

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

Religious Violence in the Ancient World: From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity. Edited by Jitse H. F. Dijkstra and Christian R. Raschle. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 446 pp. \$37.99 paperback, \$120.00 hardback.

What is religious violence in the ancient world, and where do we even begin to construct definitions? These two questions are at the heart of the impressive volume edited by Jitse H. F. Dijkstra and Christian R. Raschle. The terms religion and violence have been the intense focus of scholarly debate for a few years now. Rather than shy away or dismiss how our contemporary definitions do or do not fit into an ancient context, this volume takes on this challenge and dares to be an explicitly interdisciplinary exercise from its very inception. This is a hefty volume so I will keep my comments and reflections brief. I first offer summaries of each section and spotlight contributions that stood out to me, but my review is by no means exhaustive.

Scholars of religious violence in the ancient world have long since passed the decline and fall model touted by Edward Gibbon and have since spent much time wrestling with conceptualizing and defining slippery categories. The first section of the volume lays out the methodological framework for working with loaded terms and evolving definitions. For example, the first essay by Hans Kippenberg makes a careful distinction between the study of religious violence and the study of religion *and* violence. For far too long the dominant discourses, especially in a post-9/11 world, have defaulted to the former and Kippenberg helpfully lays out practical steps to draw religious scholars to the latter. This is a distinction that then Jan Bremmer draws further attention to in a focused case study on attempts to reconstruct violence perpetrated by Christians in the late ancient world. And while religion produced the language and justification for violence, Bremmer reminds us that religions are not inherently violent—despite what political pundits or Hollywood would lead the public to believe.

The next section offers a comparative approach by sampling various groupings of religious communities. Esther Eideinow's contribution examines the affective use of Athenian binding spells to curb larger social behaviors. It is a welcome shift away from studies that overemphasize the exceptional or marginal understanding of *katadesmoi*. The imperial consequences of trying to control or suppress deviant or seemingly fringe religious practices are then spotlighted in both essays by Christian Raschle and Steve Mason. These two essays pair nicely, as large-scale efforts to control Roman cult practices were intended more to enhance civic piety rather than to target the peculiar nature of any one tradition. Raschle, for example, focuses on efforts to control religious groups with boundaries, whereas Mason focuses on the literary response to those violent efforts to enforce control. Christian groups and violence still hold onto the peculiar, but the clash with Roman elite ideals remains central in this section.

Both James Rives and Elizabeth DePalma Digeser turn to consider the imaginative play on potential competing ideologies central to a Christianizing vision of violence,

which is a call back to Bremmer's contribution. For example, James Rives dives into the imperial political landscape and upends how we read religious violence and the stories of Christian persecution. Next, Digeser disentangles the complex overlap of religious zeal and the imperial image. Constantine remains perplexing as both a political figure and a presumed convert to Christianity. He bridges that historical moment between an empire that targets Christians to an empire that promotes Christians. To wrap up this section, Erika Manders's contribution stands out. She takes a social-scientific approach to quantifying religious violence through her creative analysis of Roman coins. All three authors point to a rich historical moment where the transfer of political allegiance and religious identity continued to capture collective interests around scenes of violence, religious allegiance, and Roman ideology.

The final section of this volume was the most relevant for my own area of research and showcases the variety of approaches possible for studying religious violence—or religion *and* violence—in the late ancient Roman Empire. The problem raised in the shift from a persecuted to persecuting Christian identity remains central to this section. First, Wendy Mayer's astute observation that the very quest for examples of actual violence, as Digeser and Mason also highlighted, is often difficult to disentangle from the fantastical Christian imagination and therefore requires much more precision than it is often afforded. Both Peter Van Nuffelen and Jitse Dijkstra then attempt to do just that. Van Nuffelen closely assesses Augustine's treatment of the Donatists and Dijkstra examines Rufinus's narration of the infamous destruction of the Serapeum. Section three also has the added benefit of thematic overlap, which provides a productive contrast in approach—for example, Van Nuffelen and Fabrizio Vecoli take very different approaches to the category of tolerance and intolerance. How scholars strive to identify political violence also results in strikingly different conclusions in Hugh Elton's and Geoffrey Geatrex's essays.

Ultimately, I was drawn to the ways the internalized discourse of violence is brought up in Chris de Wet's and Christine Shepardson's essays. Much more could be said about how saintly mimicry and ascetic discipline promote violent fantasies of the ideal Christian life. I, therefore, especially encourage readers who find themselves equally puzzled by saintly scenes of violence to pay particular attention to de Wet's descriptions. He pushes against more normative approaches to hagiographical literature and disrupts how coercive violence is treated in this genre. Shepardson also shows how the enduring legacy of persecution might map onto the anti-Chalcedon underdogs who are too often understudied. The saints and martyrs of old once again come to life as these historically marginalized groups attempted to interpret and understand how their loss tied into a longer narrative of violence where the winners were killed and tortured by the empire—even a Christian one.

To conclude, the major takeaway of this volume, at least for this author, is the welcome move toward the interdisciplinary application of theories and methods to study religious violence to help us ask better questions about the past. Those various methodological tools forged in our contemporary moment clearly allow scholars to sharpen the questions we bring with us. There remains a careful balance the historian must strike between ancient categories and contemporary concerns and this volume is fully cognizant of that process. Violence in our contemporary world undoubtedly continues to inform how we examine the ancient world. It is unavoidable and many of the authors in this volume successfully use that awareness to their advantage. It is

a welcome set of approaches and will certainly provide scholars with new points of entry into an examination of religious violence.

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***Worshipping a Crucified Man: Christians, Graeco-Romans and Scripture in the Second Century.* By Jeremy Hudson. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 2021. xi + 275 pp. £70 cloth, £22.50 paper.**

Jeremy Hudson has produced an important study on a question even sophisticated scholars may not think to ask: what is at stake when Christian apologists draw on the Hebrew scriptural tradition? Hudson elucidates the question in a study that is erudite, creative, and analytically sound, arguing in a rich concluding chapter that “the appeal to the Jewish scriptures in these apologetic works represents a new and decisive step in the use of such texts by Christian writers” (191). Hudson invites historians to see the appearance of scripture in this literature as an intentional strategy that shaped the discourses—and thus the communities—of emerging Christianity in the second century CE.

Hudson’s introduction addresses the way that a Hebrew textual tradition evolved into a *scriptural* tradition in part through the projects of Christian apologists. This discussion is multifaceted by nature, and it felt at times that Hudson devoted too much space and had to rehash scholarly conversation, especially because he does so in each textual chapter as well. But that was also because I so often agreed with Hudson’s approach on many of the issues discussed, such as the importance of intended audience and the broad influence of the Septuagint in Greek intellectual circles and the importance of implied audience. Hudson focuses on three texts that are densely studied: Justin Martyr’s *First Apology*, the *Oratio ad Graecos* of Tatian, and Theophilus of Antioch’s *Ad Autolyicum*. Hudson treats each text in turn to consider the ways that they strategically establish the authority of Jewish scriptures in support of arguments for their Christian convictions.

The chapter on Justin Martyr is at the heart of Hudson’s thesis about how Christian apologists magnified Hebrew scriptures in the second century CE. Throughout, Hudson engages Justin’s text deeply, but he never loses sight of Justin’s context, balancing his focus on the *Apology* with thoughtful attention to classical authors. His discussion of “son of God” language, for example, raises examples of related formulae throughout the *First Apology*, but also allows for an interesting side trip through Plutarch and Suetonius, including a hat tip to the expansive literature on emperor worship in the Roman Empire (43–45). In a chapter that argues that Justin’s apologetical project entails a careful elevation and separation of Jewish scriptures within a Greco-Roman intellectual context, Hudson explain how Justin positioned scriptural pieces within the complex literary milieu in which he operated (97–99).

Tatian provides an intriguing case for Hudson to discuss the evolving relationship of Christian apologists to Jewish scripture. The *Oratio ad Graecos* engages with Greek