

Danuta Shanzer examines Christian strategies to integrate and/or supplant older pagan gods and finds that the gods were sometimes present but also surprisingly absent in the Christianization process. Votive offerings at the shrine of Felix at Nola utilized older pagan themes, but they were a new legendary invention, not a survival of older paganism. The god Mercury, however, seems to have been the inspiration for the attributes of Julian of Brioude as a wonderworker at his shrine.

Duncan MacRae utilizes reception history to trace the legends of Simon Magus from the *Acts of the Apostles* through Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and the *Acts of Peter*. He traces Simon's literary development as a false convert, idolater, heretic, and magician/sorcerer and finds Justin associated him with a Roman god on Tiber island, while the *Acts of Peter* made him divine-like. Simon Magus became a literary type for the Roman deified imperial rulers, so that a triumphant Church could demonstrate its conquest over idolatry, heresy, and magic.

Claudia Rapp deconstructs the *Life of Porphyry of Gaza* to contend that the hagiography is actually about sacred spaces, as the story recounts Christians converting pagan temples into churches in Gaza, as well as recounting fanciful details about the people (e.g., John Chrysostom) and places of Constantinople. Rapp argues the author utilized sources from Gaza and Constantinople along with conversion data to fabricate a literary imagining of how conversion took place in cities across the Byzantine Empire.

Mohamed-Arbi Nsiri surveys the exchange of letters between Jerome and Augustine to analyze their personal, doctrinal, and exegetical concerns. Nsiri shows how their interpretations of scripture, translation, and the Pelagian controversy were influenced by their life setting. He also highlights the lack of consistent postal delivery as a source of communication failure. Nsiri describes their mental worldviews and the fluidity of orthodoxy as an agreed-upon principle, while still acknowledging that they strove for unity and a common understanding of authority in the Church.

These chapters convincingly demonstrate how Christians appropriated pagan concepts and practice and sites in Late Antiquity, especially in MacRae's analysis (Nsiri's chapter less so but it remains an enlightening analysis of two intellectual luminaries). The chapters on early Christianity will be most beneficial to scholars who approach Christian encounters with paganism from a text-based historical perspective.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640720001444

***Die frühen Christen. Von den Anfängen bis Konstantin.* By Hartmut Leppin. Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2018. xlviii + 512 pp. €29.95 hardcover; €22.99 e-book.**

This tome is not lacking in ambition. It attempts no less a feat than to pack into a single volume numerous results from the last generation of scholarship on early Christianity, from the linguistic turn to the recent trends in violence, economics, materiality, and connected history. Hartmut Leppin, a deeply knowledgeable ancient historian, is well-equipped for his task. And he has produced a book that, despite inevitable limitations, is marvelous in its breadth, selectivity, and currency of scholarship.

In his introduction Leppin renounces any semblance of a linear narrative; *Urchristentum* is discarded as untraceable. Instead, Leppin foregrounds peculiarities, tensions, and controversies; the result is a “Kaleidoskop . . . das immer wieder mehr andere Blickweisen zulässt” (13). Accordingly, the spotlight surrounds theology only in the minimalist prologue that sums up the memory of Jesus and expectations of Christ’s return (23–31).

Hereafter, Leppin organizes his subject into four synchronic chapters, each further divided into between six and ten digestible sections. The first chapter, on identity (“Weder Juden noch Heiden?”), begins by emphasizing practices that distinguished Christians from others, particularly the rituals of baptism, the Eucharist, and Sunday worship. Miracles, demons, and the absence of central locations (alongside Christian archaeological sites) fill out the chapter. The more chronological chapter 2 (“Christliche Autoritäten”) traces the heated, never-fully-resolved interplay between prophecy, intellectual prowess, episcopal office, money, asceticism, and saints’ relics as sources of Christian communal authority.

Perhaps Leppin’s most original area of emphasis is chapter 3, on everyday Christian conduct (“Selbstsorge und Nächstenliebe”). This chapter lingers on sexuality and the treatment of Christian women, children, and slaves (including the eventual bishop of Rome, Callistus!), but also emphasizes the ethic of humility (*Demut*); one striking claim is that Christianity aided in a taboo on pederasty that emerged in antiquity (278–280, 285). The final chapter, on Christians and the state (“Bürger zweier Reiche”), addresses repression and martyrdom but also Christian penetration of the Roman imperial elite. Leppin’s conclusion underscores the diversity, adaptability, and contingency behind eventual Christian success.

While this short review cannot summarize all salient themes in such an extensive work, it is worth noting that *Die Frühen Christen* engrosses readers with a structural rhythm. Each topic unfolds with (a) a specific vignette that illustrates Christian perspectives on the chapter topic (12); (b) relevant Jewish, Greek, and Roman social context for the subject; (c) exploration of majority Christian norms; (d) notable Christian dissenters from those norms; and (e) implications. Especially striking and vivid are the passages that open each section: for example, chapter 2 opens (135) with a rejection of bishops and deacons, quoted from the *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter* (3.79); Tatian’s pithy equation of marriage with shaming children and divorce (*To the Greeks* 8.1) introduces the section on marriage (262); and Hermas’ *Shepherd, Vision* 1.1.1–1.1.2 begins the section on penance by showing how seriously, rationally, and publicly Christians weighed sins such as a slave desiring his free mistress (303–305). When a topic is noted in passing, marginal notes often refer readers to expanded treatment elsewhere in the book, making it fairly easy to check for further information on a subject.

The depth on such a wide range of individual topics in a single volume is stunning. Thoroughly integrated are voices eventually condemned as “heretical,” such as those from what Leppin calls “the Gnostic spectrum.” While most sources are prescriptive and/or legendary, Leppin reads them judiciously. Some highlights: Leppin’s comparison of Cyprian’s martyrdom with Eusebius’s report about Paul of Samosata is eye-opening (196–205); his sections on *Demut* mine Tertullian’s and Clement’s works so thoroughly as to highlight the ethics of public sneezing (315–316); and Leppin’s reading of the Abercius inscription from Asia Minor reminds readers of how many prominent, well-connected Christians the vicissitudes of source survival have hidden from us (240–243). Indeed, one strength of the book is the attention devoted to inscriptions, papyri, burial sites, and neglected texts: for instance, the seldom-noted *Sentences of Sextus* finds

repeated quotation. The book also deserves credit for its frequent attention to non-Roman Christians, such as Mani and his followers, Persian Christians, and Armenian and Georgian Christianity (e.g., 169–171, 290, 376, 401, 410).

Leppin's perspective emerges clearly in the topics that he omits. Some readers will surely notice that the scriptural canon occupies just four pages in total (62–65, 438), while conversions and the growth of the Christian population draw no sustained attention. Leppin similarly (following Christoph Marksches) rejects the canard of a "Hellenization of Christianity," emphasizing instead an "intellectualization of Christianity" that, Leppin asserts, came naturally due to Christian dependence on texts (172–186, 436–437). Biographies of individual Christian authors are selective, social rather than theological, and subordinated to other themes, as when the careers of Valentinus, Tertullian, Origen, and Julius Africanus represent the range of "true philosophers" among Christians (177–182).

Other shortcomings are arguably more pertinent to Leppin's aims. Some sources, such as the *Acts of the Apostles* (e.g., 161, 325–326) or Athanasius's *Life of Antony* (230–232), are perhaps accepted too readily as testimony to events recounted, and similarly the traditional early dating of Christian papyri is presented too uncritically (62). While the section "Zentren früher Christen" smartly sketches Christianity's organization around networks rather than geographical centers, the Christian community of Rome clearly played a central role as a clearinghouse of Christian travelers, correspondence, and patronage by the later second century (cf. 244–246). While Leppin's command of scholarship across three languages is impressive, a few key Anglophone works are absent (Barbara Borg's on burial, Robin Jensen's on artworks, Éric Rebillard's on identity, Alistair Stewart's on bishops, and the maverick but stimulating scholarship of Ramsay MacMullen). Nonetheless, I expect even experienced scholars of early Christianity to learn much from this book.

Die Frühen Christen is written in an approachable, lively style accommodating to nonnative readers of scholarly German. It features well-selected images and a solid index of persons and places, though maps and an index of subjects would have made the work even more accessible. Despite its inevitable shortcomings, this is the best one-volume history of pre-Constantinian Christianity that I know of. An English translation would surely benefit many a student of ancient Christians and their world, as well as interested lay readers.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640720001456

***Bishops in Flight: Exile and Displacement in Late Antiquity.* By Jennifer Barry. Luminos 69. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019. xx + 204 pp. \$34.95 paper; free open access e-book.**

The fourth century CE is widely known for the engulfing conflicts that pitted various Christian factions against each other during the so-called Arian controversy. As bishops rose to prominence and emperors attempted to unify them through councils and theological formulas to describe and explain Christian dogma, the stakes rose increasingly