

an historicised late Augustine a thickened context. Specifically, she makes a case for thinking that the Council of Hippo, called by Augustine in 427, had everything to do with the messy, unfinished business of Catholic and Donatist reunification. (The late Augustine had too much social fabric to repair to be fully Burnaby's burnt-out, cold-hearted theologian.)

By my count, four of the nine essays in *The Late (Wild) Augustine*, including Elm's introduction, explicitly take on the problematic of wilding Augustine. I have already mentioned Blunda, who helpfully historicises the notion. That leaves Mark Vessey's meditation on the death scene in Possidius's *Vita Augustini* and Catherine Conybeare's attempt, by way of Cy Twombly and graffiti, to fathom a question of genre; if the *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* is not dialogue or commentary, then what is it? Those two essays are frightfully hard to encapsulate, and I will not try to do so here. The key take-away is that both speak to a wildness that Augustine evokes more than he possesses. I am not as sceptical about this kind of wildness, in that it emerges less out of projection than the intensification of readerly attention. In that regard, the wildness is generous. One need not have a wildling Augustine of one's own in order to play.

Villanova University  
[james.wetzel@villanova.edu](mailto:james.wetzel@villanova.edu)  
 doi:10.1017/S0075435822000843

JAMES WETZEL

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

JULIA KELTO LILLIS, *VIRGIN TERRITORY: CONFIGURING FEMALE VIRGINITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY* (Christianity in late antiquity 13). Oakland: University of California Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 273. ISBN 97805203890149. £80.00/US\$95.00.

In this thoughtful meander of six chapters plus introduction and conclusion, Julia Kelto Lillis in *Virgin Territory* synthesises ideas about female virginity mainly in Christian Late Antiquity. Drawing on religion theorist Jonathan Z. Smith's 1978 promotion of Alfred Korzybski's 1958 dictum of general semantics, 'the map is not the territory', Lillis presents virginity as a discursive concept to be mapped. By this view, humans as linguistic beings cannot know and communicate an unmediated reality or territory, only maps about the territory through linguistic and other expressions. Hence, we should remain mindful that 'the map is not the territory'. This view is debatable, not least because not all human experience, interaction and knowledge are necessarily mediated through language. Further, persons inclined toward idealism or realism have long differed on the ability of human inquiry and expressions to approximate and communicate a grasp of reality. L., however, treats it as incontrovertible that 'maps are all we possess', not territory itself (18). Yet she paradoxically titles her book *Virgin Territory*, which seems inconsistent with this perspective. The title should accordingly be understood as [*Mapping*] *Virgin Territory*, for L. 'seeks to describe the "maps" that early Christians drew to represent ... the "territory" or reality of virginity' (17).

Patristic advocates of female virginity, however, idealist Christian Platonists included, were in their view disclosing and extolling the divine reality of virginity in their writings. L.'s approach detaches her work from this real-life patristic stance. For dedicated virginal girls and women like Ambrose's vindicated friend Indicia, to preserve their sexual potential for the return of Jesus Christ was not just a construct to map, as it is for L. It was an anticipated experience that purportedly would surpass the best sexual climax ever. Little of this ascetic tension, thrill and obsession is discernible in L.'s mapping of Christian virginity. She also presents her approach as a corrective to the patristics being naïve realists about virginity, for she maintains that the church fathers could only be mapmakers about this topic too (17). Yet, believe them or not, the patristics positioned their views as shaping and conveying virginity itself—the territory, not the map.

L. utilises an open-ended approach of conceptual analysis to explore and map female virginity. She seeks to show that 'concepts like virginity are human-made and are produced on an ongoing basis through human thoughts, words, acts, relationships, and systems' (4), mainly in early Christianity. The conclusions in her book are as broad as her thesis and would benefit from more specific substance beyond reiterating virginity's variety and malleability: Early Christian 'virginity was ... a mutable and multifold concept that thinkers could build from existing discourses in various

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.

Vanderbilt University  
[kathy.l.gaca@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:kathy.l.gaca@vanderbilt.edu)  
 doi:10.1017/S0075435823000734

KATHY L. GACA

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

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