

sexual innuendoes colour some of the more satirical accounts. On the contrary, women's piety and patronage were frequently viewed in positive terms, without suggestions of promiscuity or subversive political intrigue.

Josephus appropriates the positive image of women as religious benefactors, enquirers, sympathizers, and brokers to enhance his projection of Judaism as a respectable and well established movement in Greco-Roman society. Similarly, Luke shapes his accounts of prominent women in the early Church to portray Christianity as a reputable cult, in which the conduct of leading women in no way approximates that attributed to female adherents of other cults.

This book adds to the increasing volume of studies of the role of gender in early Christianity. Stereotypes and assumptions which have prevailed in scholarship are challenged, and alternative interpretations of the data are offered. Its brevity means that several aspects of Matthews' argument are not as detailed as they might be, and perhaps for that reason less persuasive than a fuller treatment might have been. While readers will not necessarily assent to every detail of her reconstruction, this work should prove a useful impetus for further research, with implications for understanding early Christian mission in the context of religious apologetics and propaganda in the ancient world. Constructions of gender in the Greco-Roman world will also need to be reconsidered. For the questions it raises, as well as the interpretations it offers, this book should be welcomed by scholars of antiquity as well as of Judaism and Christianity in the Greco-Roman world.

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*The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford Early Christian Studies). By Stephen J. Davis. Pp. xiv, 288, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, £50.00.

Stephen Davis' *The Cult of Saint Thecla*, a revised version of his doctoral dissertation (Yale, 1998), fills a gap in the scholarship on early Christian martyr cults. Saint Thecla has been in need of an up-to-date, synthetic treatment that charts the rapid expansion of her well-attested cult in the Eastern Mediterranean during late antiquity. Davis provides this as well as a detailed analysis of the translation of Thecla's cult from Asia Minor to Egypt. While others have studied the development of Thecla-devotion in a given place, such as Gilbert Dagron's edition of Thecla's fifth-century *Life and Miracles* at Seleucia-on-the-Calycadnos (Brussels, 1978), Davis demonstrates the importance of the movement of her cult for the physical and intellectual growth of the Eastern churches in the fourth and fifth centuries.

He begins his introductory chapter with a synopsis of Thecla's life and martyrdom as told in the late second-century *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. He then summarizes the early Christian reactions to her legend, including, most significantly, Tertullian's (pre-Montanist) condemnation of Thecla's self-baptism, which provides a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the work. Davis goes on to discuss the audience of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a text which consistently denigrates its male characters and which may have been written, he argues, with female readers/listeners in mind. Davis is somewhat sceptical, however, about identifying the specific audience and concentrates instead on the qualifications of female piety as they are represented in this text, an analysis which provides the groundwork for his later comparisons with women's asceticism in Egypt (chapter 3). These qualifications include the practice of domestic continence, itinerancy (an integral part of which is transvestitism) and charismatic authority. Davis suggests that these defining characteristics of female piety reflect the social and religious concerns of the community behind the *Acts of*

*Paul and Thecla*, a text which inspired an enormous response in late antique and medieval Christian devotion.

Having thus introduced the representation of women's piety in the seminal *Acts*, Davis proceeds to examine in his second chapter the physical and textual development of the cult at Seleucia, the most successful centre of Thecla's cult in the East. Here Davis relies heavily on Dagron for the archaeology, but, in his own analysis of the *Life and Miracles*, Davis rightly notes that it has not been exploited as it could be and goes on to provide through this text a contribution to the study of the rhetoric of female sanctity in late antiquity. Davis' main argument in this chapter is that local cultic competition in Asia Minor, between Thecla cults as well as between pagans and Christians, offers the author of the fifth-century *Life and Miracles* the opportunity to reemphasize the community values on display in the second-century *Acts*: by doing this the author is arguing for the priority of Seleucia as well as his own personal connection to Thecla. Davis shows how part of the importance of establishing the primacy of Seleucia was the fast-growing industry of female pilgrimage: Egeria, in her famous trip to the Holy Land in the late fourth century, stopped at Seleucia and read in one sitting the entire *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in the grotto where Thecla was said to have disappeared. Egeria's pilgrimage is for Davis a prime example of how an influential, authoritative text can determine the success of a cult site empire-wide.

Chapters three through five comprise the second, more innovative half of the book. In this half Davis argues for the existence of a thriving late antique pilgrimage center of Thecla in the Mareotis, South-West of Alexandria. Davis admits that due to controversial or conjectured evidence, such as (Pseudo-) Athanasius' *De virginitate* and a notional convent devoted to Thecla, his results are 'more tenuous' than the previous half (p. 84). Nonetheless, he argues a compelling case for Thecla-devotion among women ascetics in the Egyptian wilderness by combining, as he does concerning Thecla in Seleucia, new close readings of seminal texts with archaeological evidence (p. 114).

In chapter three Davis examines the *De virginitate* from the point of view of cultic development: in the face of persecution from enemy Christian groups, the 'Arians' and the 'Meletians', the author of this text uses the example of Thecla to encourage his female readers/listeners to imitate her struggles against hostile male authorities. The combination of *paraenesis* with *mimesis* is common in ascetical writings, and Davis rightly highlights the interrelated character of late antique ascetic vocabulary, including *xenos/e* and *xeneteia*, fundamental terms that also appear in the earlier *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. A close reading of the Alexandrian *Life of Syncletica*, which betrays elements imitative of the Thecla legend, rounds off the chapter.

Chapter four is concerned with how the stories generated by these late antique martyr cults tended toward an 'isomorphism' based on earlier models of text and practice (p. 136). Thecla, in the case of the Coptic *Miracles of Saint Menas*, serves as a literary model for the story of Sophia, who suffers an attempted rape while on an ascetic walkabout in the Egyptian wilderness. The clear influence of Thecla's legend, here coupled with the convention of pairing-up male and female martyrs in a given place, is for Davis strong evidence that Thecla was Menas' Egyptian companion. The material remains include a very large number of *ampullae* (pilgrim flasks) from late antique Egypt that have standard depictions of Menas on one side and Thecla on the other. In his Appendix A, Davis provides a convenient list of these *ampullae* that have been published and uses that data to argue that the ubiquitous pairing of these two points further to the existence of a cult centre devoted to Thecla in the Mareotis, near Abu Mina, the cult shrine of Menas.

In chapter five Davis shows how the reach of Thecla's cult extended deep into Southern Egypt. He describes in detail the depictions of Thecla in the funerary chapels of El Bagamat in the Kharga Oasis. That this remote site in South-Western Egypt possesses wall paintings of Thecla is an astounding testimony to the spread of her cult,

a movement which appears to be connected, according to Davis, with a group of virgins, possibly followers of Athanasius, exiled from Alexandria in the mid to late fourth century (p. 165). Davis goes on to argue that the Coptic *Martyrdom of Saints Paese and Thecla* (fifth to sixth century) was written to capitalize on a growing popularity of Thecla in the Nile valley, and onomastic evidence further emphasizes the devotion to the patronage of Thecla in this region (Appendix B). Thus, by the fifth century the legend of Thecla had made its way to all corners of Egypt, reinventing itself in art and text as it went.

This well-argued book is to my mind open only to minor criticisms. In discussing the archaeology of Seleucia Davis perhaps relies too heavily on the idiosyncratic interpretation of Dagron and does not cite the most recent re-analysis of the archaeological reports, Stephen Hill's *The Early Byzantine Churches of Cilicia and Isauria* (Aldershot, 1996). One problem, however, that Dagron, Hill, and Davis all have is that they take the anti-pagan rhetoric of the *Life and Miracles* virtually at face value: it is entirely possible that one reason archaeologists have not recovered much in the way of late pagan remains from Seleucia is that the corresponding picture we get from the *Life and Miracles* is an anachronistic rhetorical device designed to substantiate the author's personal claims. Regarding the Egyptian evidence, Davis could have acknowledged more explicitly that Athanasian authorship of the *De virginitate* is not conclusive (p. 86 n. 18): even if pseudonymous, it still supports Davis' argument, but the spread of the cult into Southern Egypt is not necessarily bound to Athanasius' tumultuous bishopric.

Despite these minor points, Davis' overall analysis of the translation of the cult of Thecla from Asia Minor to Egypt is thorough, creative, insightful, and rewards close attention. He handles Greek and Coptic texts, as well as the plentiful material remains, with methodological sensitivity and provides many suggestions of avenues for further research.

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*A Christian's Guide to Greek Culture. The Pseudo-Nonnus Commentaries on Sermons 4, 5, 39 and 43 by Gregory of Nazianzus: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (Translated Texts for Historians, 37). By J. Nimmo Smith. Pp. xlviii, 156, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2001, £12.95

Of the three Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nazianzen was undoubtedly the most eloquent witness to the Christian appropriation of 'pagan' or 'Hellenic' culture. Indeed, his *Sermons* frequently contain references to mythological tales. Moreover, Gregory often introduced quotations from authors such as Homer and Plato as well as references to Herodotus, Xenophon, Aristophanes and Hesiod. (See Kristoffel Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla in Gregory Nazianzen: A Study in Rhetoric and Hermeneutics* [Turnhout, 1996]).

In subsequent centuries these references to Hellenic culture became the subject of commentaries and scholia which explained them to a (largely) Christian audience that was no longer really familiar with them. The large number of references to this pagan heritage in his work combined with his renown as 'the Theologian' resulted in *Commentaries* on Gregory of Nazianzen's work being one of the earliest examples. Going back to the early sixth century, there are the *Commentaries*, in fact a series of scholia, on Gregory's *Invectives against Julian*, *On Epiphany* and *On Basil the Great* (Sermons nos. 4, 5, 39 and 43). They were composed by an anonymous Christian author who is now commonly referred to as the Pseudo-Nonnus, to distinguish him from Nonnus of Panopolis, the author of the *Dionysiaca*. In 1992 these *Commentaries* were edited by Jennifer Nimmo Smith as no. 27 of the Series Graeca of the Corpus