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James C. Skedros. *Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki, Civic Patron and Divine Protector: 4th - 7th Centuries CE.* Harvard Theological Studies 47. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999. Pp. ix + 169. No Price Listed.

[1] James Skedros' book was written originally as a doctoral dissertation and then published, deservedly, in the Harvard Theological Studies series. It is a remarkable excursus into the "theological geography" of one of the most important sites in Eastern Orthodoxy: the cult of St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki. The work is primarily a historical investigation that unites critical evaluations of the legends of the saint, popular piety surrounding his holiness, architectural questions surrounding the church, the question of relics, icons of the saint, and most importantly, the St. Demetrios' role as patron of the city and his influence outside of Greece in other Orthodox countries.

[2] The book is arranged in four chapters and a conclusion: "The Origins of the Cult of St. Demetrios," "Popular Piety in the Cult of St. Demetrios," "Loci of Power - Repositories of Charisma in the Absence of Relics," and "The Civic Cult of St. Demetrios." The three appendices give the reader access to important primary sources, the first of which include four plans of the basilica and seven plates of mosaics from the basilica. The other two contain a translation of the *Passio Altera* of St. Demetrios and the *Martyrdom of the Holy Great-Martyr Demetrios*.

[3] The reader is reminded of the difficulty of sifting through a mass of conflicting, contradictory legends of a saint whose cult today is vibrantly alive throughout the Orthodox world. Skedros painstakingly sorts through the early martyrologies and locates his death between 304 and 308, by edict of Emperor Galerius. The author takes the reader through the evidence for the political rivalry between the cities of Sirmium and Thessaloniki that lead to Sirmium's claim of the saint for itself. By careful analysis of the martyrologies, Skedros comes to the conclusion that "The cult of St. Demetrios originated at Thessaloniki and remained an intensely local cult throughout the early Byzantine period" (40).

[4] The most interesting chapter is "Loci of Power - Repositories of Charisma in the Absence of Relics." In it Skedros argues convincingly that the lack of relics "allowed the saint to become the civic and religious symbol for the city and the people of Thessaloniki"

(85). This fact, Skedros contends, makes the cult of St. Demetrios exceptional, given the pervasiveness of Peter Brown's ideas about relics. "Peter Brown has captivated a whole generation of scholars with his discussion of later Roman notions of holiness and the social and political function that centers of holiness played in the lives of late antique Christians" (88).

[5] Skedros' careful analysis of the ritual function of the ciborium in the Basilica, the role of the mosaics in the cult, and the kinds of miracles performed by the saint offers a convincing alternative to the Brown model of holiness in late antiquity. Skedros' analysis reminds us why and how definitions of holiness necessarily must be local.

[6] Given the popularity of studies that focus on the body, saints, relics, and local religion, this book would be a wonderful addition to an upper division religion class in a college or university. Since it is not too long, it could be used quite effectively in tandem with a book dealing with a similar issue in Alexandria, Rome, North Africa, or Antioch. James Skedros' book is a welcome addition to these discussions in the field.

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