

researched work has given the full story of the women and men who guided the late empire.

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 doi:10.1017/S0009640723003530

***Earthquakes and Gardens: Saint Hilarion’s Cyprus.* By Virginia Burrus. Class 200: New Studies in Religion. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2023. x + 202 pp. \$99.00 cloth; \$27.50 paper.**

This book was a delight to read. Virginia Burrus takes what might seem to be a fairly typical hagiography, Jerome’s *Life of Saint Hilarion*, and offers a deeply thoughtful series of interpretive readings infused with personal reflections, sentimentality, and ruminations on memory, ecopoetics, and art. The volume is full of tensions, as alluded to in the subtitle, *Earthquakes and Gardens*, between living and dying, love and loss, building and destroying, familiarity and remoteness, and it is a meditation on the meaning, imagined and lived, of place. Burrus shares about her initial plans to spend time physically on Cyprus, to “think about how direct, embodied experiences of landscapes interact with literary experiences” (7), and to converse with locals, guardians of the island’s secrets. But her good intentions were waylaid by the pandemic, and so her study becomes an exemplum of how one might come to know a place so intimately from so far away.

After the introduction, the book is structured as six “experiments,” arranged in two parts. The absence of chapter numbers renders this learned book into an almost travelogue, an exercise in storytelling. Jerome the raconteur tells us about Hilarion, who spent his last five years on the island, settling in a spot some twelve miles from the sea, a remote but almost Edenic site with trees and a small garden. Burrus works with mere fragments; the *Vita* does not have *that* much to say about Hilarion in Cyprus. But this is also the point. So often we work with literary or material fragments, trying to piece together a coherent narrative, but Burrus challenges us to free them to interact and converse with other media in a kind of mediating dialogue that can serve to amplify and vivify the remains, each time in a different way.

In the first essay of Part II: Paphos, Burrus brings poetry into the conversation, providing insights into ancient poems to show how in some, few words can evoke powerful and sensorial memories of a place, while in others, such as a poem of Claudian, epiphastic flourishes seem to overfill a canvas, yet can also feel unfinished, full of potential. She then pivots to contemporary poets, Fikret Demirag, whose writings reveal the many layers of Cyprus, so many of them imposed by colonial powers, and Stephanos Stephanides, who in collaboration with photographer Anandana Kapur, produced a series of postcards whose images evoke sundry manifestations of Aphrodite. One of these, Burrus suggests, is Hilarion himself. She next shifts deftly into a discussion of seismology and what can be said and done about historical earthquakes. Many premodern sources mention earthquakes, but it is a challenge to chart, or as she describes, curate them: when, where, how often, how intense. Burrus delves into the excavation

history of Kourion, whose finds include the skeletal remains of a Christian couple who died in an earthquake, clutching their infant. We learn of David Soren, who began work in Kourion in 1978 and brought a sensational dimension to the earthquake that destroyed the city, complete with a *National Geographic* issue. Perhaps not on the scale of Pompeii, Kourion has its own disaster story to tell. Burrus concludes with a discussion of a series of modern art installations that each commemorate seismic activity (these days often man-made), as a way to think about “curating earthquakes.”


Spolia are the bits and pieces that make up the next essay, and like the famous mosaic floors of the luxurious Roman villas of Paphos, these fragments have stories to tell. Burrus discusses the theater of Paphos, whose life and afterlife complicate our more traditional understanding of a building’s demise, especially one shattered by an earthquake. Again, the paradoxical tensions that make up so much of this book are on display here. While the theater may no longer have been the venue for performances in the late fourth century, it preserved its vitality as a site of other creative, industrial activity. Some of its heaviest pieces were translated, like saints’ relics, to build a nearby basilica. These columns and stones in their own way created another performance site, this time for Christian liturgy. Burrus turns again to modern media—sixteenth-century depictions of Jerome amid Roman ruins and a 2019–2020 exhibition by Ladell Moe—which embody the tension of the Paphos theater, both decaying and vivifying.

Part III, “The Mountain,” begins with a reflection on geography and the notion of remoteness. The *Life of Antony* is a window into late ancient Christian attitudes toward monastic withdrawal, marked often by movements further and further away from the trappings of civil life. The eponymous hermit eventually reaches his mountain home, a singular place with an “interior” and “exterior,” where Antony feels the pull between his desire to be alone, or not. In a parallel way, Hilarion’s remote retreat exemplifies the paradoxes of insularity, both intra, between coast and mountains, and extra, mainland and island. The chapter concludes by conversing with works of art—material and literary—that speak to the proximity and elusiveness of the remote. Hilarion’s little garden is the subject of the next essay, and Burrus begins with ideas, ancient and modern, on what a garden is and how one is cultivated. The odd thing about Hilarion is that he dwelt in a *hortulus*, but neither tended it nor ate from the surrounding fruits trees. Did he practice “natural farming,” as Burrus explains, in the style of Masanobu Fukuoka who pioneered its practice? A discussion of a former industrial site in Germany that has been converted into a park, much of it left to grow with minimal human intervention—entropic horticulture—parallels Hilarion’s garden, a kind of third space, where the holy man resides ambiguously, like the non-native plant he was.

The final chapter is about Hilarion the wanderer, “a late ancient Odysseus” (134), whose journey is narrated by the rhapsode Jerome. Burrus thinks about mapping and cartographic precision, which in some ways is evident in the early part of Jerome’s text but decreases as Hilarion struggles to escape his fame. Yes, he lands on Cyprus at Paphos, a known locale, but he finds his rest ambiguously twelve miles inland. And while people have tried to pinpoint the exact spot, including the eponymous castle far removed from Paphos, the physical and literary *topoi* resist each other. Burrus ends with poignant reflections on plans derailed by a pandemic, expected and unexpected loss, and longing for places, reachable and not.

Burrus concludes by commenting on what this book is not: “a definitive or authoritative interpretation of the text” (151). It is, however, a journey, and this eminently readable study models an approach to familiar texts and genres that can create new

pathways, especially if we put them in conversation with perhaps unexpected partners. It shows us so many possibilities.

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 doi:10.1017/S0009640723003074

***Power and Rhetoric in the Ecclesiastical Correspondence of Constantine the Great.* By Andrew J. Pottenger. London: Routledge, 2022. xiii + 260 pp. \$128 hardback, \$42.36 eBook.**

Andrew J. Pottenger, an instructor in church history at Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs, has revised his doctoral dissertation from the University of Manchester (2019) into an interesting book analyzing the epistles of Constantine the Great concerning the Donatist Schism in the western Roman Empire and the Arian Controversy across the eastern Roman world during the twenty-five years in which this emperor ruled after his conversion to Christianity (A.D. 312–337). He offers it as “a contribution to studies of Constantine’s reign and association with Christianity” (226) and attempts to highlight the doctrines of imperial power and the techniques of ancient rhetoric the emperor employed in trying to end the organizational and theological divisions of his Christian brethren. The tome is divided into an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, and contains a full bibliography and a useful index in a packed 273 pages.

The detailed Introduction offers an overview of the themes of the book and sets it within the context of Constantine’s ancient reign and modern Constantinian scholarship. Professor Pottenger states that his aim is “to provide an in-depth look at Constantine’s surviving correspondence concerning the Donatist schism and ‘Arian controversy’ in order to increase our knowledge of how and why he intervened in matters internal to the churches” (3). The author contends that a “close examination of the rhetoric in Constantine’s ecclesiastical correspondence reveals three consistently appearing themes that identify this emperor’s main assumptions that directed his use of power in dealing with the divided churches” (3). He describes these assumptions as “‘doctrines of power’—the doctrine of divine favour and agency, the doctrine of ecclesiastical unity, and the doctrine of resistance and compromise” (3). He admits that the term doctrine is usually reserved for theological issues (“doctrine of the Trinity”), and posits a weak defense for his use of it here regarding Constantine’s religious beliefs and his policies and strategies for dealing with inter-Christian divisions. He then lays out a preview of the contents of the book’s chapters, then surveys recent works in Constantinian studies by Harold Drake, Timothy Barnes, Charles Odahl, Paul Stephenson, Jonathan Bardill, and others. He notes that his tome is not a broader narrative or biography of Constantine like theirs, but a more “focused analysis” of one aspect of the first Christian emperor’s policies (6–16).

In Chapter 1—“The Constantinian Correspondence on Ecclesiastical Conflicts”—Pottenger indicates that he is not using many of the usual sources for describing Constantine’s life and reign (Lactantius, Aurelius Victor and Eutropius, the *Origo Constantini*, and the *Panegyrici Latini*), but rather is concentrating solely on the surviving imperial epistles that the emperor wrote to Christian bishops and communities