

**Stavroula Constantinou – Andria Andreou (eds.), *Storyworlds in Short Narratives: Approaches to Late Antique and Early Byzantine Tales*.**

(Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages, 31). Leiden: Brill 2025, 244 p., ISBN 978-90-04-70735-1.

<https://doi.org/10.58377/byzslav.2025.18>

The study of short narrative forms has long remained on the periphery of scholarly attention, overshadowed by research focused on longer prose works, primarily novels. This edited volume addresses this significant lacuna by offering the first comprehensive theoretical and analytical approach to what the editors term 'the tale' in early Greek literature from the first to seventh centuries CE. The volume defines its object of study as "a short narrative of oral tradition having divine, human, and animal characters that often encounter marvellous, magical, and miraculous phenomena and objects," (p. 1) thereby establishing clear parameters while acknowledging the fluid boundaries of the form. The editors' ambitious goals are twofold: to develop theoretical frameworks

specifically tailored to short narrative forms, and to shed light on Byzantine engagement with the marvellous – a dimension of this literary culture that has received insufficient scholarly attention. These objectives address genuine gaps in classical, Byzantine, and literary studies, making this volume a significant contribution to multiple fields.

The volume's nine chapters are organized into three thematic sections: "Tale Theory and Poetics," "The Art of Storytelling," and "Tales in Collections." This structure reflects the editors' commitment to balancing theoretical innovation with practical application, though the boundaries between sections occasionally blur.

Part I establishes the theoretical foundations with Stavroula Constan-

tinou's dense opening chapter (Chapter 1) proposing a tripartite framework for analysing tales through the notions of 'storyteller,' 'story-ness,' and 'story-effect.' While this theoretical architecture often draws in recognizable ways from established narratological concepts, Constantinou's focus on the storyteller-listener dynamic (i.e. when a single figure takes on the combined roles of narrator and audience) offers a valuable refinement that captures the oral transmission aspects inherent in tale collections. Her typology of storytellers – ranging from storytellers with a well-defined profile to more anonymous figures, and from authoritative author-storytellers to those who derive authority from their sources – provides a useful analytical tool as well, though the relationship between these categories and conventional narrator types could have been articulated more clearly.

Christian Høgel's contribution (Chapter 2) identifies the *thauma* tale as a specific narrative type spanning both hagiographic and paradoxographic traditions. His analysis of three shared features (reference to physical laws, distinction between agent and source of wonder, and descriptions of suddenness) reveals innovative readings of both variants. Høgel's insight that the *thauma* tale employs narrative reticence to invite reader acceptance of supernatural powers represents an important observation about the mechanics of wonder in these texts. His parallel treatment of miraculous and marvellous phenomena occasionally risks flattening distinctive nuances, particularly the suggested equivalence between hagiographic

saints and paradoxographic animals as agents of wonder since the latter could also be regarded as coextensive with their behaviour and therefore as the wonder itself, yet the chapter succeeds in revealing new convergences between traditionally separate literary domains, suggesting larger ramifications beyond the analysed examples.

Ingela Nilsson's chapter (Chapter 3) on paradoxographic love tales deploys storyworld and possible world theory to illuminate how short narratives achieve believability through world-evocation rather than plot development. Her demonstration that brevity and storyworld construction function together in specific ways offers new theoretical insights into the narrativity of short tales. This, she argues, also explains the wide presence of paradoxographic material across a variety of genres, allowing it to be integrated in longer narratives. Nilsson's notion of the 'storyworld of desire' that emerges from her analysis of Ps-Alexander of Aphrodisias' work provides a compelling example of how *metaphorical* world-concepts can illuminate textual meaning, though this interpretive move perhaps deserves more explicit theoretical grounding.

Part II shifts focus to storytelling practices, with Sophia Xenophontos (Chapter 4) providing an exemplary analysis of didactic tales in Galen's practical ethics literature. The chapter examines how moralizing tales achieve their effects through narrator intervention and rhetorical techniques like humour and irony. Demonstrating the productive application of the volume's theoretical apparatus to

concrete textual analysis, it presents a clear methodology and persuasive conclusions about the relationship between narrative structure and moral instruction.

The contribution by Stavroula Constantinou and Andria Andreou on repetition in early Byzantine tale collections (Chapter 5) likewise represents a sophisticated analytical achievement. Their examination of three distinct storyteller profiles (holy, chosen, and repentant) in three subgenres of early Byzantine tale collections (collective biography, miracle and edifying tale collections) as constructed through strategic repetition demonstrates how a device typically dismissed by modern critics actually serves crucial narrative functions. The analysis reveals how triple repetitions at both macro and micro levels construct the storyteller as pious, trustworthy and relatable. Thanks to its smart selection of representative case studies, the chapter ensures broad applicability for future research.

Nicolò Sassi's study of hagiographical transmission along the Incense Route (Chapter 6) undertakes the important and complex task of comparative analysis applied to narrative dossiers. Focusing on the dossiers of saint Longinos and saint Menas, Sassi argues that the stories functioned as 'technology of enchantment' in cross-cultural contexts, providing valuable insight into the role of literature as cultural agent. The analysis could perhaps have benefitted from more detailed narrative examination of how miracle episodes are actually constructed as well as from more transparent acknowledgment

of certain limitations inherent in this type of research (e.g. related to textual transmission and manuscript survival). These concerns do not detract, however, from the chapter's solid mapping of narrative transformations, which yields clear results in that the different examined versions all focus on miracle-episodes in their selection of narrative material. The chapter thus succeeds in demonstrating the meaningful contribution of storytelling practices to human experience of the transcendent.

Part III examines tales within collection contexts, beginning with Julia Doroszevska's analysis of list-structures in paradoxographic and hagiographic miracle collections (Chapter 7). Drawing on Umberto Eco's concept of the list as hermeneutic tool, Doroszevska reveals how its quality of open-endedness serves different purposes across the examined genres, amplifying wonderment in paradoxography and suggesting limitless divine power in hagiography. The chapter builds on Scott Johnson's earlier work on miracle collections' formal dependence on paradoxography while expanding it with valuable insights into other models shaping the miracle collections' use of the catalogue (notably, epic poetry) and, specifically, its rhetorical deployment.

A further systematic contribution to tale theory appears in Constantinou and Andreou's other chapter (Chapter 8). It proposes a classification system based on agent types (human, marvellous, supernatural) and tale structures (single-episode, multiple-episode, frame). While this taxonomic approach may risk imposing

overly rigid categories on fluid literary phenomena, it does offer researchers a practical analytical framework. The authors' illustration of their system through early Byzantine hagiographical anthologies demonstrates its utility, though the broader applicability across different cultural contexts remains a question for future research.

Finally, Markéta Kulhánková's robust examination of space representation in Anastasios Sinaites' first collection of edifying tales (Chapter 9) exemplifies how narratology can illuminate understudied texts. Her application of notions from modern spatial theory (Mary-Laure Ryan's five levels of space, liminality, and Foucault's heterotopia) reveals how Anastasios uses space as both organizational principle and thematic device in his collection. The chapter demonstrates how Anastasios' treatment of three prominent spatial *topoi* of monastic literature (mountain, desert, garden) is informed by certain cultural and generic conventions. This provides a compelling reading that sheds light on the central role played by space in short edifying tales, contributing, for instance, to character construction, or to the metaphorical representation of spiritual transformation/ascent.

The volume's structure generally serves its dual theoretical and practical objectives well, though some organizational decisions invite questions. The theoretical chapters in Part I establish essential foundations, but Chapter 8's systematic classification might have been more effectively positioned earlier alongside Constantinou's opening framework. Additionally, while individual chapters

maintain high analytical standards, limited cross-referencing means that both cumulative evidence (e.g. from Chapters 2 and 7) and apparent tensions (e.g. the identification/distinction of the marvellous and miraculous in Chapters 2 and 8 resp.) are left for readers to notice and resolve.

The editors' decision to focus on the first through seventh centuries creates a coherent chronological frame, though any justification for the rationale behind these particular boundaries is left implicit. The concentration on Greek materials ensures linguistic coherence, but the 'early Greek tale' as presented here seems more a scholarly construct than a historically recognized genre category (more explicit historical contextualization of its 'early' character or 'Greekness' could have been useful to address this concern). This observation does not invalidate the research but does suggest caution about claims regarding systematic coverage.

Despite these considerations, the volume represents a significant scholarly achievement due both to its innovative overall aims and the high quality of each individual chapter. The editors and contributors have succeeded in their primary objective of establishing short narrative as a legitimate object of sustained literary analysis. The theoretical frameworks developed here, particularly around storyteller typologies and tale classifications, provide valuable tools for future research. The volume's demonstration that supposedly 'minor' narrative forms reward serious attention challenges hierarchical assumptions about literary value that

have long marginalized tale studies. The book's engagement with the marvellous also opens productive new avenues for understanding how late antique and Byzantine writers negotiated relationships between empirical reality and imaginative possibility. The comparative approach adopted by several contributors suggests fruitful directions for future interdisciplinary research.

In conclusion, *Storyworlds in Short Narratives* establishes tale studies as a viable and valuable scholarly field while providing concrete analytical tools for researchers working with

short narrative forms across different cultural contexts. The volume's combination of theoretical innovation and careful textual analysis ensures its value for specialists in classical and Byzantine studies, while its narratological contributions extend its relevance to literary theorists working with brief narrative forms more generally. This collection should inspire continued investigation of the rich but understudied tradition of short narrative in late antique and medieval literature.

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