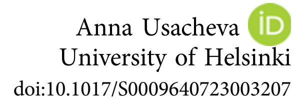
This being said, it is important to point out some lacunae in the reconstruction. Dusenbury almost glosses over the significant problem of the composition date of the treatise. He simply recycles an old-standing argument about the absence of references to the so-called heretics of the fifth century and Origen's condemnation in 399, which allegedly marks out this year as *terminus ante quem* of *DNH* (5). This view has been expressed and also contested by scholars who point out Nemesius' allusions to Theodore of Mopsuestia, and to the anti-Nestorian discourse of the first half of the fifth century (cf. M.-O. Boulnois, "Némésius d'Emèse et la comparaison de l'union de l'âme et du corps en christologie," in *Patristique et histoire des dogmes, Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études* [Section des Sciences religieuses 119/2012], 163–172). Even though it would seem that an analysis of Nemesius' indebtedness to the Antiochian school of thought was beyond the scope of Dusenbury's study, a total omission of this nuance appears slightly unfortunate. While Dusenbury stands on undeniably safe ground in his presentation of Nemesius as a "profoundly Hellenized bishop" (12), it would still be more intriguing to explore whether some of the traces of his philosophically informed cosmopolitan anthropology lead back to the Antiochian background of his thought. Perhaps future researchers might feel inspired to tackle this question. Dusenbury's refreshing reconstruction has certainly opened a new avenue to the philosophical interpretation and historical contextualization of Nemesius' work.



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doi:10.1017/S0009640723003207

From Idols to Icons: The Rise of the Devotional Image in Early Christianity. By **Robin M. Jensen**. Christianity in Late Antiquity 12. Oakland: University of California Press, 2022. xx + 244 pp. $65 cloth.

Robin Jensen is the preeminent North American scholar of early Christian art. Over the course of three decades, she has shaped the field through more than a dozen books and nearly one hundred articles on diverse topics of material and visual cultures of early Christianity. Having already written definitive works on early Christian baptisteries, the history of the Christian cross, and the distinctive features of Christianity in Roman-era North Africa, Jensen now applies her multidisciplinary approach to "devotional images" in the first few centuries of Christianity. How did Christianity honor the theological critique of idolatry inherited from early Judaism and also engage the primacy of the senses in other forms of religion around the Mediterranean world? What were the sign posts on the path from the Decalogue's "no graven images" to the powerfully charged "icons" of Christian late antiquity?

The book's structure is an elegant double helix with chronological and thematic strands. The eight chapters have overall a slightly chronological sequence, though each addresses a theme, such as "Epiphanies" (Chapter 3), "Holy Portraits" (Chapter 5), and "Miraculous and Mediating Portraits" (Chapter 7). The book is adequately illustrated with six to eight color photographs per chapter.

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The first three chapters introduce Jensen's trademark blend of source material, integrating visual and cultic artifacts of Roman-era religions with carefully curated interpretations from patristic authors. She situates early Christian disapproval of "cult images" or "idols" by apologetic writers (Chapter 1) in relationship to Jewish "aniconism" regarding the visibility of God (Chapter 2). Yet, since people generally struggle to pray to beings that they cannot in some way visualize, early Christian artists experimented with figural representations such as the "hand of God," the monogram of Christ, and other cruciform shapes. Developing Christian belief in the incarnation of the God of Israel in the human person of Jesus then offered a crucial turning point for the visibility of God. God's power was depicted as manifest in the miraculous works of Jesus on sarcophagi and other media, while the transfiguration (as depicted in the apse of Ravenna's Sant'Apollinare Nuovo) and resurrection of Jesus (as in the apse of Thessaloniki's Church of Hosios David) offered proleptic visions of God's face (Chapter 3).

Chapters 4–6 advance a chronological argument that hinges on—as is so often the case in early Christian studies—the fourth century, when the extant material evidence dramatically increases and the theological debate also intensifies. On the one hand, early Christians mostly avoided a most common and potent way of imaging God in the Mediterranean world, namely sculpture in the round. On the other hand, they shifted their artistic tendencies away from narrative art toward portraiture of Christ and other biblical heroes and saints (Chapter 4). The increasing production of such portraits drew criticism from cultured Christian elites, whose Platonic philosophical lenses viewed them as mere shadows and altogether too close to Greek and Roman cult images for comfort. Yet other Christian writers were more positive about the edifying potential of such portraits, and Jensen is likely correct that popular veneration for the relics and portraits of recent martyrs would have weakened the impact of any cultured despisers (Chapter 5). If the blood of martyred Christians was a seed of the church, as Tertullian claimed, it seems that their relics and portraits were early fruits. But what did such figures *look like*? For a recently martyred saint, perhaps one could create a realistic likeness; to know the real face of Jesus or Mary or Peter, however, was impossible. The look of Christ as created by artists in the fourth through seventh centuries thus became divergent, malleable, and adapted from surrounding visual models with apparent ease (Chapter 6). Jensen shows how Christian theologians of late antiquity navigated this problem, culminating in John of Damascus's semiotic defense of the veneration of icons as symbols.

If the argument had concluded at this point, Jensen's book would have been an excellent guide for scholar and student alike. But she substantially raises the sophistication of the work—and its value for scholarly readers—in the final two chapters on how portraits seem to perform miracles (Chapter 7) and engender new modes of spiritual visuality (Chapter 8). It is rare for a historian to show sensitivity to both ritual-centered experiences (like the kissing of relic portraits) and also the abstruse points of Neoplatonic theories of sight. This is why Jensen remains the best of her kind. These final chapters also bring scholarly citations and debates up from the endnotes and into the body of the argument, such that Jensen moderates an interdisciplinary concluding parliament of art historians, liturgical historians, classicists, and theologians on the sacred gaze and its effects.

The book does not engage much with a discursive approach to its topics—that is, how the language used by the ancient authors about images creates the realities it purports to describe. Thus, Jensen's excellent, balanced, and reliable book might be

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complemented with others who use that method, such as Clifford Ando's *Matter of the Gods*, Jason von Ehrenrook's *Sculpting Idolatry in Flavian Rome*, and Sonja Anderson's forthcoming *Idol Talk*.

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Cult of the Dead: A Brief History of Christianity. By **Kyle Smith**. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022. xxii + 333 pp. + 16 plates. $29.95 hardcover, $34.95 eBook.

What is the nature of the Christian religion? *Cult of the Dead* answers this question implicitly, presenting a wide-ranging, thematic overview of Christianity that focuses on its cult of the martyrs. At times a rather personal account, written in a lively and engaging style, the book takes its reader on a nonlinear journey across time and space, from the New World to the Old, from Canada, Roman Judaea, Persia, and the late antique Mediterranean, to medieval and early modern Europe, the Caribbeans during the "age of exploration," the author's own adventures in the Judaean desert, the Reformation and its impact (especially in England), and nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical scholarship. The book flouts scholarly apparatus and conventions, targets a wide audience, and is richly illustrated, punctually engaging with visual representations of the topics it discusses.

Mainly known in scholarly circles for his studies of Eastern Mediterranean, and particularly Syriac, martyrs, Kyle Smith is a sure guide to the topic at hand. He tackles his subject in eight evenly divided chapters, in addition to a preface, an introduction, and a postscript. A section of "Notes for Further Reading," a minimalist sort of annotated bibliography, takes the place of customary endnotes or footnotes. Chapter One sets the tone by presenting how early followers of Christ, the model for all subsequent martyrs and their *imitatio Christi*, established martyrdom as the highest form of Christian devotion. In Chapter Two, Smith takes us through his field of expertise by narrating how Eusebius and other late antique scholars pioneered a new genre that catalogued the martyrs and the saints, focusing especially on the importance of Syriac manuscripts held in various Egyptian monasteries that made their way to Western Europe in the nineteenth century. This is a good example of the way that most chapters ebb and flow between the different periods of the past, weaving a narrative that engages with both ancient authors who documented the subject the chapter studies and the scholars of later centuries who read them, elaborated on their work, and analyzed and criticized their work. Although this feature might be confusing to novice readers, presumably the target audience of this work.

The all-important physical remains of those considered holy by Christians, the relics of the saints, are the focus of Chapter Three, while Chapter Four gives an overview of the way that martyrs and saints led Christians to reconceptualize their organization of time. Indeed, from the fourth century onward, calendars included the feasts of saints and martyrs, a good indication of the progressive Christianization of society and

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