

(621–627), and (2) materials from the Coptic Acts of Ephesus (629–642). The authors have even included a glossary (643–650), an instructive set of maps (667–673), an inventory of persons from across the *Acta* (675–692), and a listing of the documents in the order provided previously by the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (693–696).

In organizing, translating, and commenting upon these crucial sources, Price and Graumann have performed a commendable service to the study of late antique history, culture, and religion. This volume bears utility for any level of approach taken to the Ephesus council, whether the in-depth study of an expert or the administration of an undergraduate course in which the council plays an important part. It promises to make a substantial contribution in areas such as the development of Christology, the politics and religion of the late antique empire, the means by which church leaders maintained relationships across the empire, the procedural customs of conciliar meetings, and the reception history of church councils.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640721000135

***The Beginning of the Cult of Relics.* By Robert Wiśniewski. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. xiv + 258 pp. \$93.00 cloth.**

The image decorating the book jacket of *The Beginning of the Cult of Relics* encapsulates several themes included in this engaging study. The object displayed on the cover is a late Roman stone reliquary discovered at Hippos in Palestine, complete with an ancient stick poking out of its case, a material vestige of an ancient practice; that is, attempts by the pious to interact directly with the remains of saints and martyrs. While such concrete examples of religious practice are often difficult to discern in the extant ancient sources, the material world of the later Roman Empire preserves vestiges of these rituals, thereby conjuring ghostly bodies of long-dead votaries of the saints who once used sticks and other objects to channel numinous power.

Robert Wiśniewski's survey of relics (ca. 300–700) zooms in on a variety of ritual approaches to and uses of the remains of biblical figures, martyrs, ascetics, and saints. His analysis centers on texts, inscriptions, and objects from the eastern and western Mediterranean with sensitivity to the importance of the northern (Merovingian) and southern (North Africa) zones as well. He approaches this spiritual topic with an empiricist eye, marshalling his evidence, weighing its reliability, and situating the data within broad historical and spiritual contexts. He offers a concluding chapter on the theological implications of relics during the epoch under review. Importantly, he highlights ancient voices contesting the validity of the relic cult and the practices surrounding it. Overall, the interpretive avenues Wiśniewski opens onto the cult of relics offer multiple paths for future research.

Wiśniewski's analysis meticulously revisits the standard narratives swirling around the origins and evolution of the cult of relics and does so in persuasive ways. This reader found the author's challenges to longstanding "truisms" about the timeline for the evolution of relic cults to be particularly satisfying. Specifically, the author deploys his diverse sources to trace transformations in ancient Christian practice: the earliest evidence for miraculous activity at shrines (late fourth century); the art of *translatio*, or transfer of

relics to new sites of veneration (mid-fourth century); apotropaic power of relics (mid-fifth century); *depositio ad sanctos* (late fourth century); *inventio* (late fourth century); physical access to relics (late fourth century); and dividing relics (largely sixth century).

Like Oxford historian Chris Wickham in his monumental study of the transformation of the later Roman Empire into the period known as the early Middle Ages (*Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* [Oxford University Press, 2007]), Wiśniewski avoids making sweeping statements about changes in practice within the entirety of Christendom. Rather, he notes periods in this four-hundred-year sequence of relics where East and West part ways and where North and South are in conversation or disagreement about religious rituals. Wiśniewski's chronology stems from his interdisciplinary methodology. Not satisfied by answering questions using textual evidence only, he examines places in the historical record where archaeological evidence does not mesh with longstanding timelines based largely on written sources for the emergence of "new" practices, such as the supposed zeal to be buried near martyrs (*depositio ad sanctos*).

In terms of ritual practice, Wiśniewski reevaluates the crucial role played by the demonic in the overall formation of the cult of relics. In fact, exorcism at saints' shrines anticipates—and directs—the chronological transformations in practice detailed above. Particularly intriguing are the ways in which relic-as-exorcist produces a space for later monastic wonderworkers to occupy. Several instances of rites associated with relic cults equally tantalize: the throwing of oracular tickets at the tombs of the holy dead (76); rubbing genitalia on the corner of a saint's tomb to cure an inguinal hernia (125); and displaying severed heads as prooftexts of the manner of martyrdom rather than a cultic practice of dividing up relics more characteristic of a later medieval era (160).

*The Beginning of the Cult of Relics* is a must read for all scholars working in the fields of late ancient Christian history, art history, archaeology, and material culture studies. For graduate students, the book presents an indispensable guide to the historiography of the subject as well as the placement of relics within the larger framework of the transformation of the Roman Empire into the world of the early Middle Ages. What I love the most about this book is the author's willingness to dismantle controlling paradigms in the field of late ancient Christian history. Instances of elite women kissing privately owned bones of martyrs during liturgical celebrations no longer can be understood as indicators of actual practice. The tradition of high-status burial near relics of martyrs most likely was limited in scope and geography. These and other carefully researched conclusions have compelled this historian to update her lecture notes.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640721000147

***Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob of Serugh.* By Philip Michael Forness. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2018. xv + 322 pp. \$100.00 cloth.**

Philip Michael Forness's *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East* analyzes the Christological content of Jacob of Serugh's preaching. What may seem a straightforward