

evidence (with excellent images) and supple methods open numerous lines of research that subsequent scholars should pursue.

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***Augustine's Preaching and the Healing of Desire in the Enarrationes in Psalmos.*** By Mark J. Boone. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023. ix + 307 pp. \$120.00 hardcover.

Building upon previous research into Augustine's theology of desire for *The Conversion and Therapy of Desire* (Wipf and Stock, 2016), Mark Boone undertakes to present a consideration of Augustine's theology of desire in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* that shows its integration with his systematic theology and importance in his pastoral preaching. Boone does this by examining *enarrationes* on specific psalms, while attempting in the process to provide an examination of the *Enarrationes* as a whole. Boone groups his analysis of the *Enarrationes* into four chapters, in addition to an introduction and a conclusion that provides insights into the application of Boone's analysis to modern preaching. These chapters cover the relationship of desire to christology, ecclesiology, happiness (and well-being), and eschatology. While this work generally remains at a fairly theological level, historians of Christianity may be particularly interested in those points at which Boone notes the role of ongoing theological debates in Augustine's preaching. In particular, Chapter Two, about ecclesiology and desire, gives some attention to the Donatist controversy, as might be expected from the centrality of that controversy to Augustine's understanding of ecclesiology. Boone at times also notes the influence on Augustine's preaching of the relatively recent Diocletianic persecution and the persecution of Catholic Christians by the Circumcellions, a violent Donatist group. Boone's discussion of desire in the *Enarrationes* will, accordingly, be primarily of interest to historical theologians and those interested in the history of preaching.

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***Unfinished Christians: Ritual Objects and Silent Subjects in Late Antiquity.*** By Georgia Frank. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. 193 pp. \$59.95 hardcover.

The subjects of Georgia Frank's *Unfinished Christians* are elusive – “ordinary Christians,” as she calls them. They might be women or men, old or young, enslaved

or free, of any ethnicity or profession. In fact, “ordinary Christians” are identified most easily by what they are *not*: most crucially, they are not ordained, not ascetic, not wealthy or powerful. Almost by definition, they leave little mark on the historical record. And yet most late ancient Christians would have fallen into this category. How, then, might we gain access to their lives and experiences, however partial and indirect that access might be? This is the challenge that Frank takes up in this carefully researched and beautifully written book.

Influenced by studies of “lived religion” as well as by theories of affect and histories of corporality, senses, and emotions, Frank’s approach centers on human bodies and feelings, as shaped or “crafted” in ritual contexts. She mines sermons, hymns, and liturgical texts for evidence of the always “unfinished” (that is, imperfect and ongoing) process of Christian formation. She also attends carefully to the material objects and architectural spaces that condition the ritual practices and embodied experiences of late ancient Christians.

A first, introductory chapter sets up Frank’s questions, methodology, and conversation partners. Each of the following chapters could stand on its own, offering a distinctive approach to the bodies and feelings of Christians who participated in a range of liturgical services. Chapter two – “Crafting the Unfinished Christian: Baptistries as Workshops” – focuses on the rites surrounding adult baptism in the later fourth century, a period notable for its high numbers of converts. Attending not only to the rituals but also to their architectural settings, Frank evokes the richly multisensory and emotionally dynamic character of the initiatory process. Less expected, she takes her readers on a tour of ancient workshops, going on to argue that baptism in this period was understood as a kind of making, in which the initiate was at once crafter (“baptismal preparation” is “a type of craft learning” or apprenticeship) and the thing crafted (“catechumens also learned how their own affordances and resistances rendered them both botched and beautiful things”) (24). “When perceived through craft’s sequenced processes and impermanent results the baptistery welcomed the new Christian as both creator and created” (39).

Chapter three – “Processions and Portabilia” – focuses on liturgical processions in which Christians carried material objects. Combining the sounds of psalmody with visual spectacle, such mobile rituals “animated religious competition” in a diverse urban setting (55), as Christians announced their presence in the city by displaying objects powerfully invested with memory and feeling. “The movable objects of processions – whether hoes and shovels, or crosses and Bibles – were both held and beheld, as processants embedded ordinary Christians into the urban landscape” (56).

Chapter four – “Liturgical Emotions and Layered Temporalities” – focuses on Christian feast days, involving both services in the church and processions spilling outdoors. Here Frank explores the intensity and complexity of emotions evoked by sermons, lectionary readings, and congregational responses, across the narrative arc of a liturgical year. “Through sermon and psalmody, congregations animated characters and crowds from the biblical past. And this ‘theater’ invited congregants to join in the complex emotional dramas before them” (75). In the context of the liturgy, emotions not only linked the biblical past to the present but also both linked and distinguished different moments in the liturgical year.

Chapter five – “Singing and Sensing the Night” – continues the discussion begun in chapter four, focusing on night vigils performed on the eves of feast days. Where sermons and readings provide the main sources in chapter four, here Frank draws on the hymns of the sixth-century hymnographer Romanos to explore how singing conveyed narrative and evoked emotion in nocturnal liturgies. “Although almost all of Romanos’s

retellings offered opportunities for immersive engagement in sacred stories, his songs about characters at night were especially evocative of the intense sensations and affects that ordinary Christians experienced” (78). Darkness only intensified the ambivalent emotions evoked by participatory singing.

A concluding chapter – “Silent Subjects, Ritual Objects” – returns to the question that drives the book: “How might we study the experiences of ordinary Christians in late antiquity?” (91). Acknowledging her subjects’ “silence” with respect to the historical record, Frank suggests that, even if their own voices have not been preserved, we can still learn much about ordinary Christians from what they heard preached and sung; from the responses scripted for their participation; from the objects made and carried, touched and gazed upon; and from the choreography delineated by ritual, architecture, and landscape. From all of this, Frank proposes, a kind of agency can be inferred. The liturgy shaped and carried congregants, but congregants likewise shaped and carried the liturgy, as they returned repeatedly to “the generative power of ritual to fashion and refashion realities” (95). As their baptism promised, they were both crafted and crafters, in the ever-unfinished business of ritual self-formation.

Frank’s faceted approach to a collectivity both defined and hidden by its “ordinariness” brings together meticulous scholarship, lively imagination, and warm sympathy for her subjects. Craft, objects, sermons, liturgical handbooks, and hymns give her rich material to work with, their vividness counterbalancing her subjects’ elusiveness. Her powerfully descriptive prose carries all the more weight in the (perhaps surprising) absence of any images in the book.

More assumed than named is a fundamental conviction that ritual is what makes the Christian. Frank notes that the “daily lives” of ordinary Christians, unlike those of clergy or monks, were seamlessly integrated into the worlds of their “religiously diverse cities.” She adds, “Occasionally, they attended church liturgies, sought out local healers, and visited martyrs’ shrines” (3). She acknowledges that “their attendance was not guaranteed at every feast” (57). Nonetheless, for Frank what defines these ordinary Christians is not their footholds in multiple communities and identities or the sporadic nature of their engagement with the weekly and annual rhythms of Christian worship, but rather their capacity to be wholly absorbed and shaped by Christian liturgy. Might that not be something, in itself, rather extraordinary?

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### ***The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite.***

**By Mark Edwards, Dimitrios Pallis, and Georgios Steiris.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. xiii-729 pp. \$148.35 cloth.

*The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite* is a welcome addition to Pseudo-Dionysian studies. While handbooks exist devoted to individual Neoplatonists such as Maximus Confessor (*The Oxford Handbook of Maximus Confessor*; Oxford, 2017) and Proclus (*All from One: A Guide to Proclus*; Oxford, 2016) as well as