

that the prerequisite of finding him in Scripture is to recognise the presence of allegory: Dinger could have united these propositions by observing that the Incarnation of Christ the Word in body, soul and spirit is the justification for Origen's threefold hermeneutic, the metaphysical premiss of that shift from the outer to the inner man which, in his own nomenclature, is not allegory but homonymy.

Under the third head, Dinger suspects that Origen is wooing a pagan audience when he represents Christ as a teacher and the disciples as his students, making no distinction between the anonymous seventy and the apostolic twelve. Under the fifth head she is at pains to demonstrate that, although he seldom mentions the Jews without acerbity, Origen excludes them from the kingdom not 'because they are Jews but because they are not Christians' (p. 224); it is not clear, however, what it would mean to exclude them because they are Jews except that (as Origen says) they cling to the literal meaning of the Old Testament and therefore fail to perceive both the divinity of Christ and the cause of his mission. In a further chapter, Dinger addresses passages in the *Commentary* which speak of the kingdom without explicit warrant in Matthew's text. In one of these, an overture to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, she takes him to be foretelling the salvation of the devil (pp. 246–7, on *Matthäuskomentar*, p. 428 Klostermann/Benz). For my part, I cannot elicit clear reference to Satan from this paraphrase of Isaiah xiv, which seems in this case to treat the fallen monarch as one of a type. The whole passage (*Commentary* xv.27ff) is obscure, as it interprets the aphorism 'the first will be last' to mean that humans will be 'first' of, that is superiors and judges of, the angels who have fallen (giving *prôtos* the sense that it bears at John i.15), and goes on to surmise that the workers who have been idle for most of the day in Matthew's parable of the vineyard represent souls who had not descended to earth until the most recent times. A more quotidian reading is also offered, and no clear choice is made between them; the Latin and the Greek are strongly discrepant, and we must therefore not be too quick to see a clear enunciation, even in this late work (p. 25), of mysteries which Origen always addresses with reserve.

CHRIST CHURCH,
OXFORD

M. J. EDWARDS

Narsai. Rethinking his work and his world. Edited by Aaron M. Butts, Kristian S. Heal and Robert A. Kitchen. (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity, 121.)

Pp. xvi + 291. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020. €89 (paper). 978 3 16 159349 9; 1436 3003

JEH (73) 2022; doi:10.1017/S0022046922000069

This collection of essays offers a foretaste of an international, collaborative project to translate into English all the extant *mēmṛē* (metrical homilies) of Narsai, the pre-eminent figure of the emergent East Syriac literary and theological tradition. This diverse and complementary collection displays the competence and creativity of the contributors and promises riches to come.

Aaron Butts offers a concise survey of the sparse data on Narsai's life, the extent of the literature attributed to him and the works known to survive. Characterising him as 'the most foundational theologian articulating a dyophysite Christology in Syriac', Butts notes his formative influence on East Syriac 'liturgical theology, sacramental theology, eschatology, soteriology, pneumatology, and Mariology. . . [and] biblical exegesis'. The essay includes a thorough-going bibliography of secondary literature and guidance into the manuscript traditions.

Daniel Becerra employs rhetorical analysis to demonstrate 'the confluence of exegesis, *askesis*, and identity' in Narsai's *Mēmṛā* on the parable of the Ten Virgins. Engaging the work of scholars of Greek and Coptic as well as Syriac literary and spiritual traditions, Becerra delves into Narsai's 'psychagogic use of rhetoric'. He argues, finally, that both the 'exegetical task' and 'the idealized self, intended to result from the experience [of delivering and hearing the homily], intersects with but is not confined by the traditional boundaries of individual bodies and souls'.

Adam Becker considers the significance of the divine name in Narsai's works, especially in the baptismal ritual. Though rooted in Theodore of Mopsuestia's theology of baptism and Ephrem's theology of divine names, Narsai's understanding of the role of God's name/s in baptism is unique. The paradoxical role of sight and hearing in God's self-revelation to Moses, Abraham, Cain, Jacob, Elijah and others provides a framework for Narsai's conception of the ineffable name of God, unspoken yet inscribed and powerfully present in ritual.

Dmitrij Bumazhnov seeks to identify Narsai's putative opponents in his *Mēmṛā* on Peter and Paul. The work shares with Homily xvii of the *Pseudo-Clementines* opposition to the Apostle Paul and insistence on God's limitlessness. It also resonates with rabbinic cautions about reading certain parts of Scripture, such as Ezekiel's chariot vision. Narsai's polemics against the 'deniers of Biblical studies' are directed against a group that is 'Jewish-Christian' in some sense, who 'could be engaged in mystical practice where the body of the incarnate Christ and the human body of the Father were contemplated by means of the physical eyes'.

Through close examination of Narsai's two *mēmṛē* on baptism, Jeff Childers examines the proposal, advanced by Kappes and expanded by Leese, that Narsai adapted his baptismal theology to fit his Zoroastrian context. Paraphrased biblical references, less conspicuous Trinitarian and Christological language and the use of themes common to Zoroastrian religion – cosmic battle, fire and water, creation and recreation, priesthood – are 'well suited but not necessarily adapted' to Narsai's religious environment. Literary and theological features inherited from his Christian forebears and a robust Christology permeate these homilies.

An early source – Barḥadhbshabba 'Arbaya – presents Narsai and Jacob of Serugh as duelling poetic proponents of rival Christologies. Philip Forness affirms that this rivalry and the rich body of texts it has left to scholars offers a unique opportunity to explore the emergence and development of Syriac poetic genres. To that end he presents a careful analysis of three poetic devices – anaphora, caesura and enjambment – in a selection from the hundreds of extant twelve-syllable homilies attributed to these masters of the genre. Their use of metre and poetic devices provides keys to methods of composition and nuance and suggests 'somewhat surprisingly' that they built upon 'a well-developed tradition'.

In her study of Narsai's *Mēmṛā* 'On the finding of the holy cross', Kelli Bryant Gibson challenges Abramowski's dating based on Christological titles, 'crucified man/king/one'. She argues instead that the homily should be read as the first known Syriac celebration of the feast of the Holy Cross. In polemics ostensibly against Jews and pagans, centred on 1 Corinthians xviii–xxv, Narsai adduces types of the cross in nature and especially in Hebrew Scripture. The opponents of veneration of the cross are most likely to be within Narsai's Christian community.

Kristian Heal proposes that Narsai intended his many homilies on biblical figures to inspire his audience to imitate their virtues. This is evident in his exhortations to join the 'company of travellers' on 'the clear path'. He presents many Old Testament figures – not only Abraham, David, Job, Samson and Joseph, but also others, including Sarah, Rebekah and Hannah – as models of 'essential Christian virtues'. These 'spiritual athletes' and 'warriors' provide 'mirrors' to inspire the cleansing and beautification of Christians.

Commencing with recent redefinitions of asceticism that tend to broaden its framework beyond early and medieval Christian monasticism, Robert Kitchen turns to a selection of Narsai's homilies that encourage striving toward spiritual transformation. Fasting, keeping vigil and celibacy show a way of life that leads from baptism to the new world even while living on earth. Jonah and the three young men in the fiery furnace are exemplars of the struggle against sin; divine grace and mercy remain central.

Craig Morrison presents a study of 'the faculty of discernment in Narsai'. After setting the stage with a few well-chosen examples from biblical and rabbinic literature, he turns to Aphrahat, Ephrem and then to Narsai. As for his predecessors, Adam and Eve are central to Narsai's discussion of discernment, but he also ponders its meaning for David, for the Prodigal Son, for Jonah and, like Targum Onkelos, for the Israelites in the desert. It constitutes a *leitmotif* in Narsai's writings: the distinctly human capacity to discern, failure to do so, struggle and suffering, and reemergence 'with a renewed capacity for discernment'.

After a brief *apologia* for interdisciplinary study, specifically for the applicability of ancient medical texts to early Christian studies, Ellen Muehlberger turns to 'Narsai's theories about transformative insemination'. Rich metaphorical language and theological reflection enlightened by ancient gynaecological texts are to be found in Narsai's treatment of the Annunciation. Conception by ear pairs Mary with Eve; a plethora of agricultural and physiological motifs link water with wombs, baptism and the entire economy of salvation.

Eva Rodrigo Gómez begins by situating painting on a broad cultural canvas – in the Roman and Sasanian Empires, in the attitudes of early Greek and Latin Christian writers and in Syriac tradition in the writings of Ephrem. Narsai portrays God as artist and specifically as painter, especially in the creation of humanity. Marred by sin, the human image is restored in the incarnation. Narsai's technical knowledge of panel painting enriches his own literary, catechetical and exegetical creations, deliberately imitating the divine artist.

Erin Galgay Walsh provides a rich comparison of two of Narsai's homilies pertinent to gender roles in salvation history. The better known, 'On the reproof of women', focuses on Eve and the interaction with Satan that corrupts her in body and soul,

causing violence and conflict to reverberate through the course of human history. 'On the Canaanite woman' begins with this chaotic social condition, but this woman, who 'seized the boldness of invincible faith' and thereby triumphed in the struggle, provides an exemplar comparable to Mary.

Through the lens of Narsai's homily 'On the soul', set against a broad canvas of ancient thought, J. Edward Walters explores Narsai's understanding of the relation of body and soul. He highlights the care of the soul for the body, the origin of the soul, its 'control of bodily senses, the capacity for speech and reason, and creativity/artistry' and its fate at death. The body/soul relationship is often described in Christological or Trinitarian language since for Narsai as for many of his contemporaries, these complex and mysterious unions pose analogous intellectual challenges.

PRINCETON

KATHLEEN E. McVEY

Rhetoric and Scripture in Augustine's homiletic strategy. Tracing the narrative of Christian maturation. By Michael Glowasky. (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, 166.) Pp. viii + 195. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2021. €104. 978 90 04 44668 7; 0920 623X

JEH (73) 2022; doi:10.1017/S0022046922000148

One of the most promising and fruitful developments in patristics has been the rediscovery of Augustine as a rhetorician. In many ways, scholars for too long took the bishop of Hippo at his own word (at least as found in works like the *Confessions*) by focusing their attention more on his intellectual debt to Plotinus than to Cicero. In so doing, even eminent Augustinians have typically passed over the fact that Augustine was only ever what might be termed an amateur philosopher, while he was educated, trained and employed as a rhetor. Indeed, as Paul Kolbet persuasively argued in his excellent *Augustine and the cure of souls*, his approach to Neoplatonism was really very much in the tradition of some strands of late Roman rhetoric.

The new emphasis on Augustine the rhetor is due in no small part to growing interest in Augustine the preacher, itself encouraged in part by the discovery of some of his sermons. The very nature of sermons, delivered in a particular setting and to particular congregations, should have grounded work on Augustine's rhetoric in his social and historical context. Strangely, however, this has not generally happened – at least not in a thorough-going way – but instead his rhetoric has been analysed according to the influences that underpinned it or to its impact on his theology. So, for example, much ink has been spilt arguing about Augustine's relationship with Cicero or how the mechanics of rhetoric shaped Augustine's hermeneutical strategy. Not surprising, *De doctrina Christiana* has loomed large in these studies.

The brilliance of Michael Glowasky's book is that it foregrounds Augustine's audience. By focusing on his *Sermones ad populum*, Glowasky seeks to explain Augustine's rhetorical strategy by acknowledging the character, concerns and needs of his target audience. He argues that these congregations can generally be divided into three categories: catechumens being prepared for baptism, the recently baptised neophytes and the more mature faithful. Far from preaching more generally, Augustine, so Glowasky argues, used different forms of rhetoric