

rarely allow us to do. However, I think that future GRETL monographs (such as the volume on cult personnel announced on p. 144) should be written in collaboration with specialists of the topics under study – if funding allows.

Toulouse

ALAYA PALAMIDIS
alaya.palamidis@gmail.com

CONVERSIONS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

DESPOTIS (A.), LÖHR (H.) (edd.) *Religious and Philosophical Conversion in the Ancient Mediterranean Traditions*. (Ancient Philosophy & Religion 5.) Pp. xii + 477, figs. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. Cased, €149, US\$180. ISBN: 978-90-04-50176-8.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X23001828

The stubborn problems in the study of conversion resemble those in the study of magic or religion in general: how to define it; what approach to take (lexical, theological, psychological, sociological or cognitive? emic or etic?); whether it constitutes a coherent category across cultures, traditions and eras; whether it is worth retaining.

This collection, the product of a 2018 University of Bonn conference, indicates that some agreement has been reached in the 90 years since A.D. Nock's *Conversion* (1933). The typology and sociological orientation of L. Rambo's *Understanding Religious Conversion* (1993) remain influential, while Nock is cited mainly for criticism. The contributors stress that conversion is a diverse, multi-dimensional, gradual process and converts active participants, even if it is experienced (or remembered) as sudden, passive or externally initiated, and that conversion narratives do not transparently reveal psychology or historical experience but are shaped by and into normative paradigms. Juxtaposing sections on Judaism, philosophy and Christianity presumes that, for all its variety, 'conversion' can be meaningfully discussed across traditions and was debated among them in antiquity.

Fundamental disagreements over definition persist, though, and the editors decline to define 'conversion'. Must it be exclusive? Is it the start, the culmination or the duration of the process? What is most necessary: change of belief, behaviour or belonging? That is, what constitutes 'conversion' and how can we recognise it? The sharpest conflict concerns how expansively to define 'conversion', and especially whether to include repentance and (re)turning (to virtue, correct values, oneself, the community, God, cosmic order). Many contributions focus on precisely that, but in a provocative chapter P.A. Davis dismisses it as not 'conversion *per se*' (p. 248). He cogently dissects the methodological difficulties in looking for 'conversion', an etic concept, in ancient sources. Attempting an emic approach, he argues that in the synoptic gospels, Acts and even the Apostolic Fathers, the words *metanoia*, *epistrophe* and their cognates do not denote 'conversion itself' (p. 261), but 'intra-religious' repentance for sin and a change of behaviour leading to restoration of an impaired relationship. This is a useful re-description, but what is 'conversion itself' and how does it differ? One cannot escape etic definitions. Perhaps the answer is that 'conversion' must cross religious boundaries, repent *beliefs*, not *behaviours*, and create 'new or different devotion' instead of restoring 'former faithfulness' (p. 266). Yet Davis also resists labelling Gentile transition to Christ-belief 'conversion', partly because our sources employ the

same language for it, partly on theological grounds, since all humanity has an existing, estranged relationship with God and is 'called upon to repent and turn (back) to God' (p. 263). Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument would render conversion to Christianity theologically impossible. Davis's position is too restrictive, but he raises pertinent questions about when repentance is connected with 'conversion'. (Is addiction recovery 'conversion'?) I would have liked to see these issues probed more deeply, and more conversation across the chapters in general.

How to classify Jews' entry into the nascent Christ-movement and what kind of transition(s) people who joined any sub-group within Second-Temple Judaism thought they were making is a recurring theme. Using Social Identity Theory and accepting 'addition' (adopting new cultic commitments without discarding old ones; Nock's 'adhesion') as a type of conversion, R. Roitto concludes that the experience and consequences of becoming a Christ-believer depended on both the convert's starting point and how they understood the Christ-movement's relationship to other religious identities (separate from, a sub-type, or *the* prototypical form of Judaism? mutually exclusive or compatible?). Löhr's essay asks if it is 'justified to speak of conversion within Judaism or Israel' (p. 87), using five Second-Temple case studies, including Paul's account of becoming a Christ-follower in Philippians 3. He devises a set of questions to assess whether a text portrays creating or joining a group as 'conversion', hoping to counter the limitations of written evidence and word-study by articulating how a source might describe something recognisable as 'conversion' without specific Hebrew or Greek words. Unfortunately, Löhr never explains clearly what the answers to his questions signify or what would justify applying the (undefined) label 'conversion' to any case.

In his investigation of the link between conversion and almsgiving in the New Testament, M.N. Williams treats those conversions more simply as 'the transfer from *not* being a Christ-follower/believer to *being* a Christ-follower/believer' (p. 372). For him the crux is change of behaviour flowing from and causing changes of belief and belonging. While almsgiving is a standard Jewish practice expected of Christ-followers, Williams argues that it acquires special Christian meaning as a theocentric and Christocentric response to the gospel, while the obligation expands from 'the poor' to the Christian community and, missionally, those beyond it.

In the other methodology chapter, P.-Y. Brandt adopts a perspective that combines sociology with psychology, while disagreeing with Roitto on exclusivity. He defines conversion as an identity transformation, prompted by both internal and external motives and pressures, that must be negotiated with others in the convert's environment to bring their subjective self-identity into line with the objective identity ascribed by others. Producing a self-narrative that meets the group's expectations of conversion is part of that negotiation.

Two chapters conceptualise '(re)turning' within Judaism as 'conversion'; both should be in dialogue with Davis. In the Ruth novella, K.-H. Ostmeier shows, what could be cast as a 'tradition transition' is instead justified theologically as a 'return'. Focusing on personal names, the root *šub* ('return') and intertextuality with the story of Lot's daughters, Ostmeier argues that Ruth's migration embodies the physical and theological 'return' and reintegration of the Moabites into the Abrahamic community. The chapter's fresh contribution is to argue that the novella also covertly 'brings back' Lot's younger daughter via punning allusions to her descendants, the Ammonites, in the names Naomi, 'a son for Naomi', and Ruth. F. Zanella's study of *tešubā* ('repentance, atonement') in Tannaitic literature argues that in rabbinic usage, *tešubā* denotes a process of inner transformation consisting of a decision to *turn away* from past transgressions, behavioural patterns or values based on moral-religious introspection. Penitence, he suggests, resembles 'tradition

transition' in that both express a desire to separate from something and (re)turn towards 'shared moral and religious values that are understood as positive, right and true' (p. 158). Fair enough; but, applying Roitto's insight, it matters what the starting and end positions are and how the person perceives their relationship.

A. Furlan unpacks the 'conversion' strategies of multiple adaptations of a Hellenistic Jewish-Orphic *Hieros Logos*, first by Jewish authors, then by Christian apologists who quote, recontextualise and reinterpret the poem. 'Conversion' here means efforts to make Jewish monotheism comprehensible and attractive to Greek audiences by asserting its compatibility with and primacy over Greek tradition, personified by Orpheus. This is an interesting, complex example of ancient contests over 'history of culture'; its relevance to 'conversion' is less obvious.

The philosophy section takes on Nock's (individual, psychological, sudden) model of philosophical conversion. S. Grau collates themes in Diogenes Laertius' conversion stories to show that in philosophical biographies conversion is personal, 'corporate', appeals to 'the heart more than the mind' (p. 219) and employs motifs used to legitimise other 'cultural operators'. S. Padilla argues that waking and sobering up are key Stoic metaphors for conversion to philosophy, understood as a 'total change in a behavior or way of life' (p. 164), rejecting 'an irrational and intemperate' lifestyle in favour of 'a reasoned one' (p. 165) – a lengthy process with mental, physical, social and even comic implications. She highlights the distinctiveness of the Stoic view of a wakeful, sober life, steeped in Stoic materialist psychology and immanent theology, in contrast with Platonic and Aristotelian uses of similar imagery.

Despotis finds a similarly all-encompassing ideal of personal change in Plutarch. Following Platonic anthropology and cosmology, Plutarch holds that, when reason reasserts control over the soul's passions, the soul 'turns toward itself' (*epistrephein*), ascends and assimilates to God, restoring its 'previous (cosmic and human) status' (p. 208). While stressing this model's Platonic specificity, Despotis locates Plutarch within early imperial debates about human transformation. Its participants, including Stoics and Luke's gospel, share common terminology, although not definitions, and a basic agreement 'that humans can turn away from ignorance and vice, change by discovering the truth, and attain immortality' (p. 214). His second contribution adds Paul and John, arguing that both drew on 'Hellenistic-Jewish amalgams' to 'place their new messianic views in dialogue and competition with other traditions promising people an alternative way of life' (p. 317).

In Romans 6, S.J. Chester shows, Paul presents that alternative life in terms of death, especially as sharing in Christ's death in baptism and being dead to sin while alive to God, which innovatively makes death a positive, ongoing condition. For Chester this motif supplies the key to the argumentative flow of Romans 6 and a way to reconcile divine and human agency within Pauline soteriology.

At the opposite pole from Davis, R. Heimann offers a philosophical reading of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount as a blueprint for *metanoia* (viz., 'conversion') best paralleled in Plato. His premise is that, read in order with attention to its 'line of thought', Matthew's Sermon explicates Jesus' call to 'repent' (Matt 4:17) as a 'fundamental change' of every aspect of life – social, religious and psychological – in turn. (This analysis depends uniquely on Matthew, without reference to Luke's version.) On this reading, the Beatitudes outline a two-phase process fleshed out in detail in the rest of the Sermon: recognising one's spiritual poverty and renouncing false, self-centred valuations, then repairing that deficiency by reorienting oneself towards God.

Many have wanted to identify 'conversions' to mystery cults; M. Herrero de Jáuregui rejects recent attempts as misguided efforts to 'rehabilitate' Greek religion by assimilating it to Christianity, reflective of lingering 'Christianocentric' prejudice. For Herrero de

Jáuregui ‘conversion’ requires exclusive change and is possible only within a ‘discourse-based religiosity’, not the ‘ritual-based religiosity’ of mysteries. Nor is initiation the same as conversion – a point made already by Origen (*Cels.* 3.59–69).

In the sole chapter on second-century Christianity C.J. Berglund debunks the view, influentially asserted by E. Pagels, that Heracleon interpreted John’s story of the woman at the well as a paradigmatic conversion narrative only for ‘those born with a spiritual nature’ and predestined for salvation. Berglund shows that this deterministic soteriology is not present in fragments of Heracleon’s *Hypomnēmata*, but only in Origen’s comments. Taken on its own terms, Heracleon’s paradigmatic conversion is ‘a deliberate rejection of Gentile and Jewish worship traditions in favor of a Christian one’, mediated by ‘interaction with Christian believers’ (p. 427).

This collection usefully samples current approaches to conversion in antiquity, and it contains much of interest. It would have benefited from more clearly stated arguments, allowing the mostly European contributors to write in their own languages, and more explicit reflection on how, or whether, its composite portrait of conversion fits together.

Boston College

KENDRA ESHLEMAN
kendra.eshleman@bc.edu

ASPECTS OF EXEMPLARITY

BAUER (S.), BROCKKÖTTER (P.) (edd.) *Exemplarität und Exzeptionalität in der griechisch-römischen Antike*. Pp. 307, colour figs, colour ill. Göttingen: Verlag Antike, 2022. Cased, €80. ISBN: 978-3-949189-09-8.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X23002792

This collection on exemplarity focuses on what the editors call in the introduction the exceptional nature of *exempla* (‘die exzeptionelle Qualität von *exempla*’, p. 19). In the introduction Bauer and Brockkötter reflect on the concept that is at the heart of the collection: the potentially transgressive nature of *exempla*. *Exempla* do not only serve to legitimise normative systems, but may also potentially disrupt them and create new ones (‘*Exempla* haben nicht nur die Fähigkeit, historische Formationen und soziale Erscheinungen zu legitimieren, sie können sie gleichsam auch aufbrechen und so neue Ordnungssysteme, Verhaltensweisen und Wertvorstellungen etablieren’, p. 19). Bauer and Brockkötter dive into the relationship between the concepts of exemplarity and exceptionality in the first chapter dedicated to the state of the art. The first section of the chapter is devoted to the definition of exemplarity, as elaborated by the ancients (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian). *Exempla* were everywhere in antiquity, especially in Rome’s urban and intellectual landscape. They were widely employed in works of literature in different contexts: rhetoric, history, ethics and moral discourse, philosophy and poetry. An *exemplum* could appear in the form of a very long and detailed story or just in a couple of words. The collection of *exempla* originated towards the second half of the first century BCE and in the first century CE, as exemplified by the works of Cornelius Nepos, Valerius Maximus and Frontinus (to which Hyginus and Varro could be added).