

Short notices

Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism. Papers from a conference 19–25 November 1985.

Edited by Karen L. King. (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity.) Pp.

xxi + 455. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988. 0 8006 3103 X

A conference sponsored by the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity would be expected to produce a highly professional set of papers, and this collection, from a conference in 1985, fulfils expectations. Established American Nag Hammadi scholars, like James Robinson, Elaine Pagels and Frederick Wisse, mix with leading Europeans like Luise Abramowski and Kurt Rudolph, to produce a set of papers touching the various feminine-related issues raised by gnostic studies. The range is wide: problems of gender in translation, the status of female (or at least feminine) divine figures in gnostic mythology, the status of female disciples in gnostic texts, what may be divined about the status of women in gnostic communities, and Christian or gnostic asceticism among women. Some perhaps are not as directly focused on gnosticism as one might expect. Robinson recognises that some Nag Hammadi texts are non-gnostic texts which have been used gnostically; his fellow-authors have not all caught up. His discussion of the feminine Christology implied by the title of Christ as Wisdom is associated with a reading of texts like the Gospel of Thomas very different from that which they have usually received. Similarly, there is material on asceticism generally, and a paper on the veils of women who prophesy at Corinth, which are not particularly gnostic. Most of the papers are followed by 'responses' by other scholars. Commendably, these are not off-the-cuff remarks but judiciously prepared critiques and supplements, worth reading in their own right. The list of works cited is long and itself constitutes a valuable bibliography of the subjects discussed. And there is a subject-index, less well articulated with sub-headings than the book deserves, but still useful. I am, however, concerned that one aspect should not discourage readers from taking seriously this wealth of valuable discussion. The editor herself, and the first contributor, Michael Williams, are almost alone in indulging in that abuse of language which substitutes 'gender' for 'sex' and supposes that this gives some sort of sociological respectability to their writing (there exists a whole series called 'Gender Studies'). Williams, describing what he calls 'Variety in gnostic perspectives on gender' so far confuses issues as to write: 'Many nouns which are simply lexically male (e.g. *Nous*) or female (e.g. *Sophia*) are not in themselves "gendered" in the sense in which I am using the term' (p. 5). These words are not 'lexically male' or 'female'; they are precisely masculine and feminine *in gender*. It is sex they lack, whether male or female. Gender belongs to words: it means 'family' or 'class' and is not confined to masculine and feminine. If books about women and women's perspectives are to carry weight, the terminology must be grammatically and philosophically sound, and not artificially confused. I write this to encourage readers looking for historical analysis not to be put off by the clap-trap in the preface and the first

chapter. The substantive point which Williams argues is good and important; it is his terminology that spoils it. Chapter ii, by Deirdre Good on 'Gender and generation', is a model of clarity on such matters, and the rest of the book is in this respect 'clean'.

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Studien zum Romanushymnus des Prudentius. By Rainer Henke. (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe xv, Bd 27.) Pp. 185. Frankfurt am Main–Berne–New York: Peter Lang, 1983. S.Fr.45

This Münster dissertation, written under the supervision of Christian Gnllka, selects major themes from *Peristephanon* x and offers a detailed commentary marked by learning and judgement. The first theme is that of humility or Prudentius' insufficiency for his task, which is a rhetorical cliché with pagan parallels. The second theme deals patiently with the gruesome horrors and ferocious tortures that Prudentius loved to describe in apparently sadistic detail, bringing out the point that the more ghastly the martyr's sufferings the greater the merit. Thirdly, the figure of the child who witnesses to the true faith is a theme traced back to Herodotus and the concept of natural insight in Stoic philosophers, but here shown to be given a distinctively Christian variation. Lastly, there is an examination of the concept of nobility in lines 126–35, a notion to which Prudentius gives a Christian content in contrast to pagan tradition.

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De vlucht van de christenen naar Pella. Onderzoek van het getuigenis van Eusebius en Epiphanius. By Jozef Verheyden. (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen. Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België Klasse der Letteren 50, 1988. Nr 127.) Pp. 285. Brussels: Paleis der Academiën (available from Brepols, Turnhout), 1988. 90 6569 398 X

Close and commendably sceptical investigation of the sources, and of the substantial and varied modern literature, leads Verheyden to the conclusion that the story of the flight of the Jerusalem Christians to Pella before the city fell is an invention of Eusebius. Alleged sources used by him at this point are examined and dismissed. Epiphanius, as other scholars have increasingly recognised, is merely elaborating what he read in Eusebius. The latter, preoccupied with the judgement of God upon the infidel Jews, understands the presence of Christians in Jerusalem as the cause of its preservation, and their departure as the signal and precondition of the wrath which falls upon the city. Only one feature adds plausibility to his account: the unexplained name of the place to which the Christians fled. Verheyden is content to regard it as a matter of no great moment, and offers only a slight hypothesis to account for it. This is a commendably serious, well-documented study, which exposes yet again the necessity to read Eusebius as a thinker and theologian, and not as a quarry for unexamined historical data. There is a four-page English summary, an extensive bibliography and useful indexes.

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