

MARTYRS

W. AMELING (ed.): *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten*. (Altertums-wissenschaftliches Kolloquium 6.) Pp. 148, pls. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002. Paper, €44. ISBN: 3-515-08234-4.

The papers in this collection were originally delivered in a lecture series at the Friedrich-Schiller Universität in the summer of 2001, and a stimulating and informative series it must have been. They do not, however, constitute an entirely satisfactory book. Lack of coherence is a standard criticism brought against collections like this, and certainly applies here: although Ameling in his foreword identifies a number of interesting themes (e.g. the complex interaction between martyrdoms as historical events and martyr acts as literary texts), the reader would have to do some hard work to trace them in the individual contributions. But the more serious problem lies with the papers themselves, which tend simply to survey material rather than construct arguments.

This problem is conspicuous in the initial offering: Klaus Rosen's discussion of martyrs as advocates of Christian unity reads more like a collection of sketchy notes than an actual paper—not surprising in a contribution of barely four pages. Detlef Liebs's survey of the ways that martyrs used their trials to propagandize for their faith is much more substantial and accordingly more useful, although his tendency to treat martyr acts as records of actual events will give some readers pause; the lack of attention to martyrologies as literary works is rather striking, given Ameling's remarks in the foreword. There follows Victor Saxer's comments on martyr cult in Rome from the second to the fourth centuries, accompanied by a number of nicely produced black and white photos. He brings together a wide range of evidence (archaeological, textual, epigraphic), which he conveniently summarizes at the end; but despite some recurring motifs (the cults of Peter and Paul, the material aspects of martyr cult, continuity with pagan practice), there is hardly a unified subject, much less an overall argument.

Jan Willem van Henten, in the first of two English papers (the others are in German), is one of the few contributors with a thesis to argue. Evoking W. H. C. Frend's influential *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1965), he questions the connection between martyrdom and persecution. After emphasizing the literary nature of martyr acts, he takes 4 Maccabees as a test-case; he argues that this text was not a response to persecution but was instead meant to reinforce community boundaries by delineating a 'model group'. His analysis, however, while cogent in itself, does not support his stated thesis because it concerns only martyrologies and not actual martyrdoms; in this respect his paper is methodologically at the opposite extreme from Liebs's. The second English contribution, Jan Bremmer's discussion of Perpetua, is a series of observations very much in the manner of the 'Notiunculae martyrologicae' that the author, together with J. den Boeft, has published in *Vigiliae Christianae*. The most important of these deal with Perpetua's visions, which Bremmer believes have not yet received an adequate treatment and which he tries to elucidate by reference to 'the material and mental world of Perpetua' (p. 97) rather than any fashionable psychological or methodological presuppositions. Given Bremmer's wide knowledge and sound judgement, this exercise naturally yields some useful observations. Yet his ideas about what constituted Perpetua's mental world are a bit restricted: the New Prophecy apparently formed no part of it, and concerns with gender scarcely more. Nevertheless, the detailed examination of the various elements

in these dreams against the background of contemporary culture constitutes a valuable contribution to the understanding of this fascinating text.

Theofried Baumeister's contribution on Coptic martyrology first surveys recent work in the field, especially new editions, and then traces some of the characteristics of the Coptic tradition that distinguish it from its Greek models, notably its stress on the repeated healing and restoration of martyrs before their final death. He tentatively connects this to the centuries-old Egyptian concern with bodily integrity as a key to the afterlife, and dates the solidification of this distinctive tradition to the sixth century. In the final paper, Tilman Seidensticker surveys the concept of martyrdom in Islam from the Qu'ran to contemporary suicide bombers, emphasizing a progressive loosening in the use of the term; he believes that there are enough similarities with Christian ideas of martyrdom to suggest some influence, but that the Islamic concept differs fundamentally in treating the martyr as one who dies in the active defence of the faith rather than as the passive victim of oppression.

Such, briefly, are the papers. Add the absence of an index, a general bibliography, or even a list of abbreviations, and the overall impression is one of a quantity of fine sand. More cement would have been helpful.

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MENDICANT MONKS

D. CANER: *Wandering, Begging Monks. Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*. (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 33.) Pp. xvi + 325, maps. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002. Cased, US\$65/£45. ISBN: 0-520-23324-7.

Daniel Caner's excellent study turns a light on a neglected and (at least in antiquity) much-maligned group of ascetics: the wandering, begging monk. C. argues that rather than being a heretical branch of 'orthodox' monasticism, the itinerant monk adhered to a *modus vivendi* that was much older than the coenobitic pattern promoted by the church in later centuries. The appearance of vitriolic polemics against this way of life in the late fourth century was the product of a church that was firming up its hierarchical structure and an episcopacy jealous to protect its authority and claim to alms.

C. opens his study with an examination of the attitudes toward work and stability preserved in the stories of the Egyptian desert fathers. He suggests that wandering monks were a feature of Egyptian monasticism from the beginning. Stories about wandering monks were preserved to suggest the monk's freedom from cares as well as God's sustaining presence and provision everywhere in the desert. Nevertheless, these accounts existed in tension with apophthegms that promoted stability and manual labor. The balance between a wandering life and stability tipped towards the latter as more monks moved to the Egyptian desert and communal cooperation became a requirement for group survival.

In Chapter 2, C. turns his attention to the evidence for early Syrian asceticism. This examination focuses on two documents suspected to have a Syrian provenance: the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* and Pseudo-Clement's *Letters to Virgins*. The former is read as offering an apostolic paradigm for the wandering ascetic, while the latter is