breiger on ‘cleavages’ within modern monastic communities to the dramatic fracture that took place in the group of Dioscorus of Alexandria in the first session. In the introduction, Amirav sets forth that a ‘sub-group, sub-network, or clique, will usually break off from the *mother group* along lines of weak attachments, or *cleavages*’ (p. 80). She then locates a cleavage in the sub-group of bishops who deserted the *mother group* of Dioscorus as the bishop Flavian of Constantinople was rehabilitated, pointing to their social and political motivations, and suggesting that ‘bishops originating from areas prone to hostile attacks and politically unstable would be more inclined to change their minds with a view to not losing imperial support’ (p. 102).

The centre of the book consists of the discourse analysis of sessions I, II and VI of the Council. The opening session, dedicated to the examination of the proceedings of Ephesus II (449) and the role of bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria in it, is the longest of the Acts and takes up accordingly the most space in this book (pp. 103–162). Amirav goes through the full minutes of the session and analyses through the mirror of modern theories such elements as seating plans and body language; the regular use of formal language and the significance of the exceptions to it; the role of the imperial establishment and of acclamations on the part of the bishops. The result is a vivid and insightful narrative of the gathering, in which major dynamics of power underlying this highly formalistic situation come to the fore and some interesting behavioural patterns are illuminated. In her summary on p. 172, Amirav presents the Council as ‘a careful and well-orchestrated theatrical show, whereby even acclamations and exclamations, some of them tellingly long, are the product of social conventions’ – although one might argue that in drawing this conclusion she downplays the instances of heated altercation

that frequently occur in the text and that she aptly analyses on pp. 116–122 and elsewhere as breaches of ‘co-occurrence rules’ and *decorum*. A special focus is on the ritualistic function of acclamations in the quest for consensus. In one instance, however, Amirav’s historical reconstruction is flawed by her pushing too far the significance of an acclamation (I.31): in the context of an altercation between the Oriental bishops and the Egyptian ones with their supporters, Amirav thinks that the Egyptians’ exclamation in favour of the empress reveals that emperor and empress were ‘the heads of two opposing parties’ (p. 118), with Pulcheria supporting the miaphysite (Egyptian) faction. This conclusion occurs elsewhere in the book (pp. 127, 146, 172). But the epistolary exchange between Pope Leo and Pulcheria shows that she too supported the dyophysite cause, and the Orientals’ acclamations in favour of both the emperor and the empress (e.g. I.530) demonstrate that there was no such a polarisation as Amirav believes.

In the analysis of the second session (pp. 163–171), Amirav sets forth the clash between the aims of the imperial court and those of the clergy: the emperor and his representatives, who chaired the gathering, asked for a new definition of faith, in order to reinforce their ideal of dogmatic concord and ecclesiastical harmony, while the bishops opposed it at first, appealing to the authority of the Church fathers. The author highlights the pre-eminence of the imperial establishment over the bishops and the rhetorical strategies deployed by Anatolius, the highest imperial official and chairman, to achieve their goals.

The sixth session, presided over by the imperial pair Marcian and Pulcheria, saw a bilingual address of Marcian himself to the bishops and the reading out of the definition of faith. Amirav tackles the figure of the Byzantine emperor as *custos fidei* and ‘New Constantine’ before carrying out a discourse analysis of his speech and the several acclamations that responded to his pronouncements, once again putting the stress on the ideas of *concordia*, consensus, and harmony that the emperor wanted to pursue. Following this, there comes a short section in which three of Marcian’s letters are analysed from a sociolinguistic point of view (pp. 204–208): two of them were sent to Pope Leo before the Council, and Amirav interestingly points out the difference in tone compared to ‘the authoritative stance adopted by Anatolius, the senior imperial officer, in his dealings with most bishops, however senior, who attended the council’ (p. 207).

Where the book might fall short is in the handling of the ancient languages. Amirav normally relies on the Greek text, for Greek is the language in which the proceedings were mostly held (p. 26). Whenever the Acts are cited, the English translation by Price typically appears in the main body, and the original (be it Greek or, more rarely, Latin) in the footnotes. However, in a few cases the translation and the original do not match (e.g. p. 97 the translation of VI.12 in the main body but the original of VI.23 in footnote n. 40; p. 119 the translation of I.37 in the main body but the original of I.38 in footnote n. 70; p. 163 n. 250 Price's translation from III.3 and a Greek section from II.2), and typos are more frequent than one would expect in a work of this quality, some of the Latin ones probably due to the AutoCorrect in the word processor (e.g. on p. 191 *stadium* for *studium*, repeated on p. 199 n. 108, and n. 80 *nostril* for *nostrī*). While this does not affect the argument, the author's case does seem to be slightly tainted where she apparently relies on the English translation rather than on the Greek original, as for example on p. 159. Here Amirav discusses I.341, where Dioscorus of Alexandria interrupts the reading of the proceedings of the Home Synod of Constantinople (448) carried out by Veronicianus. In Price's translation, Dioscorus says: 'Mark, this is what I object to'. As Veronicianus carried on reading, Amirav comments: 'Veronicianus did not mark anything himself. The author seems to take 'mark' of the English translation as meaning 'note down', but a closer look at the Greek, which runs Ἴδὸν τούτου ἐπιλαμβάνομαι makes it clear that Dioscorus did not ask for anything to be noted down in the minutes, because the word that Price idiomatically translates as 'mark', Ἴδὸν, is used in its meaning 'look' here. A consequence of this misunderstanding might have been the subsequent observation that 'the shorthand documentation of the proceedings, including the above remark of Dioscorus, must have been executed by the other secretary present, Constantine.' Now, as Amirav rightly points out elsewhere, 'a mechanical description of the process of record-keeping is lacking for the Council of Chalcedon' (p. 47), but if the other Church councils are anything to go by, where the *notarii* were several, this must be all the more true of Chalcedon, given its size and importance; moreover, one has to take into account that Constantine, one of the *secretarii* from the imperial consistory, was also in charge of reading out the acts of previous councils (cf. I.23) as well as translating some remarks of the papal delegates from Latin into Greek (cf. I.274), so it seems quite unlikely that he was also in charge of the shorthand documentation of the proceedings.

In sum, this book is a commendable endeavour that will be useful to historians of the Church and of antiquity in general. At a specific level, it offers fresh and interesting insights into some aspects of a central moment in the history of Christianity. At a more general level, Amirav manages to demonstrate that the application of certain anthropological, sociological and socio-linguistic theories to the analysis of ancient texts and occasions is not only feasible but also profitable: this will hopefully encourage more studies of such a nature in the future. At any rate, all scholars should favourably welcome a work that actively helps us ‘not to forget that ‘dead’ societies, too, were once exploding with the dreams, aspirations, and fears of ‘real’ and living people’ (p. 209).

This review is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 677638.

Tommaso Mari, Bamberg
tommaso.mari@uni-bamberg.de

www.plekos.de

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Tommaso Mari: Rezension zu: Hagit Amirav: Authority and Performance. Sociological Perspectives on the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2015 (Hypomnemata 199). In: Plekos 19, 2017, 1–5 (URL: <http://plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2017/r-amirav.pdf>).
