



John Moschos' *Spiritual Meadow*: Authority and Autonomy at the End of the Antique World

Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen

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John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow is one of the most important sources for late sixth-early seventh century Palestinian, Syrian and Egyptian monasticism. This undisputedly invaluable collection of beneficial tales provides contemporary society with a fuller picture of an imperfect social history of this period: it is a rich source for understanding not only the piety of the monk but also the poor farmer. Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen fills a lacuna in classical monastic secondary literature by highlighting Moschos' unique contribution to the way in which a fertile Christian theology informed the ethics of not only those serving at the altar but also those being served. Introducing appropriate historical and theological background to the tales, Llewellyn Ihssen demonstrates how Moschos' tales addresses issues of the autonomy of individual ascetics and lay persons in relationship with authority figures. Economic practices, health care, death and burials of lay persons and ascetics are examined for the theology and history that they obscure and reveal. Whilst teaching us about the complicated relationships between personal agency and divine intercession, Moschos's™ tales can also be seen to reveal liminal boundaries we know existed between the secular and the religious.

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