demotic education has the potential to show how Graeco-Latin *paideia* may have shaped or been shaped by practices from a pre-Christian Egyptian context.

In incorporating multiple subfields, the volume does suffer from a lack of consistency in how disciplinary standards are adhered to. While the editors address this (p. x), the lack of conformity with papyrological standards, for example, means that many named texts are missing from the Index Locorum (for example, in ch. xiv, the authors use papyrological sigla only for Greek papyri, not Coptic texts, meaning that the latter are not incorporated in the index). Consequently, the utility of the volume will be affected for some users. Yet, this is a relatively minor point, and these collected studies will be of interest to scholars of early Christianity, monasticism, late antiquity, the Classical world and its reception, and ancient education. This volume emphasises continuity and the persistence – even in adapted forms – of established traditions across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The rise of monasticism was not an abrupt and radical change, but one that existed within a cultural continuum.

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Christian reading. Language, ethics, and the order of things. By Blossom Stefaniw. Pp. x + 249. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019. £74. 978 0 520 30061 3

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This book takes up an important and understudied topic, the lectures on the Psalms and Ecclesiastes uncovered in 1941 among the Tura papyri which appear to be transcriptions of classroom sessions, complete with student questions that occasionally interrupt the flow of a lecture. The scholarly consensus since their discovery has been that these lectures should be attributed to Didymus the Blind, the late fourth-century Alexandrian teacher, heir of Origen and sometime ally of Athanasius. The present study of these texts is divided into five chapters. The first is a partly fictional, partly historical narrative of the fate of the Tura papyri including accounts of episodes in Stefaniw's personal and professional life up to the writing of this work. Chapter ii includes fourteen pages of translated passages from these lectures and introduces the book's main argument, namely that these lectures show Didymus to be providing lessons in grammar based on the Bible. Chapter iii examines Didymus' attention to the 'textual patrimony' organised under the topics of knowledge, language and reading, while chapter iv considers the 'intellectual patrimony' consisting of ethics, logic and 'the order of things'. Finally, chapter v takes the inductive approach of 'grounded theory' by highlighting synthetic categories under which Didymus' work can be analysed, including patrimony, curatorship, *mimesis*, *oikonomia*, cosmos and the reading Christian as object-subject. The purpose of this exercise is to determine whether these themes can be found in other late antique, 'knowledge-producing texts' (p. 190). The answer seems to be yes, though the chapter works at a highly abstract level and includes almost no citations or references to other primary sources.

The book's central contention is that Didymus was a grammarian (p. 41), who was not merely using 'grammatical skill' to perform biblical exegesis but was instead offering 'instruction in grammar' based on the Bible (p. 98). Some version of this claim is undoubtedly true and bringing this into focus is a useful

contribution to scholarship, though it would have been even more valuable had the book not eschewed the 'full comparison' with Homeric commentary needed to properly substantiate it (p. 78). In place of such a comparison, the book is devoted to a more radical argument about what kind of 'Christian' knowledge Didymus the grammarian created, and here it is much less successful. As in so many ambitious projects, the book claims that everyone prior to this intervention has misunderstood these texts, imprisoned as they were by the 'Western episteme' (p. 145). The illusory and shifting foil for the book is never given systematic presentation, but passing comments and a few repeated phrases build up a strawman of an opponent. Didymus' teaching is 'totalising', which is the opposite of 'confessional' or 'parochial', and he is not doing 'exegesis', since this word refers only to 'biblical commentary and devotional projects' (p. 111). Nor is he like those fundamentalist groups today who prohibit alcohol or dancing (p. 180). On the contrary, the only thing different between Didymus and his non-Christian, contemporary grammarians is that he uses the Bible as his text of choice rather than Homer. In every other respect Didymus' 'way of reading' was 'ordinary for late antiquity' (p. 189) with the goal of his lessons being to mould his students into 'a perfectly ordinary type of late Roman subject' (p. 217). That is, like every other late ancient grammarian, the unifying theme of his instruction was 'governance' or 'right order' (p. 148) and through his instruction he was aiming to create citizens who know their place in the empire (this despite the lack of any references by Didymus to the contemporary imperium in the passages cited in the book).

In short the book sets up a sharp dichotomy without ever sufficiently arguing for its legitimacy: Didymus must be engaged in either the totalising, ordinary work of any other late ancient grammarian, or he must be a Bible teacher who, with a much more limited ambition, was merely offering lessons in morality and theology for a religious sect. The real agenda of this book is to argue for the former option, which requires that Didymus' base text contributed nothing distinctive to the content of his lessons but was merely instrumental for displaying the same knowledge on offer from any other grammarian. In short, contrary to appearances, Didymus emphatically is not giving instruction in 'the content and interpretation of the Bible' (p. 187); his 'object of study' is 'general knowledge' rather than the 'text' (p. 119). Naturally one might ask why, if he did not care what these texts meant, Didymus made the innovative choice of substituting the Bible for Homer, though this important question is hardly pursued and, when it is raised in the final pages, the analysis is strikingly thin and the reasoning far from cogent. It was a 'radical' step for him to do so (p. 202), with the consequence being that he was merely 'pretending' to do 'ordinary work' in these lectures (p. 205; does this not contradict the earlier claim of ordinariness?). Yet it was an innovation stemming from a 'disease' (p. 214) that emerged in Julian's reign and was 'ultimately unnecessary' (p. 221).

The book does not make much of an attempt to understand the theology and biblical exegesis of this period (as the author admits on p. 46), nor does it engage with the vast secondary scholarship on these topics. Since Didymus was, as is evident both from these lectures and from his wider *corpus*, deeply involved in both these projects, this *lacuna* severely undermines the book's aim and results in some glaring errors, such as, for example, the claim that 'the Nicenes'

defined Christ as '*agennētos* or unbegotten' (p. 127). This, however, is exactly the opposite of what the creeds of 325 and 381 affirm, as does Didymus himself (for example, *Commentarium in Psalmos,* codex page 332, lines 21–6). Even the evidence marshalled in its favour at times undermines the argument unawares, such as the lengthy passage quoted in which Didymus provides a pro-Nicene account of the Son's eternal existence and kingdom, even citing 'God from God' and 'kingdom without end' from the creed (pp. 92–6). Surely alluding to a creed should make a lecture 'confessional' in at least the most basic sense of the term? Also problematic for this book's thesis is Didymus' frequent use of the word *exō* to refer to 'those outside' (178 occurrences in these lectures according to TLG). Though the book at first admits the word was 'a conventional formula used by Christian authors to denote non-Christians' (p. 66 n. 85), it later proposes instead that the term has no religious significance and simply means 'most people' or 'those outside this lesson today' (p. 168 n. 78). No argument or evidence is adduced to support this novel interpretation of the Christian use of *exō*, probably because the only argument in its favour is that it is needed to support the procrustean bed into which this book fits these lectures, thanks to its insistence that they cannot in any way be religiously sectarian or confessional.

Perhaps the best way of indicating what is problematic about this volume is to ask what work the word 'Christian' is doing in its title. The book evacuates the term of any meaning aside from the allegedly insignificant, diseased and unnecessary innovation of teaching grammar based on the Bible instead of Homer. This strategy is pursued in order to rectify the 'hyperfocus on religious identities and differences' that has plagued prior scholarship (p. 190) and to emphasise that Christian authors 'cannot be studied according to a separate set of categories that only apply to them' (p. 218). But the book itself has set up needlessly reified categories. It is not the case that Didymus can only be either a confessional Christian or a totalising grammarian, nor are the only scholarly approaches a hyperfocus on religious identity or a complete denial that it matters in any substantive way. Ancient Christian intellectuals like Didymus must of course be analysed in terms of the cultural and intellectual patrimony that they shared with their non-Christian contemporaries, but this does not exclude the possibility that they also creatively negotiated that inheritance to suit their Christian identity, practice and belief. In sum, texts as complex and fascinating as these lectures require a more subtle and sophisticated analysis than this book offers.

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Dionys vom Areopag. Beiträge zu Werk und Wirkung eines philosophierenden Christen der Spätantike. By Adolf Martin Ritter. (Tria Corda, 10.) Pp. xii + 199. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018. €29 (paper). 978 3 16 155625 8

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This quite small book contains the *Tria Corda* lectures given at the University of Jena in 2016 by Professor Adolf Martin Ritter. For his lecture he chose a subject on which he is supremely well qualified to speak, as one of the editors of the critical edition of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* (1990/91), which has been acclaimed as the 'event of the century' so far as patristic studies is concerned. It is certainly one