

directions' (135). 'Late ancient virginity discourse teems with commonalities and borrowings, yet brims with variety' (161). 'Variety persists' in the virginity concept; 'virginity was ... never stable, profoundly meaningful yet perpetually malleable' (217).

L. does present several specific arguments about female virginity. In ch. 1, she explains that Greek medicine shows no awareness of any hymen as an ostensible vaginal membrane sealing the womb until broken by penis penetration. Giulia Sissa already demonstrated this point in her 1984 *Annales* article as well as in 1990 and 2013 (see L.'s Bibliography and Index). This has been the consensus position since the 1990s in the field of women and Greek medicine. In chs 5 and 6, L. returns to discussing hymen perceptibility, where she further supports Sissa that this membrane is first on record in Christian Late Antiquity as perceptible proof of virginity. L. gives Sissa credit in all this, but one chapter rather than three on the hymen and related concerns of virginity preservation would have sufficed.

In ch. 2, L. explicates another virginity theme already familiar to scholars on the *Protevangelium of James* but deserving greater recognition. In this apocryphal gospel, the virginity of the Virgin Mary has a post-partum specificity. Historically, one reason why men prefer to copulate with virgins has little to do with the virgin's first time at sexual intercourse. Rather, as epitomised by virgins, vaginas not stretched out from childbirth are preferable for men to penetrate sexually, for they are tight and stimulating. Hence, even mothers after childbirth can be virginal, so long as their vaginas spring back to their pre-delivery state. The *Protevangelium* insists that the post-partum vagina of Mary models this return to virginal tightness, as verified by the midwife's inspection of Mary after Jesus's birth. This is quite the immaculate virginal rebound, but for whose imaginable pleasure the gospel does not say.

In chs 3 and 4, L. presents detailed conceptual analyses of female virginity from patristic sources that are original and a fine complement for the historical analyses of the same in Peter Brown's *Body and Society* (1988). L.'s open-ended exploration, however, hinders her work from decisively selecting and declaring what she thinks matters from the mutable variety that she detects and presents about virginity in patristic sources. Her text still wrestles with this Protean concept.

L.'s *Virgin Territory* offers her own valuable analyses about early Christian female virginity. Though partly derivative about the hymen, she also presents a worthwhile review of current research on virginity in Classical and Late Antiquity. Given her map-making approach, her focus is not on the patristics' agenda to Christianise their territory of female virginity, but on building a complex semantic grasp of virginity as represented in this agenda.

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ROBIN M. JENSEN, *FROM IDOLS TO ICONS: THE RISE OF THE DEVOTIONAL IMAGE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY* (Christianity in late antiquity 12). Oakland: University of California Press, 2022. Pp. xix + 244, illus. ISBN 9780520345423. £50.00.

This succinct and erudite book provides a summary of and response to the issues most relevant to the emergence and development of Early Christian imagery. The strength of the book is arguably its rigorous theological underpinning—its incisive understanding and application of relevant texts to these issues, which Jensen weaves deftly into an accessible narrative. This well-known strength of the author leads in places to less space for extended engagement with material and visual sources, but the result is a balanced and theologically informed consideration of the causes for the acceptance and proliferation of devotional Christian images—particularly the surge in visual piety from the fourth century—which stresses continuity as well as innovation. The well-rehearsed drivers for the proliferation—increased pagan converts, wealth and religious freedom, and the theological implications of the Incarnation—are framed as enablers rather than causes. Jensen does not offer any positivist assertions in this regard, but a corrective nuanced response to past and present arguments based on the theological context behind the evolution of Christian thought and practice.

The opening three chapters trace aspects of continuity and differentiation in thought and practice between paganism and Christianity. J. repudiates older arguments in demonstrating that early

Christians were not opposed to divine representations *per se*, though they acknowledged, to a greater or lesser extent, the inertness of pagan representations and their dangerous potential for both inhabitation by demons and idolatry. J. provides ample demonstration that there was no blanket aniconism based on the Hebrew scriptures and that Christians were aware that many pagans saw a tension between divine immateriality and representation. Challenging misconceptions of early Christian thought on imagery allows J. to address misunderstandings of pagan images and ideas of Jewish ‘aniconism’—she argues that Christianity and Judaism were opposed to idolatry, rather than divine images in and of themselves. Ch. 3 demonstrates that the Judeo-Christian God was not completely invisible either, from humans made in the *imago Dei* to physical attributes ascribed to God in the Old and New Testaments and Christ made visible in the Incarnation. The overall thrust of the opening chapters is that making images was not the issue, but rather who was represented.

At its midway point, the book turns to familiar aspects of the topic in considering the reasons for the delayed emergence of Christian imagery, the initial predominance of narrative imagery in funerary spaces, the impact of the newly imperial church and the development of devotional images alongside the cult of relics. Ch. 4 addresses the complex question of why Early Christian art took so long to emerge in recognisable form. J. favours practical over theological explanations, arguing that it was only in the third century that the Christian community sufficiently increased ‘in size, visibility, political security, and economic resources’ to finance the development of new iconographies. She discusses, however, the theological unease behind the greater delay in the emergence of portrait-like images of the holy persons which came uncomfortably close to pagan practice in inciting veneration.

Likeness is discussed in ch. 6 as key to differentiating Christian devotional images when they did emerge from the fourth century, because only Christian images pertained to historical personages. The imitation of a received truthful likeness of the prototype is discussed as a disruption of the Platonic inheritance in moving beyond disdain for mimesis. The evolving appearance of Christ, his polymorphism in scripture and his simultaneous representation as beardless youth and bearded senior, even in the same ecclesiastical space, are considered theologically: from the emergence of the mature type as a response to the fourth-century Trinitarian controversy concerning the son’s equality with the father, to an articulation of unity regarding his humanity and divinity. Issues of likeness and veneration lead naturally to considerations of presence, addressed in ch. 7. Here again J. offers a rigorous and succinct summary of the main topics, such as miraculous images and the shared traits of images and relics. The final chapter draws together the preceding arguments and reaches the crux of the issue—the reasons for the dramatic rise in Christian imagery and the embrace of devotional images from the fourth century.

The author’s summary of and critical engagement with the received historiography reaches a crescendo in the final chapter, which considers the perceived ‘redemption of matter’ from the fourth century, a topic that has dominated scholarship in recent decades. J. recapitulates the merits of the arguments offered so far, many of which pertain to the evolving demographic of the Early Church. She then challenges recent privileging of the incarnational argument, pointing to the relative silence of fourth-century sources regarding the relationship between the sanctification of the material world through Christ’s incarnation and the justification of icons in comparison to later iconophile writers. While not diminishing the implications of Christ’s incarnation for imagery, J. emphasises the dearth of evidence for any *new* understanding of the incarnation in this period. Again, rejecting monocausal explanations, Jensen points to the complex multiple factors that contributed to this ‘more affirming valuation of the material world’. Most significantly, she reaffirms intellectual continuity between pagan and Christian understandings of imagery, particularly Neoplatonism’s emphasis on the value of the sensible for moving towards a greater knowledge of intelligible reality.

The book is a valuable resource for those interested in this period, providing an accessible overview of the issues at stake. Jensen neatly captures the continuity and flux in philosophical and theological understandings of sacred images.

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