

RECENSIONER OCH BOKANMÄLNINGAR

Abate Gobena, *Sanctity and Environment in Ethiopian Hagiography: The Case of Gedle Gebre Menfes Qiddus*, Dissertationes Theologicae Holmienses 4 (Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm 2023). 229 pp. ISBN: 9789188906229.

This dissertation asks whether we might understand a correlation between the distinctively curated landscapes of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church enclaves, and the Ethiopic Tewahido spiritual tradition as expressed notably in the late medieval *Gedle Gebre Menfes Qiddus*, that is the Acts (or hagiography) of St. Gebre Menfes Qiddus.

The starting point in Chapter One is a striking fact of the present Ethiopian ecosystem: the presence of sacred forests surrounding the churches and monasteries of the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia. These sacred forests are ancient, thickly grown, filled with wildlife, adorned with the ringing call of the roof sistras on church buildings, and visibly striking in a landscape otherwise generally desiccated and bleak: “a landscape marked by deforestation” (p. 19). These forests have been studied largely for their scientific importance and their socio-political roles in the present history of Ethiopia. By contrast, Fr. Abate turns the spotlight directly to their theological significance, an aspect not taken into serious account in these other studies. The forests have continued and thrived, Fr. Abate argues, due to their centuries-long cultivation by clergy, monks, and devoted laity – but not by happenstance nor environmental strategy. Rather, these forests are the product of a particular, distinctive theological orientation and sensibility, profoundly instilled within Ethiopic Tewahido spirituality, and disseminated over centuries

through the invocations, prayers, readings, homilies, responses, supplications, and hymns that comprise collective liturgical teachings and practices, as well as individual devotions.

Fr. Abate presents Gebre Menfes Qiddus as an outstanding example of a saint whose story illustrates this unique vision as well as its manner of diffusion across vast reaches of time and space. Among the most cherished saints in the Ethiopian Tewahido Church, clergy and monks read his hagiography aloud in liturgical and other church gatherings often and with full ritual solemnity. The faithful, in turn, receive it with reverence and serious attention. Icons of the saint and his life are commonly displayed; printed books with his story are easily and widely available. He is a continual and revered presence in the living tradition of Ethiopic Tewahido Orthodox. What, then, Fr. Abate asks, do we find in the hagiography of Gebre Menfes Qiddus that speaks to the distinctive richness of ecological vision displayed by the sacred forests of the Ethiopic Tewahido Church? How does this saint's life serve to inculcate or instill this vision deep into the hearts of the faithful, to such an extent that the forests are preserved and cultivated still?

Chapter Two of the dissertation presents the reasons for choosing this saint's story and the methodologies Fr. Abate engages in his study. In addition to a basic orientation to hagiography as a literary genre, Fr. Abate outlines the major sources of influence underlying this text: the Egyptian and Syriac desert traditions and the Bible itself. Fr. Abate presents a reader-oriented form of literary analysis as especially instructive for his study, because of his conviction that the liturgical reading/recitation and listening practices of church communities are of fundamental importance for the reception of theological instruction – not just reception of theological teaching (as a cognitive act), but the deep internalization of a theological orientation or *habitus* in one's approach to the environment.

Who was this saint? Gebre Menfes Qiddus was raised in a monastery from the age of three. But his story is one of solitary devotion in extreme isolation from other people. Over years – indeed, over centuries, according to the hagiography – the saint prayed without ceasing in forests, mountains, lakes, and wilderness. He did not eat or drink; he did not wear clothes. He lived among wild animals, in full harmony with the natural world. He prayed with angels. He wandered; he remained stationary. Through his person, the disordered life of the fallen cosmos was

restored to the harmony of life in Eden before the Fall. His story offers a glorious vision of humanity and cosmos redeemed.

Fr. Abate considers the saint and his story through four primary themes that pervade the hagiography. To each theme he devotes a full chapter. Here is a brief sketch for each:

Chapter 3: *Ascetic estrangement*. The saint is depicted as set apart from before birth. His conception was miraculous, in the manner of many biblical stories. "His mother did not cuddle him and he did not suckle [his mother's] breast"; his parents and relatives admired his solitude, and he stayed apart from them. Rather than family, the saint belonged to a sacred family, with God as his father and mother, the Virgin Mary caring for him, prophets and apostles as siblings, and angels as his friends. Taken by angels, the saint entered an (unnamed) monastery, where "there were many monks", but only the abbot is mentioned. The saint remained separate, studying the Bible, and turned to his solitary practice, wandering for years or remaining stationary for years, through forest, mountains, and desert. Through centuries of devotion, the saint was attended constantly not by human companions, but by angels, saints, prophets, and apostles. Estranged from human sociality, the saint flourished instead among and within plants, animals, birds, and trees.

Chapter 4: *Co-existence with non-human creation*. And indeed, the saint flourished and more. At first, relations were difficult; ravens pecked at his eyes; grace protected him. But soon divine protection was replaced by intimacy. Wild animals leapt for joy at his presence. Herds of lions and leopards surrounded and cared for him; animals slept in his embrace. Soon, the saint's body became like theirs: his hair grew thick and long, "like a lion's fur" or "like a hawk's feathers", covering his nakedness. Unclothed, he neither ate nor drank. The wilderness, whether forest or desert, became his intimate shelter until he began to resemble this, too: his stature became that of a palm tree, his skin "like bark", the fragrance of his body like spikenard or myrrh or pomegranates, the fragrance of saints. For years, he lived in a lake, praying in the water. In turn, the natural world became a sanctuary enclosing him as in the Holy of Holies. The animals stood round in prayer.

Chapter 5: *Identification with angels*. Ethiopic tradition is rich in its depiction and theology of angels. In this case, the saint not only lived the angelic life; he also lived among them. Like them, he had no need for food or drink; like them and with them, he prayed without ceasing. Without need for sustenance himself, the dust beneath his feet became

the food required for the lions and leopards who attended him. Angels surrounded him, served him, and held an umbrella of light over him just as servants over their masters (imaged in the Ethiopic liturgical processions in which the deacons carry brightly colored silk umbrellas to protect priests and bishops). Just as he grew to resemble the animal and natural forms of creation, so too did he grow to resemble and surpass the angels in his perfection.

Chapter 6: *Reconciliation of opposites within the saint's own person, with, by, and through his bodily askesis.* Finally, this fourth theme considers how the saint's extraordinary efforts resulted in a reconciliation of opposites to the point of transforming and sanctifying all of creation, on earth and in heaven. Wandering and standing became mirrored images of perfect prayer; non-human life became the saint's own life; material and immaterial bodies became indistinguishable; the world where the saint was – in mountains, forests, desert, lakes – became a Paradise, as Eden before the Fall. But in the story of the life and struggles of this saint, a transformed real world also emerged. The places of his wanderings or standings became sacred places in which bloomed monasteries, churches, and pilgrimages of devotion. His abstinence became imitated by the fasting and askesis of monastics and faithful laity, who in their visits separate themselves from others and from the cities. His prayers became voiced by theirs. His story was and continues to be told, sung, recited, and learned. And reverence for the saint became care and attention for creation: the natural world blooming in the sacred forests of the Ethiopic Tewahido Church.

Following analysis of these four main themes – undertaken with copious comparisons with other hagiographies (including Egyptian and Syrian), and with biblical examples and quotations from liturgical prayers and hymns – Fr. Abate presents Chapter 7, on the use and impact of the *Gedle Gebre Menfes Qiddus*, that is, of the hagiography itself. Arguing that this text has been, and continues to be, one of the most widely distributed, widely read, and widely heard hagiographic texts in Ethiopia, Fr. Abate contends that it can and must become deeply incised into the heart of every faithful listener: monastic, clergy, or laity. Its constant repetition, read almost daily in liturgical services and elsewhere; its constant visual reminder in lively icons and devotional objects (happily included in the thesis book!); its memory fostered also in the Midre Kebed Monastery statues of lions and leopards guarding the main church building – all are vehicles for ensuring that the saint and his model are

always present, and always inspiring the faithful in how they relate to the forests, the natural world more fully, non-human creatures, and indeed creation as a whole. While Fr. Abate admits one cannot claim a direct link of causation between this text to the tradition of the sacred forests of Ethiopia, yet he sees profound and abiding resonance between collective and private devotional attention to this saint and his story, and the remarkable cultivation of the sacred forests.

Chapter 8 offers a summary conclusion of the thesis and its distinctive theological contributions to the study of Ethiopian ecology and biodiversity, and (I myself would argue) to its Christian history.

A number of helpful tools complete the study: a glossary of key Ethiopic (Ge'ez) terms; a list of uncatalogued copies of the hagiography; a list of the copies in the digitized manuscript collections of the British Library; a translation of one of the fourteen miracles attributed to the saint; a striking public sign at Lake Ziqwala (where the saint prayed) with stern directions for how visitors should conduct themselves on the holy grounds. Finally, there is an extensive bibliography of works consulted. This is a thoughtful and thought-provoking study that merits the attention of theologians concerned with the ecological questions of our times.

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Sverre Elgvin Lied, *Participation in Heavenly Worship: From Apocalyptic Mysticism to the Eucharistic Sanctus*. *Studia Traditionis Theologiae* 50. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022. 238 pp. ISBN: 9782503599281.

This book is a revised version of a doctoral thesis that was originally submitted for public defense at VID Specialized University in Stavanger, Norway, in 2016. Its aim is to investigate how the idea of the celebration of the Eucharist as part of the heavenly worship took root in the Christian church. This motif is a well-known one from the 4th century on, but here we learn how this is expressed in texts from before the Council of Nicaea.

The author finds the background of the motif in what he identifies as Jewish apocalyptic mysticism in texts from the Second Temple period.

In his view, apocalypticism and eschatology are more important elements of this tradition than a Platonic idea of earthly participation in the divine, although in practice the boundaries here can be difficult to draw. He is also aware that there is some change in this respect during the period he is investigating.

The texts Lied highlights are texts by Ignatius, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. In addition, he has investigated the *Apostolic Church Order*, which is an anonymous group of texts which so far has been more or less overlooked by scholars. Ignatius understands the church as God's temple and sees the worship service as the church's participation in Christ's eternal, Eucharistic sacrifice, but he has little regard for the service as part of the heavenly service. The same applies to the texts of the *Apostolic Church Order*. Irenaeus's understanding of salvation as deification allows for a somewhat greater emphasis on this perspective, but it is still the Eucharist as anticipation of the eschatological union of God and human beings that is the main focus. This motif is also found in Gnostic sources, but in Irenaeus this is more clearly understood to mean that God raises all of creation into fellowship with Him.

In Clement, there is a distinct union of apocalyptic and Platonic motifs in his understanding of the soul's ascension to God and participation in angelic worship. It is primarily related to the spiritual growth and worship of the individual, but also has implications for the understanding of communal worship. This is generally understood by Clement as ascension to and communion with heavenly worship, although it is probably the one who has adopted this perspective for his or her own part who understands it best.

Origen is less concerned with interpreting and expounding the liturgy than he is with giving an exposition of the Scriptures that focuses on the spiritual significance of the texts. Nevertheless, he clearly understands that through prayer we unite with the fellowship of angels and saints. The understanding of worship as a fellowship between those on earth and those in heaven is therefore evident in Origen. But he is more concerned with the descent of the angels than with the ascension of the earthly church; it is therefore more correct, according to Lied, to say that we have in Origen an understanding of the participation of angels in earthly worship than vice versa. In a concluding summary, Lied empha-

sizes that it is primarily with Clement and Origen that we find the community worship service as something that takes place in a union with the worship of the angels and saints.

One difference between Jewish and Christian worship is that in a Jewish context one does not speak of sacrifice in connection with the heavenly service, while the relation to Christ's sacrificial death means that this motif naturally arises in a Christian context. Here, then, one imagines that through the celebration of the Eucharist one takes part in Christ's presentation of himself as a sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary. The inclusion of the worship of Isaiah 6:3 as part of the liturgy occurs primarily in the fourth century, but there are, according to Lied, precursors from the late third century from Syria and Egypt.

In a concluding chapter, Lied comments briefly on what happened in the fourth century when the church's situation changed from that of an oppressed minority to a socially accepted faith community, and more people than before came to its worship services. The liturgy then became both richer and more unified, and the Sanctus of Isaiah 6:3 became a permanent element. Thus, the shared praise of the earthly and heavenly communities became a regular part of the liturgy. This is also unfolded in homiletic literature from this period, and Lied gives examples of this from Theodor of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostomos and Ambrose. This is thus common for both Greek (Antiochene and Alexandrian) and Latin traditions.

Through this book, Lied presents himself as a credible guide through this landscape. He knows both the primary sources and the main scholarly works, and when he has to take a position on researchers' different interpretations, he does so in a balanced and well-argued way. He is not himself a supporter of the bold hypotheses; he never goes further in his conclusions than he is certain that his sources allow. One may as a reader sometimes long for some more boldness in the conclusions, but compared to those who may be too liberal in this respect, one is grateful for Lied's careful and balanced approach. He has in this book given us a trustworthy discussion of some of the central motifs in the liturgical history of the early church.

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Johannes Aakjær Steenbuch, *Negative Theology: A Short Introduction*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2022. 118 s. ISBN: 9781666742176.

Den negativa teologin har som bärande idé att när det kommer till beskrivningar av Gud är språket otillräckligt och av den anledningen bör de teologiska utsagorna formuleras negativt. Gud är o-ändlig, o-begränsad, icke-kroppslig och så vidare. Oavsett om man arbetar historiskt eller systematiskt är denna metod och tradition värd att fördjupa sig i och söka förstå. Utan tvekan kan man konstatera att den negativa teologin genom århundradena har spelat en stor roll för den kristna kyrkans teologiska tänkande och att den också i dag fyller en viktig funktion.

Johannes Aakjær Steenbuch har i *Negative Theology – A Short Introduction* skrivit en kärnfull och tankeväckande genomgång av den negativa teologins historia. Boken spårar den negativa teologins historia från och med Bibelns texter och framåt genom historien. I tre kapitel presenteras utvecklingen i den antika världen, medeltiden och slutligen i den moderna tiden från senmedeltiden via reformationen fram till och med idag.

I genomgången i det första kapitlet följs de teologer som ofta brukar uppfattas som den östliga teologins huvudgestalter. Från Klemens av Alexandria dras linjen till Gregorios av Nyssa. Mellan dessa båda ställs den nyplatoniska filosofen Plotinos som pekas ut som särskilt betydande. Beskrivningen av den historiska utvecklingen och urvalet av tänkare blir ett slags argument i sig själv, även om läsaren inte helt får det förklarat för sig. I sammanfattningen av första kapitlet ges dock en förklaring till varför urvalet ser ut som det gör: "Rather than seeing early Christian theology as a passive recipient of novel philosophical ideas flowing in from the outside, it is probably more correct to see it as actively engaged in a more complex conversation with Jewish and Platonic thought, where Christian thinkers may even have influenced the pagan peers." (34)

Just detta, att den negativa teologin vuxit fram i konversation mellan olika traditioner, är kanske själva grundargumentet i hela det första kapitlet. Jag undrar dock om det inte hade varit möjligt att gå längre i att visa hur denna konversation mellan huvudsakligen nyplatonisk filosofi och kristen teologi sett ut. På ett par ställen i kapitlet antyds det att den inre logiken i de olika traditionerna fungerar på olika sätt. Men i stället

för att enbart konstatera att det nog finns skillnader vill skulle jag vilja förstå mer hur dessa skillnader ser ut – filosofiskt, analytiskt, systematiskt. Olika idékomplex glider in i varandra i de olika traditionerna och mellan de olika tänkarna. Men i allt detta finns skillnader i betoningar, metoder och därför också i slutsatser. Jag hade önskat ännu mer av klargöranden kring dessa bitar. På ett ställe skriver Aakjær Steenbuch att Gregorios av Nyssas apofatiska teologi går djupare än andras eftersom han betonar Guds oändlighet snarare än Guds enhet. Ett verkligt intressant påstående som borde kunna följas upp mer och som, om det stämmer, rimligen borde ha stora teologiska konsekvenser.

En sak jag uppskattar särskilt i det andra kapitlet om medeltiden är det visar på kontinuiteten mellan vitt skilda tänkare, och på så sätt går emot vissa standardbeskrivningar av kyrkans medeltid. Det visas att den negativa teologins grundantaganden finns som en gemensam utgångspunkt såväl för de teologer som karakteriseras som mystiker som för skolastikerna. Här blir texten tesdrivande och det är i det här fallet bra. I avsnittet om Anselm drivs tesen att hans välkända gudsbevis bör läsas och balanseras utifrån den negativa teologins ramverk. Om Thomas av Aquino, som ofta porträtterats som en utpräglad rationalist står det: "As with Anselm, Thomas's proofs are not so much attempts at confining God to a convenient box in our theological system as they are attempts, so to speak, at opening up cracks so that the light can shine in." (52)

Här ser vi att det även i detta kapitel finns en ambition att korrigera felaktiga och förenklade idéer om den historiska teologin. I detta har det andra kapitlet i mitt tycke sin främsta förtjänst. Betoningen på kontinuitet ger en stark och bred bild av hur etablerad den negativa teologins är och blir därmed ett argument för en fördjupning i negativ teologi.

I bokens sista del beskrivs ett känt historiskt narrativ med stor klarhet och kraft. Från iakttagelsen att den negativa teologin någon gång i gränsen mellan medeltidens slut och den tidigmoderna tidens början upphör att beröra filosofi och metafysik och i stället förflyttas till spiritualitetens och poesins områden, rör sig den historiska genomgången först bakåt till senmedeltiden och sedan framåt genom moderniteten. Duns Scotus pekas ut som källan till den moderna teologins problem. Hans uppfattning om varabegreppet som univokt (det vill säga att det betyder samma sak att Gud *är* som att allt annat *är*) tillsammans med hans starka betoning på Guds viljas frihet görs tillsammans med den efterkommande Ockhams nominalism till som ett slags grundproblem

som sedan hänger kvar i senare teologi och filosofi. Formulerad på enklast tänkbara vis kan tesen sägas vara att det i den moderna tiden finns en godtycklighet eller irrationalitet i gudsförståelsen, en godtycklighet som kanske liknar vad man antar om Gud i tidigare negativ teologi men som i själva verket är något helt annat. Detta nya sätt att tänka om Gud och Guds relation till världen tar sig sedan uttryck på olika sätt i reformationens teologi, i den tyska idealismen, hos tänkare som Søren Kierkegaard och Karl Barth och i det sena 1900-talets poststrukturalism.

Även om den historiska genomgången knappast är ny utan känns igen framför allt från den engelska, teologiska skolbildningen *Radical Orthodoxy*, blir den väldigt tydlig och bitvis mycket övertygande. Den idéhistoriska utveckling som beskrivs är dock väldigt komplex och jag frågar mig vid ett par tillfällen: "Skulle det inte kunna vara precis tvärtom?" Att man genom läsningen tvingas till fördjupad reflektion om själva kärnan i dessa frågeställningar ser jag dock som något mycket positivt.

Sammanfattningsvis är *Negative Theology* ett imponerande litet verk som lyckas täcka mycket utan att för den sakens skull göra det på ett ytligt sätt. Med tanke på att boken bara är ca 100 sidor lång är det givet att det går att hitta perspektiv som skulle kunna fördjupas ytterligare. Men för den som söker efter en bok om negativ teologi som är tillgänglig och ger historisk överblick samtidigt som den erbjuder teologisk fördjupning så kan det knappast finnas ett bättre val än *Negative Theology – A Short Introduction*.

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Éric Rebillard, *The Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts Nor Forgeries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 189 pp. ISBN: 9780812252606.

On the strength of his collection of martyrs' narratives for OUP (2017), Éric Rebillard has produced this short theoretical book. It comprises a mere 87 pp. of main text (divided into four chapters with a short introduction and even shorter conclusion), two appended works in Latin with facing translation (pp. 90–91; 92–123: the latter being the same short text repeated 6 times), notes (pp. 125–154), a bibliography (pp. 155–177)

and a general index (pp. 179–187). The apparatus of the book thus occupies more than half the total number of pages. Rebillard's ambition is to "successfully argue the case that martyrdom narratives should not be studied with traditional criteria applied in favour of or against their authenticity"; moreover, while the title clearly spells out what these texts are not (neither authentic accounts nor forgeries), Rebillard claims that "the question of what kind of texts we are studying is here addressed more satisfactorily than it has been thus far" (p. 6). From these two books one presumes that this scholar is set on establishing his voice in the field in a continuing manner, but the acknowledgements at p. 189 declare that this will be his last book consecrated to such study. Rebillard will not be another Delehayé.

The two books are connected by a thread considering criteria for collection of martyrs' texts through history. Here, too, Rebillard proposes his selection of a handful of pre-300 CE narratives on the basis of external attestation of characters or narratives, without recourse to internal criteria. Rebillard's aim is to go beyond the current scholarly debate (with a noble ecclesiastical ancestry) about the historical authenticity of these texts. Rather than enter the conversation – read heated polemic – concerning the truth-value of these texts that erupted in American academia, Rebillard effectively sidesteps the issue mainly because he considers that the intended audiences were already convinced about the historical value of these narratives, while at the same time being conscious that the versions they were presented with were necessarily literary rewritings of original stories. (A modern parallel would be that of films about the holocaust: while the narrative details need not be of exact stories that happened, the general framework makes sense to viewers as historical. Their point is to interpret, rather than to recount, history by using stories.) This claim is certainly interesting, but the author fails to develop this point. In these few, dense pages, many valuable leads are left equally underdeveloped, so that the impression is that the author is somewhat reticent in his exposition, and certainly ungenerous to the reader who might need to be guided more pedagogically to both ideas and texts. Compression leads to some obscurity, and the level the book is at presupposes a very good knowledge of the contents, issues, and manuscript transmission of these texts.

The negations of the title are a direct answer to Candida Moss and Bart Ehrman respectively, but one does not find any detailed rebuttal of their arguments. On the other hand, for his positive appraisal, Rebillard

relies on definitions formulated by other scholars in different contexts, such as the “stories without authors and without texts” studied by Christine Thomas for apocryphal narratives (p. 43) and the ‘open texts’ applied to ancient novels by David Konstan (p. 44). Rebillard expands these concepts with the idea of “living texts” as providing the necessary paradigm shift for martyrs’ narratives (p. 46). This definition relates to a New Philology approach concerning changing versions. Rebillard considers each version as metaphorically representing an independent “performance” of the work, even though by p. 52 the word performance has lost its inverted commas. At the same time, he applies to them the very complicated FRBR taxonomy devised for printed texts, distinguishing the Work from its Expressions, Manifestations, and Iterations, which he exemplifies with six versions of the *Acts of the Scilitan Martyrs* (Appendix II). But what is the point of complex comparisons if the direction of evolution of a text can no longer be legitimately deduced, even as a hypothesis? Moreover, some editorial choices, such as keeping phonetic peculiarities of the scribe of MS Vallicellianus Tomus X (if this is the correct shelfmark) who wrote *causa* (cavs?) for *capsa* (pp. 100–101) and translating this spelling variant as ‘cause’ in English, are clearly misguided. It is not clear whether it is the literary methodology that steers the categorizations, or the textual criticism that imposes the use of fluid categories where variants (and even errors) come into their own. In the first case, I do not see how this analysis differs substantially from Moss’s approach in pointing to the dynamics of fiction; in the second, I cannot see any special novelty between martyrs’ narratives and other fluid texts that have been the object of study of New Philology.

Though rightly advocating more nuanced literary understandings of these narratives, Rebillard stops short of pushing their definition beyond the written textual domain. His point remains a philological one that appeals to New Philology but begs the question of how legitimately to treat these texts within a scholarly discourse (if at all). Could there be some mileage in dropping the idea of these texts as written (even though the versions we work from are of course in manuscripts) and considering them rather as oral-performative canvasses that took different shapes in different local contexts? Were they, in some sense and at some point in their formation, plays about martyrs rather than texts for single-voiced liturgical reading? Rebillard’s remarks on the literary taste for staging trials according to reports of interrogations, acquired long after

the martyrdoms, would gain in depth by considering the dialogical format of such scenes as part of performances, a specific shape for a “living text”. Rebillard argues that the use of court procedures in dialogue form cannot be used to ascertain the historical or the early nature of the Passiones. This point is convincing, and the later, fourth-century fashion for introducing these procedural questionings attests more to the creation of a believable setting (perhaps enacted as an official interrogation scene?) than it does to the historical immediacy of the story of a particular saint.

In the end, Rebillard fails to clearly situate the resulting accounts in the realm of the “as if true” which he defines as the *tertium quid* beside the true/false dichotomy and which includes a significant parallel with comedy and mime (p. 63). Reticence to develop the association of martyrs’ narratives with performative phenomena seems to me to weaken the full-bodied argument against the true/false dichotomy. After all, the audience that is several times invoked does not materialize concretely in this book. Augustine’s letter to Paulinus, translated as Appendix I, is quite candidly declaring that the great theologian was just not capable of writing in such a genre. Avowedly, Rebillard’s literary claims for these narratives are intended to discourage historians from using them as sources of factual information. The legitimacy of this use, however, is not more radically questioned.

In the course of proving his points, Rebillard dedicates fairly detailed attention to some narratives, so that students of these texts (specifically, the Martyrdoms of Polycarp, Pionius, the Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne, the Life and Passion of Cyprian, the Passions of Perpetua, of Lucius and Montanus and of Marian and James) will benefit from consulting the book’s remarks on dating, structure, and take advantage of some pointed remarks on their relations (esp. between Perpetua and Cyprian). There is no doubt that a corrective and appeasing book was needed to calm the polemic around martyrs’ texts, and that Éric Rebillard had the authority and expertise to be its author. Certainly, this short book has made an important contribution in this sense. Above all, the obsession with reducing everything to either truth or falsity springs from our contemporary world of uncertainties which has become detached from meaningful debate about the human condition. Martyrs’ texts had a voice in this definition of reality, which need not be reduced to a simple moral lesson.

It is a pity, then, that the author does not articulate his point of view more fully and share his knowledge more expansively for the less expert reader. A result of Rebillard's reticent and synthetic approach is that this book, though doubtlessly important, will remain accessible only to a select audience of experts. Even the direct dialogue partners in the polemic about martyrs' texts make the briefest of appearances, giving the impression that their writings only deserved a wry and curt reply.

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Stavroula Constantinou and Aspasia Skouroumouni-Stavrinou, *Breastfeeding and Mothering in Antiquity and Early Byzantium*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2024. 272 s. ISBN: 9781032208756

Before facing her death in the gladiatorial arena, Perpetua wrote her last words in her diary: 'But concerning the outcome of that contest, let whoever wishes to write about it, do so'. Therein, perhaps, lies the martyr's prophetic vision. In offering up her story to be written by others, Perpetua handed over the last word to posterity. For the better part of two millennia, her diary has been parsed by storytellers, theologians, and historians. The latest in this storied line is *Breastfeeding and Mothering in In Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, edited by Stavroula Constantinou and Aspasia Skouroumouni-Stavrinou.

The publication is well-timed. As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, motherhood became a nexus of public discourse. The dull glow of zoom screens shed new light on the institution of motherhood, as homeschooling made *invisible work* more visible, and underscored the value of *emotional labor*. These terms became important facets of contemporary gender politics and a flourishing of motherhood memoirs and narrative non-fiction followed. Though the field of motherhood studies had been steadily developing for decades, the pandemic highlighted the need for motherhood to become a topic of academic study across many disciplines. Against this backdrop, MotherBreast, an interdisciplinary project based out of Cyprus, held workshops and a conference throughout 2020 and 2021. Most of the book's chapters were developed from

papers delivered during these events. This book thus gives voice to Byzantium sources in an ongoing and important conversation about the value and work of motherhood.

The book is structured into three parts: society and ideology, medicine and practice, and art and literature. In the opening chapter, the editors demonstrate the value of these lenses by holding them up to the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (PPF). The PPF is an account of imprisonment and martyrdom set in Roman Carthage in 203 AD, written mainly in the first person by a narrator identified as 'Perpetua'. Though the text is well-studied, this chapter yields new insight into the narrative. In society and ideology, the editors identify a tension between the binaries of good and bad motherhood that structure the text. Though other binaries – such as reality and dreams, male and female – have been an important facet of PPF scholarship, the editors correctly assert that categories of good and bad motherhood have not previously been emphasized. As such, the editors outline how the text “continues a tradition established in Augustan Rome, whose art and literature incorporate tensions and paradoxes between good and bad mothering to regulate actual Roman mothers” (p. 17). Similar insight is wrought from medicine and practice, where an intertextual reading of the PPF alongside Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Soranos demonstrates that Perpetua used medical vocabulary in her writing, demonstrating an awareness of contemporary medical discourse. Finally, the prism of literature and art casts a different light on the genre of the PPF. Though the genre of Perpetua’s narrative has been the subject of scholarly debate for many decades, the editors propose that there is an inter-relationship between gender and genre in Christian martyr’s autobiographical writings and that Perpetua’s writing can be read specifically as a “motherhood diary” (p. 40). Each of these three perspectives offers new insight into the ancient text and illustrates the relevance of the book’s three thematic strands to scholarship.

In the contemporary conversation on motherhood and domestic labor, Patristics scholars are in a unique position to say something meaningful about sacrifice, martyrdom, and the body. For church historians in particular, this book offers an entry into issues of motherhood and lactation.

The book is interdisciplinary by nature, the contributors come from a variety of different fields and thus draw from a diverse array of primary sources. These include philosophical texts, medical treatises, legal

documents, advertisements for wet nurses, and letters written between women offering each other mothering advice. Throughout the chapters, these are often read together with biblical texts, apocrypha, hagiography, and magical papyri. The visual evidence here is likewise varied, from a collection of church frescos depicting striking images of female figures whose breasts are bitten by serpents, to a Roman coin portraying the 'secular figure' of Empress Fausta, nursing a child. The diversity of sources reminds us that, when there are so few extant sources that speak to the experience of Byzantine women, particularly mothers, an interdisciplinary approach is imperative. Though Perpetua's diary remains, as the editors claim, the "premodern source par excellence of the lactating women" (p. 8), the singularity of her story speaks to the dearth of women's writing that remains with us. This lack necessitates that church historians cast a wide net to find evidence of mothering in Late Antiquity. This book represents a shore from which to do so – a starting point for anyone interested in examining, or re-examining, motherhood in the early church.

The editors likewise see the value of this book as a starting point. As the MotherBreast project was based in Cyprus, the sources examined here are mainly written in Greek, which leaves an opening for scholars to apply a similar approach to Latin, Syriac, and other texts. Likewise, the scope of the book, covering the first seven centuries AD, opens up questions of how these mothering practices changed and developed over time. As the editors themselves write, "the volume does – and could – not offer an exhaustive analysis of the examined period's lactating woman and her work of mothering, yet we believe that it will lead to more investigations enhancing our understanding of mothering practices, both in the period under discussion and in later times." (p. 47) This call for more research on the topic of breastfeeding and mothering thus echoes Perpetua's last words: 'Let whoever wishes to write about it, do so.'

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Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksen, *Romanos: Nattens sange. Fire kristne hymner*. Aarhus: Atlanten, 2023. 112 s. ISBN: 9788797288122.

Det er sjelden jeg får i oppgave å anmelde en bok som jeg simpelthen synes er uforlignelig bra. Dette er en sånn anledning. Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksens bok er et praktverk utført av ualminnelig kyndige hender.

Romanos Meloden (+ ca. 560) regnes gjerne som den senantikke periodens største salmedikter. Med sine lange, strofiske sanger dramatiserte han det kristne fortellerstoffet for Konstantinopels kirkegjengere. Dialoger, kontraster og djerv billedbruk skapte en nesten kinematisk spenning.

Eriksen har valgt ut fire av Romanos' sanger eller *kontakier* og oversatt dem til dansk. Det dreier seg om én gammeltestamentlig sang («Josef»), om helten fra 1. Mosebok som blir egyptisk slave, én nytestamentlig («Peters fornægtelse»), om apostelens svik i forkant av korsfestelsen, og to hymner som skaper selvstendige fortellinger eller dramaer mot bakgrunn av nytestamentlige beretninger: «Jul i Helvede» handler om hvorledes Marias vuggesang til den nyfødte vekker Eva og Adam fra søvnen i Hades; «Korsets triumf» iscenesetter en underjordisk dialog mellom Djevelen og det glupske monsteret Hades i forbindelse med korsfestelsen. Eriksen har et utsøkt blikk for ironien, dramatikken og det groteske i denne poesien, og oversettelsene balanserer fint mellom en relativ nærhet til den greske teksten og en (så vidt denne anmelderen kan bedømme) levende og stilistisk bevisst dansk. I motsetning til Hjalmar Gullbergs svenske gjendiktning av Romanos består Eriksens av frie vers uten rim og metrikk. Hverken «Josef» eller «Peters fornægtelse» har tidligere vært oversatt til noe skandinavisk språk.

Elof Westergaard, biskopen av Ribe, åpner boka med et forord som blant annet handler om Romanos' innflydelse på den moderne greske poeten Odysseus Elytis.

Eriksen har selv skrevet innledningskapittelet, en atten sider lang presentasjon av Romanos' liv og verk. Som Romanos-forsker er han velinformert om den nyeste forskningen på feltet og formidler kunnskapen på en forbilledlig pedagogisk og engasjerende måte.

Verket er rikt illustrert av den danske kunstneren Peter Brandes. Skjønt – «illustrert» er egentlig ikke rett ord. Boka lar tekst og farvebilder tale med hverandre som to mer eller mindre jevnbyrdige størrelser; den emosjonelle ekspresjonismen i bildene går i dialog med sangene.

Ironisk nok slår de moderne bildene meg som mer tradisjonelle i motivvalg enn de senantikke tekstene, som altså kan feire oppstandelsen med en dugelig monsterdialog. Jeg savner uansett en liste over bildene, som gjerne kunne inneholde billedtitler. En alminnelig innholdsfortegnelse mangler også i boka.

Sammen med Brandes har Eriksen skapt en nydelig bok som uten å simplificere formidler spensten og livaktigheten i disse senantikke sangene og viser nye veier inn i gamle fortellinger.

Thomas Arentzen
Sankt Ignatios/ EHS