

survival of nineteen plays (twelve by mere chance) shows that the ancients prized him more than Aeschylus or Sophocles.

Tzamalikos foresees that he will be charged with superimposing his own conceits upon Simplicius, as the latter has superimposed his own Neoplatonism on his predecessor. Such strictures would be more persuasively answered if the book were more clinical in time and not so prolix in its belligerent sallies against the ignorance of the modern academic world. It is not true, for example, that the Latin edition of Origen's *First principles* both asserts and denies the existence of uncreated beings other than God (p. 931); the passages quoted to show this intimate clearly enough that all particular beings are created. A translator who has not succeeded in mastering one difficult clause of a sentence in Alexander of Aphrodisias is unfairly convicted of an 'utter misrendering' (p. 23). Simplicius may confess to finding some unclarity in Aristotle; he does not stigmatise him as 'uncertain, dubious and indeed inarticulate' (p. 576). For all that, it cannot be denied that Tzamalikos has a grasp of the ancient philosophical *corpus*, including the Aristotelian commentators who make up almost half of it, that is matched by only a handful of living scholars, none of whom could pretend to his equally comprehensive grasp of patristic literature. For this reason alone, his study demands our attention, though it asks us to swallow too much when it credits Origen, or any third-century Christian, with the proclamation of a 'homoousian Trinity' (p. 1562).

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Writing and communication in early Egyptian monasticism. Edited by Malcolm Choat and Maria Chiara Giorda. (Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 9.) Pp. xiv + 239 incl. 3 ills and 2 tables. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2017. €114. 978 90 04 25465 7; 2213 0039
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The contemporary writing produced within late Roman ascetic circles was as important as the asceticism itself – perhaps even more so. To write about asceticism was, in any case, an ascetic act – Derek Kreuger has made that much clear. It also changed a haphazard and varied range of Christian experiments in *anachōrēsis*, 'withdrawal', into a movement, a culture, that cast its web with time, albeit thinly, over the whole of the ancient world.

In the case of this book, the boundaries are more narrowly drawn; but the ten papers presented give two vital impressions: first, the way in which the written evidence helped precisely to create and define a single culture, so scattered along the river and so soon to be transplanted, as it were, to Gaza and to Palestine more generally; and second, the sheer number of topics that inquiry opens up – the materiality of communication (papyrus in particular), the continuity of custom and ideology that it sustains, the difference between the portable and the rooted (epistolography and epigraphy), the achieved permanency of 'monasticism' as an ideal with a theology (and an anthropology) of its own, and the relation between what monks wrote and what they read (the Bible especially).

Egypt has been for some time a happy hunting ground for scholars whose skill and interest has been the letter. This is perhaps a natural consequence of preservation; but the focus has two immediate effects: first, it elevates a richly documented province into an essential component of the empire itself – indeed, the loss of the letter’s long reach was a crucial factor in the empire’s decline; and second, it shows the different levels of conscious identity that shared documentation could bring into mutual play. One can catch in the vocal character of exchange – its liturgical, legal, pithy, reflective, antagonistic and exegetical disclosures – something of the busier, raucous, angry and anxious, and socially extended ambiance that can be more hushed, more formal and more predictable in the polished and carefully edited missives of the *élite*. This book opens such windows, brings one down to street level, and gives the writing a space to work in.

It is sometimes felt, not least by reviewers, that collections of papers can be too dispersed in their attention to offer a useful picture more generally. Fortunately, publishers have become increasingly watchful in guarding against a scattered effect, and one is particularly reassured by the prudence of the best, as in this case: the resulting cohesiveness is also, of course, a compliment to the editors. Malcolm Choat (at Macquarie University) and Maria Chiara Giorda (currently at the Fondazione Bruno Kessler in Trento) are well established and widely respected scholars in this field, with books and papers to prove it. The point still needs to be made explicitly, because, as Lillian Larsen stresses in her short but trenchant introduction, there are still too many who blithely continue with what she calls the ‘well-crafted caricature’ of monastic Egypt as a refuge of ill-educated (if not wholly uneducated) peasant enthusiasts. In the cause of underpinning a powerful antidote to such prejudice, the editors between them pack with incontrovertible detail more than a third of the book.

Their seven remaining colleagues are far from blushing bystanders: they are ones who hit more particular nails on their particular heads – the transition from the creation to the (ritual) use of texts (Paul Dilley), the transition from custom to law (Esther Garel and Maria Nowak), the way in which writing (especially epigraphy) enhanced the significance of space (Jacques van der Vliet), the ideological and institutionalising force of the written word (Fabrizio Vecoli), the taking of Coptic seriously (Jennifer Westerfeld), and the balance between reading and listening (Ewa Wipszycka). What strikes one immediately about this list (in itself only partial in its allusions) is that it identifies the characteristics of any literary culture at the time. (Coptic here plays the role of any language anywhere else that was neither Syriac nor Greek nor Latin.) It makes the monastic writer and reader the peer of any writer and reader in the empire. The monks of Egypt provide just one example – but how rich – of how their ascetic colleagues beyond Egypt were able to erect a cultural machine equal to any other in the Christian commonwealth. Its effects had equal force, even if its purposes were different. We underestimate, in other words, the challenge that any literate monk could bring to bear on any comparable religious leader.

So, we are dealing here with an important book, which might easily slip through the net of scholars with their eyes elsewhere. Anything that tells us more about the Christian empire as a reading and writing society, with its breadth of vision, its itchy feet, the economic and social ventures that it was ready to risk, will find in these

pages further detail to add to the stockpile of creative energy that literate Christianity thrived on; and that is an opportunity that we cannot afford to miss.

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Death's dominion. Power, identity and memory at the fourth-century martyr shrine. By Nathaniel J. Morehouse. (Studies in Ancient Religion Culture.) Pp. viii + 203. Sheffield–Bristol, CT: Equinox Press, 2016. £22 (paper). 978 1 78179 082 3

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This slender volume, the author's revised doctoral thesis, claims to 'fill ... a void in scholarship ... on the rise of the martyr cult in late antique Christianity' (p. 178). The making of the cult of the saints being a growth industry in historiography, this is a big claim to make. The book encompasses the Roman world and gives a diachronic picture of the construction and monumentalisation of the martyrs' tombs after the Constantinian turn as well as of their reception and recycling in the fifth century, suggesting that the bridge linking the two was way too fragile before this synthesis. Morehouse brings together a 'star team' of impresarios and critics whose works about relic cults are extant – the emperors Constantine and Julian the Apostate, bishops Athanasius of Alexandria, Damasus of Rome, Paulinus of Nola, Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo, the ascetics Apa Shenute and Sulpicius Severus, the poet Prudentius, the cleric Vigilantius and the nun Egeria – and stresses the importance of pilgrimage in the creation of a 'unified cultural memory' at the shrine. Drawing on recent scholarship rather than on a new exegesis of the sources, the book follows up the construction of 'cultural memory' at the martyr shrine from the fourth to the fifth century.

Inspired by Mark C. Taylor's photo collection published as *Grave matters* that Morehouse terms a 'contemporary burial *ad sanctos*', the introduction provides a summary of shrine and relic scholarship, and presents the research question, the source material and the theoretical framework of the book. On the basis of textual, rather than archaeological sources, it seeks to describe the struggle for control of the illustrious grave, 'the struggle to determine how the graves of the important Christian dead would be used to fabricate an image of Christianity which would ultimately determine the direction of the church in the fifth and sixth centuries' (p. 5). This promises a deconstructionist approach to the cult based on texts (as opposed to a historical interest in the martyr or an archaeological approach to the shrine), a Foucauldian concern with power, and an Assmannian involvement with cultural memory. Stating that monuments never 'just happen', the author focuses on monumentalisation – what it means, in what context, and whose power it serves. Using today's prominent jargon of 'identity' and 'cultural memory', the introduction, however, ducks away from a definition of 'cultural memory' and identity as used in the book. Is it individual/communal religious experience, collective memory or the very impact of the monument that shape Christian identity at the shrine?

Chapter i ('To begin: the life of the dead is set in the memory of the living') offers an overview of the preservation of the memory of the dead in the Roman world before the fourth century. Taking a chronological approach to the