

J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt (eds.): Portraits of Spiritual Authority. Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 137). Pp. xiii + 227. Leiden, Boston, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1999. Cloth. \$75. ISBN: 90 04 11459 9.

This volume presents revised versions of ten papers delivered at a workshop in Cardiff in May 1998: Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Rewriting Early Christian History: Augustine's Representation of Monica' (3-23); Alastair H. B. Logan, 'Magi and Visionaries in Gnosticism' (27-44); Christine Trevett, 'Spiritual Authority and the "Heretical" Woman: Firmilian's Word to the Church in Carthage' (45-62); Rowan Williams, 'Troubled Breasts: The Holy Body in Hagiography' (63-78); Jan Willem Drijvers, 'Promoting Jerusalem: Cyril and the True Cross' (79-95); Stephen Mitchell, 'The Life and *Lives* of Gregory Thaumaturgus' (99-138); Han J. W. Drijvers, 'Rabbula, Bishop of Edessa: Spiritual Authority and Secular Power' (139-54); John W. Watt, 'A Portrait of John Bar Aphthonia, Founder of the Monastery of Qenneshe' (155-70); Gerrit Reinink, 'Babai the Great's Life of George and the Propagation of Doctrine in the Late Sasanian Empire' (171-95); and Peter Hatlie, 'Spiritual Authority and Monasticism in Constantinople during the Dark Ages (650-800)' (195-222). The essays are concerned with the nature of authority exercised by members of the late antique religious hierarchy, or individuals closely connected to them, as depicted in literary texts. As the editors remark in their preface (ix-xiii), historians these days are increasingly sensitive not only to different types of authority, but also to how that authority is represented or manipulated by the authors of texts. As such, then, the volume presents a useful complement to the text-

sensitive reconsideration of his views on the late antique holy man that Peter Brown provided in his Authority and the Sacred (1995), ch. 3.

Clark's opening chapter begins with a heavily theoretical assault on the failure of modern historians (in general — not just those writing about Christian antiquity) to incorporate methodologies from contemporary literary theory when approaching their texts. Curmudgeonly readers (whose existence must be presupposed by Clark's polemic) may view this censure with distaste, but Clark goes on to show the rich results that may be reaped by adopting such methodological tactics. In her assessment of Augustine's depiction of his mother in the Confessions and Cassiciacum dialogues, Clark points out the hopelessness of trying to recover a 'realistic', 'factual', or 'transparent' portrait of Monica from these texts. More fruitful, Clark argues, is analysing the function that Monica fulfils in each text as a spiritual cipher, representing potential routes to Divine Truth for the uneducated. Of the other essays in the volume, only Logan's study of Gnosticism is so explicit in its use of theoretical approaches. He deploys methodologies derived from the sociological study of religion to assess the emergence of authority figures in Gnostic groups. He argues that no single sociological characterization of a cult fits the case of Gnosticism perfectly, but the different religious strategies identified by sociologists nevertheless provide useful tools for analysis.

The remaining essays stress the need for a close reading of texts in their immediate cultural contexts. Thus Trevett analyses the letter of Firmilian, bishop of Cappadocian Caesarea, to Cyprian of Carthage about the behaviour of an ecstatic woman who performed baptism and celebrated the eucharist. For Trevett, the key issue is not whether the woman really existed, but how Firmilian's portrait of her was calibrated to

persuade Cyprian of the dangers posed to the Church by Cataphrygian New Prophecy. Williams's paper argues for a subtle approach to the holiness of saints as depicted in hagiography that is sensitive to sacramental theology and Christology. He admits that this approach to the topic is complex, but insists that it 'should warn us against the more prevalent clichés about "positive" and "negative" valuations of the body in early Christianity' (76). Jan Willem Drijvers considers the writings and career of bishop Cyril of Jerusalem in the context of contemporary imperial and ecclesiastical politics. Cyril's promotion of veneration of the True Cross buttressed his efforts 'to increase the glory of [the see of] Jerusalem' (85) at a time of intense rivalry between Jerusalem and Caesarea. His account seems to me, however, to prioritise the worldly at the expense of the spiritual and miraculous: perhaps a more subtle reading is possible.

The papers in the second half of the volume examine how the spiritual authority of individuals was represented in texts. Mitchell's paper (one of the strongest in the volume) epitomises the difficulties that literary texts present. He focuses on how the life of Gregory Thaumaturgus, a third-century bishop of Neocaesarea in Pontus, was recast in a series of works (including *Lives* in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian, and accounts incorporated in (e.g.) Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History* and Basil of Caesarea's *De Sancto Spiritu*) written from the late-fourth century onwards. He contrasts these later accounts with the earlier narrative of Eusebius of Caesarea and Gregory's own surviving writings, and argues that these later accounts were constructed for a specific audience. Thus Gregory of Nyssa's panegyric *Life* certainly addressed its subject's reputation as a wonder-worker, but it also emphasised biblical parallels to the bishop's life and made him a proponent of Trinitarian orthodoxy that suited Gregory of Nyssa's theological

agenda amongst the episcopate of Asia Minor c. 380. Other accounts (such as the Latin *Life*, which Mitchell tentatively ascribes to Rufinus: 133-5), however, were aimed at a more popular audience and so laid particular stress on Gregory's performance of miracles. Such questions loom large also in the papers by Han J. W. Drijvers, Watt, and Reinink, all of which are concerned with the presentation of authority figures in Syriac texts. All three stress the importance of locating texts in their specific cultural milieu if their contents are not to be misinterpreted. The final essay, by Hatlie, concerns the fate of the 'holy man' in early medieval Byzantium. Such figures were much less prominent in seventh and eighth century Byzantium than in late antiquity. Hatlie argues that we should not succumb to the temptation to associate this purely with the reverberations of the Iconoclast controversy; instead he posits a series of changes — social, economic, and institutional — that transformed the place of monasticism and 'the holy' in Byzantine society.

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