FOREWORD

The purpose of this book is to explore one of the most fascinating and challenging aspects of late antique and early medieval textual transmission: the fluidity of the anonymous text. This is always a complicated class of texts. But in the case of hagiography, this fluidity, this permanent change of a narrative core into new forms, is even more complex.

First, these are texts frequently intended to be read and transmitted without the author's name, and often seen as a collective narrative to be reworked and reshaped by whoever wishes to do so. At the same time, the hagiographical text, like any other classical, late antique, or medieval text, was subject to the usual constraints and vicissitudes of late antique and medieval textual transmission. In most cases, we are left with crumbs from a long chain of countless operations of copying a copy of a copy over the span of many centuries. Often these texts become difficult to reconstruct from a line of transmission in which most elements are lost.

Finally, the hagiographical text is subject to a number of conditions not experienced by other classes of classical and medieval text: their belonging to the history and development of the cult of a particular saint or saints has certain implications. They are recurrently adapted to the liturgical, or simply spiritual, needs of each audience in a particular time and geographical and cultural context. This entails reshaping the text constantly into different styles and linguistic registers, either to make them more suitable to a sophisticated audience or to make them more accessible to the less learned.

The *Life of Euphrosyne* is a good example. The text tells the story of a young girl from a wealthy family in fifth-century Alexandria, supposedly in the time of Theodosius II, who turned her back on earthly riches and social conventions, and, disguised as a man, dedicated herself to God in a monastery. Written originally in Greek, possibly in the sixth century, the account underwent many changes in subsequent centuries. It was reworked into different redactions that travelled across the eastern and western Mediterranean, from Constantinople, Macedonia, and the Middle East to the Greek communities in southern Italy. Exemplars of the Greek text were then translated into several of the languages of early medieval Christianity: Latin, Syriac, Armenian,

Arabic, Old Slavonic. In Latin, we have at least three different translations, stemming from different lines of transmission of the Greek account. In the Middle Ages, the *vita* was translated into a number of vernacular languages: French, Italian, Portuguese, German, English (in Aelfric's collection of saints' lives), and Middle Dutch.

One thing is clear: the extraordinary success and dissemination of this narrative owes a great deal to the concept of anonymity in hagiographical literature. Each agent of the transmission can be *an* author. The textual forms change time after time, century after century, according to the audience and purpose in each moment. But the core of the narrative remains with the same inspiring essence and scope. In two of the main Latin redactions, even the name of the heroine changes, from the Greek Euphrosyne to its Latin equivalent Castissima. But the story remains the same.

The present book deals with a small portion of the life and dissemination of the *Life of Euphrosyne*: only the extant Greek and Latin versions produced prior to the late twelfth century will be explored. The introductory chapters to each version elucidate their textual history, and the critical editions provide the reader with a sound base for the study of the texts.

The idea for this book was born in Bologna, when in 2021 I was Invited Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies (ISA) of the University of Bologna. It was a challenge proposed by Francesco Santi. My first words of gratitude are addressed to him. I would also like to thank so many people who helped me, directly or indirectly, in the completion of this work, but I am afraid I will omit many of them. I'll simply mention some of those who contributed directly to this book. First, Guy Philippart, who provided me with the initial information about the manuscripts containing the different versions of the *Vita Euphrosynae*, and Monique Goullet, an enthusiastic supporter of my study and a most influential master in *écriture* and *réécriture*; my colleagues Fernand Peloux and Renaud Alexandre, with their sound knowledge about many important points in this study; Eftychia Bathrellou and Fotini Hadjittofi, my colleagues at my university, and also Anna Lampadaridi, who kindly helped me with the Greek text; Annunziata Di Rienzo, who provided me with information about the Syriac translation, and Mariapia Muccigrosso, who likewise enlightened me about the Armenian texts; Guglielmo Cavallo and Mirella Ferrari, with details on certain manuscripts, and François Dolbeau, with details on a biblical passage; Robert Godding and the Société des Bollandistes, for their generosity with bibliography and other material; Laura Albiero about some liturgical terms; Vanni Veronesi for his help with a Gorizia manuscript; Federico de Dominicis for his bibliographi-

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