

chapter on reliquaries in action, she discusses processions, including some modern Italian and French examples, and sees reliquaries not as stage props but as themselves performative (see p. 147). In such discussion, she provides much evidence that should be taken into account in recent art historical theorising (such as that of Horst Bredekamp and Glenn Peers) about the medieval life of things.

In dealing with the complicated question of the relationship between inner and outer, contents and container, Hahn employs the concept of metaphor, citing some recent literary and even post-colonial theory. This is an important interpretive move in that it takes us away from tendencies either simply to classify by type or to over-narrativise medieval objects. It is not clear, however, even to Hahn herself, that the idea of metaphor quite does the work that she wants it to do. In fact, she moves beyond it to talk of ‘somatic charge’ and of some reliquaries as ‘machines’ (p. 243). Moreover, Hahn sometimes speaks – as other historians such as Jean-Claude Schmitt have recently done – as if the reliquary is or creates the relic. Again this does not quite seem to work as an interpretive move. Medieval theologians and the ordinary devout did consider aspects other than the container – for example, provenance or location – to authenticate, and hence to create, the relic. Indeed one could argue that in some cases the relic dictates the container, even where it does so by reversal (for example, by demanding crystalline material to frame fragments of bone, dirt or flesh). If we look at the box of stones from the Holy Land, now one of the important small relic collections at the Vatican, it seems as if there is a reciprocal (not a one-way) relationship between the images in the lid and the stones. But Hahn herself would not disagree.

The fact that these theoretical questions are raised, if not answered, is what makes *Strange beauty* so important for historians of religion as well as art historians. Hahn is theorising the nature of representation itself. For if representation means to stand in for (as a diplomat does for a country) as well as to look like (as a portrait does for a person), saying how an object does this and what authorises it to do so is a central question for religion as well as for art. It is a question that has not yet been very well answered. Medievalists who pride themselves on their interdisciplinarity, but have tended unaccountably to neglect the profound interpretive questions raised by objects, would do well to give Cynthia Hahn’s *Strange beauty* a major place on their graduate syllabi and in their own investigations.

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Ennode de Pavie, chancre officiel de l'Église de Milan. By Céline Urlacher-Becht. (Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité, 198.) Pp. 511. Turnhout: Brepols/Paris: Institut d'études Augustiniennes, 2014. €66 (paper). 978 2 85121 272 6; 1158 7032
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Some good books are hampered by their style. This is such a book. French academic conventions tend to favour meandering reasoning and elaborate prose as markers of acumen. One could wish that the author had recast her original doctoral dissertation (Strasbourg 2009) more thoroughly, making for better readability

and easier access by the wider audience which this book merits. As it is, the rather forbidding exterior conceals a novel and important contribution to Ennodius scholarship. By isolating the body of Ennodius' Ambrosian hymns and religious epigrams, some fifty pieces in all, scattered throughout his work, Urlacher-Becht is able to define the nature of his Christian stance. She argues that the deadlock which is created by the traditional question whether Ennodius was a 'real' Christian rather than a hard-core aristocrat can be overcome if, instead, we look upon Ennodius as a man of the Church. With approval, she cites the subtitle of S. A. H. Kennell's monograph on Ennodius, 'A gentleman of the Church' (Ann Arbor 2000). The fundamental opposition in Ennodius' work, according to Urlacher-Becht, is not pagan *versus* Christian, but secular *versus* official. When 'off duty', Ennodius can permit himself the liberty of, for instance, the frankly erotic *Carm.* 1.4 (388 V.), which is simply in a different register from what is required when he functions as 'the official cantor of the Milanese Church', as Urlacher-Becht aptly styles him.

The book consists of three main parts. The first aims to develop the sensibility for identifying Ennodius' specific religious 'voice', i.e. where the cleric, not the Christian aristocrat, speaks. Relying on notions from discourse linguistics, Urlacher-Becht is rightly keen to prefer the functional perspective of 'the position of the speaker' ('la posture énonciative') over traditional (auto)biographical concerns. Varying across the poems, the position of the speaker appears to be an indication of their diverse intentions. In the Christian poems, the speaker is very much in the background or absent, whereas, in the secular ones, personal matters come to the fore. The speaker's absence in the Christian poems enables their subject matter to be highlighted, especially bishops Ambrosius and Laurentius, and the diocese of Milan. On the basis of this, Urlacher-Becht goes so far as to interpret Ennodius' religious poetry as 'an integral part of an ambitious programme of restoring the past grandeur of Milan'. As a further proof of the validity of the functional criterion, she argues that, within the secular poems alone, three such positions exist in relation to three types of addressees: one strictly private, another concerned with the circle of friends, and a third public, at *recitationes*.

The second part of the book discusses the religious epigrams and their function of exhibiting and defending the power of the bishop of Milan. These epigrams are extremely unhelpful for visualising the places which they mark. What they do instead is bring out the euergetism of the town's bishops (Laurentius in the first place), whose building activities go hand in hand with their moral exemplarity. Urlacher-Becht provides a wealth of minutely detailed analyses of these *tituli*, usefully supported by careful translations, offsetting Ennodius against other representatives of the genre like Damasus, Paulinus of Nola, Sidonius Apollinaris and Venantius Fortunatus. The chapter continues with two other categories of epigrams, i.e. those made for the *domus ecclesiae*, and those for a portrait gallery of Ambrose and his successors. While the edifying verses for various parts of the episcopal mansion display a perfect synthesis of aristocratic and Christian moral values, the portraits (whose possible location gets a fair share of attention) underline, not surprisingly, the piety and moral excellence of Milan's episcopacy, tuned to the needs of its population.

The third part of the book, concerned with the hymns and Milanese liturgy, enters theological territory. Urlacher-Becht defines Ennodius' hymns against the foil of the Ambrosian archetype. Only so does it become clear how different they actually are: no longer a doctrinally targeted weapon to combat Arian heresy, but a poetically more sophisticated means of praising God in different historical circumstances. Urlacher-Becht takes great pains to prove the relevance of Hymn 1.19 (350 V.), *Hymnus sanctae Mariae*, to the community of Milan, where the worship of Maria struck root as early as 451 and the hymn's Chalcedonian orientation can be supposed to have originated in current doctrinal policy. There is even greater ingenuity in Urlacher-Becht's linking Hymns 1.11, 1.16, and 1.13 (342, 347, 344 V., *In tempore tristitiae*, *De ascensione Domini* and *De pentecoste* respectively) to form an Easter cycle. However impressive Urlacher-Becht's micro-reading, supported by a torrent of footnotes, may be, this probably goes beyond the limit of exegesis. The ensuing discussion of the remaining hymns on martyrs, detects, from the subtlest of traces, an undercurrent of the *imitatio Christi* motif, the importance of physical suffering in the *confessores*, on a par with the *martyres* (*contra* Delehaye), and nothing less than a new model of sanctity, the magisterial, in Ambrose. Again, the will to find meaningful connections and define Ennodius' unique personality is probably greater than the material on the whole allows. On the other hand, Urlacher-Becht's argument are always intelligent and invite further research. The chapter ends with a discussion of the question whether the hymns were actually used in the liturgy, which also involves the manuscripts. Urlacher-Becht's familiarity with the manuscript tradition is such that one can only look forward to the edition of Ennodius' poetry which she is planning to publish.

Urlacher-Becht has written a book which stands out for both identifying new territory and surveying it for the first time. It will be the starting point for any future studies in the field.

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Isaak von Ninive und seine 'Kephalaia Gnostika'. Die Pneumatologie und ihr Kontext. By Nestor Kavvas. (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*. Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language, 128.) Pp. ix + 193. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2015. €99. 978 90 04 28440 1; 0920 623X
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Nestor Kavvas, a scholar of Syriac Christianity and currently a research assistant at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Tübingen University, proposes in the monograph under review a historical and theological contextualisation of the cardinal aspects of the doctrine of Isaac of Nineveh (seventh century). Isaac was the most influential of Syriac Christian authors, managing to transgress the ecclesiastical borders of his mother Church of the East and exercise a profound impact on the development of spirituality first in Byzantium and later in Europe. (The fact that Isaac features in the recent *La Théologie byzantine* [Turnhout 2015] is indicative). It is not the first time that Kavvas has addressed Isaac of Nineveh, for he produced a Modern Greek translation of the 'Second' part of Isaac's *corpus* and