

polemic, and the surviving material from the anti-Christian polemics by Porphyry, Sossianus Hierocles and Julian would also be worth analysis. Nevertheless, Williams has accomplished an impressive and stimulatingly fresh reading of the material, where her background in Classical studies serves as a valuable corrective to the previous analyses by biblical scholars and church historians. Her book is well worth including in any discussion of Jesus' historicity or of pagan reception of early Christianity.

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An embodied reading of the Shepherd of Hermas. The book of visions and its role in moral formation. By Angela Kim Harkins. (Studies in Ancient Religion and Culture.) Pp. x + 228. Sheffield–Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2023. £26.95 (paper). 978 1 80050 328 1

JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924001143

Angela Kim Harkins has pioneered a fresh chapter in *Shepherd of Hermas* research, aligning herself with the recent revival of interest in Hermas studies. She steers away from the traditional historical critical preoccupations of *Shepherd* scholars (date, number of authors, genre, social and historical backdrop, etc.) to consider the work in a new way through a combination of literary theory and cognitive science. She pushes back against scholarly criticisms of the *Shepherd* as an overlong and boring writing filled with irrelevant and tedious details, even a failed apocalypse, to argue instead that such assessments fail to understand the way these aspects engaged ancient readers and listeners to make it one of the most widely read and popular works of the Early Church. Both length and detail played a crucial role in shaping reading and listening audiences by encouraging them to immerse themselves in the text's universe. Through the vivid experiences elicited by narrative details, they became actively engaged in constructing Hermas's visions, setting the stage for them to be educated and thereby shaped by the second section of the work, the Mandates – a set of ethical guidelines aimed at moulding Christian behaviour. The discussion centres on the first four visions of the work, which serve as an autobiography of visionary experiences by Hermas (whom Harkins sees as a purely literary construct). As the manuscript history indicates, this distinct section circulated widely and independently of the rest of the work. The cognitive science she deploys centres on an immersive or enactive reading of the text. Enactive reading 'understands cognition as an embodied process that dynamically constructs the narrative world' (p. 5). It attends to the ways in which 'an embodied reader's perceptions and environment ... have an active and constitutive role in creation of the narrated world' (p. 5). The embodied readers Harkins identifies are North African catechumens and elite audiences. The former she posits based on citations of the text by Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind and Eusebius of Caesarea. The latter she adduces from the preservation of numerous papyrus fragments of the work's vision section found at Oxyrhynchus and elsewhere in Egypt.

The book comprises five chapters. Following an introduction which lays out the cognitive theories informing the investigation, Harkins turns to the popularity of

the work amongst ancient Christians. This is followed by three chapters which focus respectively on a different aspect of immersive reading and the cognitive science that undergirds it, namely, proprioception and interoception, rumination and ecocriticism. The penultimate chapter reconsiders treatments of the *Shepherd* as an apocalypse to show that attention on considerations of genre have neglected the way the text could have been used by everyday readers. The study ends with a concluding chapter. The absence of author and subject indices severely limits the utility of the study as a research tool, which is a pity because it promises to be an important resource for *Shepherd of Hermas* studies.

In addition to identifying the manuscript fragments of the visions, their frequency of production, and how widely the *Shepherd* was read in the Early Church, the first chapter, 'The popularity of the *Shepherd of Hermas* in the ancient world', contrasts differences in readers' experiences of engaging the text as a papyrus roll and a codex. The former necessitated a slower reading pace of the text, fostering a more profound interaction with the intricate descriptions of the visions and Hermas's autobiographical narratives, thereby encouraging a more immersive engagement with the stories. The second chapter, 'Taking a look at Hermas', describes modern cognitive theories of reading to argue that reading involves an interaction of both the mind and the body. An enactive cognitive account of the *Shepherd* thus examines the ways Hermas moves in time and space (proprioception) and his emotional reactions to what he sees and experiences (interoception) as cues for a reader imaginatively to move and experience along with him. Harkins enriches her application of modern cognitive theory with an account of the author's use of ekphrasis and ancient rhetorical theories thereof to reproduce how the text would have shaped original readers' experiences of its contents. Especially titillating is her examination of an ancient reader's reconstruction of Hermas's seeing and touching Rhoda when he encounters her bathing naked in the Tiber. Parallels with stories about Venus as well as ubiquitous images of her (including in North Africa) would have functioned as prompts to fill in the details thereby increasing readers' engagement with the eroticism of the vision. 'Sticky thoughts that make presence from absence' (chapter iii) engages rumination as a further aspect of enactive reading, a term that describes 'recurring thinking that naturally makes presence of the absence, as the mind unintentionally and persistently returns to a particular idea or thought' (p. 100). Harkins examines rumination with the help of queer phenomenologist Sarah Ahmed's theory of 'sticky thoughts', the idea that certain emotions, ideas or attributes adhere to specific bodies, objects or social groups, creating associations that are difficult to dislodge. By lingering with Hermas's inner thoughts and experiences of his sexual desire for Rhoda as well as his mourning the sin of his forbidden thoughts, ancient readers were to ruminate on their own thoughts, desires and regrets. Harkins's next chapter, 'Experiencing the journey', focuses on dissecting Hermas's third and fourth visions – depicting a tower and a beast emblematic of imperial oppression – through ecocriticism. The term describes an enactive reading in which 'language about the environs of Hermas's vision can be understood to create experientially vivid ways for readers and hearers to access the passing of time and space in the narrative, thereby playing a strategic role in cultivating states of anticipation and watchfulness that heighten receptivity to

instruction' (p. 131). This approach elucidates how Hermas's visions of his environs fostered a palpably immersive experience for the audience, enabling them to navigate the narrative's temporal and spatial dimensions. Such a technique played a pivotal role in engendering a heightened state of alertness and expectancy, thereby enhancing the audience's openness to learning. The third vision, widely panned for its boring allegorical interpretation of a tower constructed from stones of different mountains, Harkins treats ecocritically as placing readers and listeners in time and space and inviting them to look at their own place in the Church. Descriptions relating to the trimming and testing of stones for construction-worthiness, while a trivial nuisance to historical critics looking to mine the Shepherd for historical realia, had a central function in helping readers and listeners to locate themselves in their Christian religion. Long allegory encouraged slow reading and rumination as early Christian readers and listeners entered the scene and considered different stones and their meanings. On the other hand, Harkins improbably argues that Hermas's fourth vision, of a monster coming to persecute Christians, was meant to be amusing to ancient audiences who would have read and heard 'with a wry smile and chuckle' (p. 159) of Hermas's fear before a creature with flaming locusts coming out of its mouth, coming to lie supine before him with its tongue sticking out and, in Harkin's interpretation, dead. Harkins assumes but nowhere explains why ancient readers would have drawn connections between Hermas's vision of the beast like a sea monster with Jonah's fish and Job's Rahab (p. 155). Chapter v litigates scholarly readings of the Shepherd as an apocalypse, criticising Collins's classic typological definition that assumes a bifurcation between 'thisworld' and 'otherworld'. Harkins argues that such a typology invites scholars to read ancient visionary texts like the *Shepherd* 'against the grain', importing etic distinctions insensitive to the lived world that shaped the author of the *Shepherd* and its audiences. For ancient readers there was no such bifurcation. Rather, the world and those who inhabited it were porous entities capable of being penetrated by 'otherworld' spirits and other entities. By debating whether or in what way the *Shepherd* is an apocalypse, scholars neglect to consider how the text assumes a model of the self that is foreign to modern historical critics. Harkins's enactive reading seeks to identify ways that the *Shepherd* created a narrative world with sufficient detail that invited audiences to immerse themselves within and experience as both real and imagined. 'Unlike modern scholars who are trained to read for discipline-specific information, ancient readers read with the aim of immersing themselves in the possible world of the narrative' (p. 188). Harkins's insightful application of theory is marred by repetitiousness; to cite one of many examples, on p. 180 she quotes anthropologist Tanya M. Luhmann's definition of paracosm and repeats the same on p. 186.

Harkins repeatedly returns to the role of the *Shepherd* in serving catechetical purposes, a theory that first appeared in the nineteenth century and which has been most forcefully developed in studies by Philippe Henne as well as Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen Collenridge, who furnish a series of third- and fourth-century references for such application. On the other hand, based on fragments found at Oxyrhynchus, she locates the text amongst North African elite literati (pp. 44–58). If she wishes to argue that the *Shepherd* was consumed by different readers/listeners and used for different purposes, the argument should indicate

ways an audience's *Sitz im Leben* would have resulted in differing uses of the text and have resulted in contrasting reading/listening experiences. A collective catechetical application arguably differed from more private use. Harkins argues that the work's popularity in Rome is indeterminate. Nevertheless, she argues that elite readers would have found the over-sexed, numbskull freedman Hermas true to type and hence risible, which leads one to conclude that she thinks the literary invention of the bumbling autobiographer is a deliberate narrative device. If so, this makes problematic the idea that the protagonist's visions and encounters are designed for the task of self-fashioning (p. 23). These criticisms notwithstanding, this study presents the guild with a new way of engaging the *Shepherd* that will repay scholarly attention.

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Romaniser la foi chrétienne? La poésie latine de l'antiquité tardive entre tradition classique et inspiration chrétienne. Edited by Giampiero Scafoglio and Fabrice Wendling. (Collection d'études médiévales de Nice, 20, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. Cultures et Environnements. Préhistoire, Antiquité, Moyen Âge.) Pp. 255. Turnhout: Brepols, 2022. €60 (paper). 978 2 503 60087 1; 2294 852X

Césaire D'Arles. Commentaire de l'apocalypse de Jean. By Roger Gryson. (Sources Chrétiennes, 636.) Pp. 311. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2023. €59 (paper). 978 2 204 15489 5; 0750 1978

JEH (75) 2024; doi:10.1017/S0022046924001428

The first of these books, we are told, is the result of collaboration between a group of Latinists and a team of historians engaged in research on processes of spatialisation and territorialisation in late ancient and medieval Christianity. That original impulse appears clearly in an essay on Prudentius and the cult of the martyrs, and in another on epigraphic poetry across the time span between Damasus, bishop of Rome in the fourth century, and Ennodius, bishop of Pavia in the sixth. Beyond that, it diffuses through a fleeting focus on spaces in the city of Rome into a flickering discussion of the 'Roman inculturation' of Christianity. For the coherence of the volume, the reader must rely on the *quatrième de couverture* and a slender introduction. There are no response pieces, no general conclusion, no index. Each essay is prefaced by abstracts in French and English, and has a separate bibliography. Fewer than half of the ten contributions formally address the question posed by the title of the collection. The quality of scholarship is high. In addition to generous coverage of Prudentius and especially Ennodius, there are instructive pieces on Macrobius, Ausonius, Claudian and the Latin Anthology, and an elegant opening chapter on the representation of the Roman past in the writings of later Latin poets.

Can one now speak of a 'Romanisation' of the Christian faith, without being heard grinding a confessional axe? The suggestion will not startle Roman historians *d'outre-Manche*. (See, for example, Peter Heather, *Christendom: the triumph of a religion* [2022], part 1: 'The Romanization of Christianity', who does not mean to innovate with the phrase.) Yet there is still something to ponder in the coda to Joëlle Soler's essay on Prudentius, where she argues specifically for the model