

the prefaces of these biblical commentaries as sites for authorial self-fashioning, as ‘media to help shape how these works and how he as their author, would be received’ (p. 5). Much like his subject, the author boasts a linguistic virtuosity and attention to detail that lends his examination of Jerome’s Pauline commentaries an unassailable authority. This is a model monograph that brings to light a long-neglected facet of Jerome’s exegetical production at a formative moment in his career as a biblical commentator.

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*Schriftauslegung und Bildgebrauch bei Isidor von Pelusium.* By Stefan Berkmüller. (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte, 143.) Pp. x + 291. Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2020. €99.95. 978 3 11 068593 0; 1861 5996  
*JEH* (73) 2022; doi:10.1017/S0022046922001075

Little is covered in modern scholarship on the fifth-century epistolary *corpus* transmitted under the name of Isidore of Pelusium, somewhat surprising considering that it is one of the largest epistolary collections of late antiquity. In this context, the reworked version of Berkmüller’s doctorate written at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich is a much needed and very welcome contribution.

In chapter i Berkmüller revisits the history of the printed editions and examines the debates on the origin of the *corpus* and the authenticity of the author, wherein he pleads – following the work of P. Éviex – in favour of Isidore’s historical reliability as a letter-writer, and of the authenticity of (at least some of) his letters. This is then followed by a literature review covering Isidorian scholarship mainly of the last twenty years (chapter ii, especially pp. 36–43). Berkmüller labels scholarship on Isidore since 2000 as ‘naïve’ for not scrutinising the authenticity of the letters (p. 23), and more specifically for not referring (or doing so only marginally) to the positions taken by R. Riedinger and M. Kertsch who argue that the *corpus* is not authentic. Yet, in most cases, this is so mainly because Éviex’s arguments of the previous decade against Riedinger’s doubts have been generally accepted and form, for better or worse, the *communis opinio*; this is also the case of scholarship before the turn of the century, which is not discussed in this respect (for example, D. T. Runia [1995] and U. Treu [1998]). In any case, since Berkmüller also follows Éviex on this matter, the insistence that recent scholarship should have discussed Riedinger’s objections (irrespective of how different the focus of that scholarship may be) reads for the most part as a rhetorical introduction to his discussion of Éviex’s arguments for Isidore’s historicity, and thus as a safe basis for the study in the following chapters.

In the remainder of the book, the author examines Isidore’s understanding of Scripture that begins with an analysis of his exegetical letters classified according to modern exegetical criteria (chapters iii, iv). In chapter iii Isidore’s views on the origin of Scripture, its divinely inspired character (p. 46), canonicity (p. 53) and the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments (p. 55), lead Berkmüller to situate him among the mainstream Christian authors of the fourth and fifth centuries as an exegete. As for Isidore’s terminology (p. 60), Berkmüller structures it into two categories: concepts employed for the ‘obvious’

interpretations, which would not necessarily correspond to a strict ‘literal interpretation’ but rather to an immediate meaning of a passage (for example, *πρόχειρος*, *ἐξ εὐθείας*), and concepts employed for a less common, or a deeper meaning of a passage (for example, *βαθύτερος* / *εἰλικρινέστερος* / *ὄξυωπέστερος* *νοῦς*, *κεκρυμμένος*), which, in turn, would not strictly stand for what is generally called an ‘allegorical interpretation’, but perhaps more often for an ‘additional’ meaning to the biblical passage. With numerous examples which add weight to his analysis, Berk Müller rightly challenges a strict divide between a literal and an allegorical interpretation in Isidore’s case as anachronistic on the one hand, and as creating a false dichotomy on the other (p. 76). In the remainder of this chapter, Berk Müller categorises Isidore’s exegetical interpretations according to the way in which the Pelusiate reacts to the needs of his addressees. The author explains Isidore’s predilection for a more literal type of interpretation as a result of a request from his addressees on the one hand, and in the context of the disputes between different Egyptian monastic fractions, on the other, which lead to the rejection of allegory by one of them, because of allegations of Origenism (pp. 78–9). However, Berk Müller qualifies both of Isidore’s interpretations – literal and allegorical – as *de facto* moral interpretations. He also shows how, irrespective of what type of interpretation Isidore adheres to, his general approach goes towards a connection between exegesis, dogma and practical lifestyle.

For instance, as the author shows, Isidore does not seem to give a firm statement about the inconsistencies in the scriptural text (pp. 97–102), or about the Christological references in the Old Testament (pp. 102–8), pleading instead against forcing a metaphorical interpretation which would release one from moral requirements, as well as against forcing a literal interpretation when dealing with contradictions in the scriptural text.

Finally, chapter iv scrutinises Isidore’s use of imagery (*Bildgebrauch*) in relation to modern exegetical terminology, mostly applying that of F. Young (1997), who proposes the usage of ‘literal’, ‘allegorical’ and ‘typological’ not as ‘methods’ but as ‘mechanisms employed to extract meaning’ (p. 114). Moreover, Berk Müller points out that an exegetical exercise implies ‘creative conveyancing’ and ‘connections of references’ (p. 115), with the aim always of ‘correctly determining the reference’ (*‘die Referenz ... richtig zu bestimmen’*) to which a certain thing refers (pp. 116–17). In the following (chapter iv.2), the author goes through an impressive number of letters and classifies Isidore’s exegetical methods into three main categories: text-critical (comparing different variant readings, syntax-related explanations, occasional etymological interpretations, for example letters 192 and 1043, pp. 121–34); cross-referencing, i.e. explaining one biblical text with another (pp. 134–6); and adding external information from astronomy, natural sciences, etc. (pp. 136–44).

Berk Müller further describes with careful consideration the contexts in which Isidore uses these methods (ch. iv.3, 4). On the one hand, there are exegetical letters in which an interpretation close to the text is preferred to clarify factual questions and contradictions, but also in paraenetic, and theological contexts (pp. 144–83). On the other hand, Isidore skilfully masters a wide range of associations and cross referencing in different biblical books. For instance, in letter 211, pregnancy is associated with a belief not yet ready to be confessed, and drinking

milk with an immature attitude (p. 195). The texts to which Isidore refers are (with very few exceptions) from the New Testament. These associations appear predominantly in paraenetic contexts (letters 9, 83, 126 etc.) – with moral and eschatological undertones sometimes intertwined (letters 65, 205, 285, 414, 416 on p. 206) – but also in theological contexts, either as references to Christ (in letter 453 Isidore is taking Jacob's not knowing the name of his wrestling adversary in Genesis xxxii.23–33 as an indication of the unknowability and incomprehensibility of the divine being, p. 215) or to God's work in human history (in letter 106 the sellers of doves from the Temple are related to the priests who commit simony, and then Isidore adds a third element in the comparison with the dove as the Holy Spirit condemning the simonist priests as a sort of irony, p. 222). The usage of *tertium comparationis*, most often in the form of metaphors, is not unusual in Isidore, and Berkmüller excellently illustrates the extent to which Isidore goes in order to strengthen an interpretation, sometimes by recontextualising and bringing passages to the use of one another (letters 136, 169, 358, etc.) in a fresh exegetical *démarche*.

In the final subsection of this chapter (ch. iv.5) Berkmüller deals with Isidore's theory of (biblical) images (for example, letter 907), which according to the letter-writer cannot be fully translated and need to be approached with a certain openness (or 'polyvalence' in F. Young's terminology). He then analyses Isidore's image use in different interpretative contexts: in paraenetic contexts Isidore extensively uses sport or nautical metaphors (letters 502, 661, 944), but also medical, child- or household-caring images, as well as animal or plant metaphors (letters 977, 316, 503, 1188, 1880, etc.). Isidore also uses both biblical and non-biblical images to illustrate stages in the salvation history and the situation in the Church. Berkmüller concludes with a few interesting examples of Isidore's creative concatenation of the following biblical images resulting in what he deems a fine 'theology in images and image chains' (*Theologie in Bildern und Bildketten*): wine (both with positive – letters 168, 393, and negative connotations – letters 169, 925), salt (letter 16), tree and root (letter 64), thorns (letter 95), eating (as the cause of Fall, letter 282), virginity (letter 286) and the image of the fig tree (letter 358). Metaphors appear also in eight Christological letters – letters 42, 219, 360 (Christological union connected with the idea of taking away sins), letter 201 (the leaven as the kingdom of God and the renewal of humanity through the Christological union), letter 193 (the story of Jacob and Isaac in Genesis xxvii.1–40 is linked with the relationship between the Father and the Son), letters 182, 199, 248 (around the divinity and humanity in Christ).

The volume is rounded up with an extensive bibliography divided into three sections, each with several subsections, followed by a brief note with conventions on translations, quotations, abbreviations and spelling. It also contains an index of personal names, a biblical index and an index of Isidore's letters discussed in the book.

To conclude, this is the first monograph-size treatment of Isidore's biblical exegesis and Berkmüller carries out this task with meticulous attention to detail and admirably develops a complex system of categorisations. This is also the first monograph to offer systematic translations in German of the exegetical letters of Isidore. One wonders, however, about the inescapable overlaps when specific metaphors

could be classified both under a paraenetic and a theological context, or simply about the letters' being introduced according to the context in which the exegesis appears. However, such challenges are perhaps innate to the material analysed and should not deter in any way from the great task Berkmüller had set for himself, and from the advancements this book achieves. This is an important volume which will be of use to all working on Isidore of Pelusium, his context, or more generally on late antique biblical exegesis.

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*Urban developments in late antique and medieval Rome. Revising the narrative of renewal.*

Edited by Gregor Kalas and Ann van Dijk. (Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.) Pp. 341 incl. 42 figs and 2 tables. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. €119. 978 94 6298 908 5

*JEH* (73) 2022; doi:10.1017/S0022046922001257

This interesting study, an interdisciplinary essay collection published with the assistance of the Marco Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is composed of a lengthy introduction (pp. 11–40) and ten papers: Kristina Sessa, 'Rome at war: the effects of crisis on Church and community in late antiquity' (pp. 41–39); Gregor Kalas, 'Portraits of poets and the lecture halls in the Forum of Trajan: masking cultural tensions in late antique Rome' (pp. 74–108); Jacob Latham, 'Rolling out the red carpet, Roman style: the arrival at Rome from Constantine to Charlemagne' (pp. 109–47); Dennis Trout, '[Re-]founding Christian Rome: the Honorian project of the early seventh century' (pp. 149–75); Erik Thune, 'After antiquity: renewing the past or celebrating the present? Early medieval apse mosaics in Rome' (pp. 177–203); John Osborne, 'The (re)-invention of Rome in the early Middle Ages' (pp. 205–35); Dale Kinney, 'Rewriting the renouveau' (pp. 237–78); Luisa Nardini, 'Renewal, heritage, and exchange in eleventh-century Roman chant traditions' (pp. 279–97); and William North, 'Reforming readers, reforming texts: the making of discursive community in Gregorian Rome' (pp. 299–329). The book concludes with a list of manuscripts cited and a short index. As for bibliography, each paper is accompanied by its own list, an elegant solution to what is usually a difficult problem for the editors of essay collections. It is not possible here to examine the papers in a detailed description in a comparison especially with the works of Richard Krautheimer and Helene Toubert, his student, who are quoted frequently. The list of titles just given will indicate the interdisciplinary nature of the book, making the volume as rare as it is welcome. It invites further research. Its subtitle, 'Revising the narrative of renewal', presumably chosen by the two editors, aims to show a picture of the great city of Rome remaining always Eternal Rome, not in need of any kind of renaissance. In the opening chapter, Kristina Sessa argues that even without the exact numbers of the dead or displaced individuals known, it is clear that Romans suffered greatly after the end of the Gothic wars (p. 58). Her arguments are supported by the letters of Pope Pelagius I (556–61) as primary source. She also refers to Justinian's Pragmatic Sanction, issued by the emperor's consistory in August 554. This much debated document (or bundle of documents) supports the picture