

Dennis Trout (Hrsg.): *Damasus of Rome. The Epigraphic Poetry. Introduction, Texts, Translations, and Commentary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015 (Oxford Early Christian Texts). XVII, 229 S., 6 Abb., 1 Karte. £ 95.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-873537-3.

This is a small book, concise and erudite. Most certainly to be long of use to scholars and students of late antique Rome, this publication makes available to the interested lay reader as well as to philologists and historians what is perhaps the single most important collection of inscribed Latin texts to survive from the conversion of the city of Rome to Christianity: the poems of Damasus bishop of Rome (366–384). With meticulous care and an eye for the telling detail, Trout offers readers an introduction that sets these inscribed Christian verses within their historical and cultural (material, as well as linguistic and religious) setting, a reader's guide to use of the texts, and then a new critical edition together with English translation and commentary of the Damasan poetic *corpus* arranged according to geography. Anyone interested in early Christian Rome will wish to have this book at hand when visiting the archaeological sites or reflecting on the nexus between material remains and historical experience. Epigraphy – with the aid of palaeography and philology – here makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of history and archaeology and sheds light upon a vital moment in the formation of the Roman church.

An introduction (pp. 1–52) that commences with translations of the two surviving late antique biographies of Damasus goes on to provide readers with the historical, literary, religious, and cultural background necessary for understanding and appreciating the Damasan poetic *corpus*. Indubitably informed by the apocryphal correspondence between Damasus and Jerome that stands as the beginning of the *Liber Pontificalis* so as to provide that *falsum* with irreproachable paternity, the choice of texts for the opening gambit is superb. The contrast between the biographies offered by the contemporary Jerome and the sixth-century anonymous author of the *Liber Pontificalis* nicely highlights the gap between contemporary evidence and the testimony of a later epoch. In the what follows, Trout offers five sections that deal with the episcopate of Damasus (pp. 2–15), the nature of Damasan verse (pp. 16–25), the relationship between Damasan verse and the anonymous fourth-century work known as the *Carmen contra paganos* (pp. 26–38), the use of poetry in the monuments dedicated to the saints at Rome (pp. 39–46), and the

nature of the script used to inscribe Damasan verse (pp. 47–52). This a veritable minefield, and there is much scope for contention. Trout does a commendable job of providing readers with a balanced review of the issues and their interpretations.¹ From a child's discussing recent history with an executioner to an aversion for copulative *et* to the distinctive nature of Philocalian serifs, the discussion is wide-ranging, detailed, and by and large persuasive. It is worth adding only that the familial estates of Damasus (used to provide financial support for the foundations of S. Lorenzo in Lucina and S. Lorenzo in Damaso) render the Spanish provenance of the family quite unlikely.

A reader's guide (pp. 53–68) offers an equally dense review of the *testimonia* for the texts of the Damasan poetic *corpus* as well as instructions for use. Divided into four sections, it effectively enables readers to use the apparatus criticus of the Latin text to follow in the third part of this book. The first section (pp. 53–55) offers a description of the *corpus* of nearly seventy poems that have been attributed to the authorship of Damasus. Consideration of categories such as *elogium* and epitaph is helpful, in reminding readers of the variety of themes covered. The second section (pp. 55–65) provides readers with a review of the different types of evidence (*viz.* calendars, *acta* or biographies, *itineraria*, and *syllogae*) for the cult of the saints and martyrs in the city and suburbs of late antique Rome. The third section (pp. 65–66) offers a review of previous editions of Latin epigraphic poems in general and of the Damasan *carmina* in particular. A fourth section (pp. 66–68) usefully furnishes readers with the rationale for the order in which the evidence is set forth and calls attention to the features that make the Latin text a critical edition. In short, readers are given a careful introduction to what the evidence is in general and how it will be presented in particular cases in the following edition.

The third and principal part of this book (pp. 69–194) consists of a critical edition of the Latin poems of Damasus accompanied by an English translation and detailed commentary. It should be remarked at the outset that Trout has not taken the liberty of re-numbering the poems even though he has

1 It should, however, be remarked that some items of relevance appeared in print at the same moment as this book, e.g. R. Westall: Constantius II and the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican. In: *Historia* 64, 2015, 205–242.

shifted the order as established in 1942 by Antonio Ferrua, SJ.² A table of contents (pp. 71–73) ensures that readers will be able to find rapidly and with ease the poem that they seek. The translations read well and are faithful to the Latin originals. Of the sixty-seven poems presented, it would appear that fifty-nine are authentically Damasan. The vast majority of these served to provide monumental commemoration for the saints' burials along the *viae consulares* (e.g. Via Nomentana) irradiating from the imperial metropolis through adjoining countryside. For instance, the *elogium* of pope Marcellus at the cemetery of Priscilla (no. 40) celebrates a minor figure from the heroic age of persecution at the opening of the fourth century. Or, to cite another example, the *elogium* of archdeacon Lawrence at the cemetery of the Ager Veranus (no. 33) commemorates one of the emblematic figures of the Roman church, remarked by later generations for his attention to the *thesaurus* of the Church.³ Others, however, were dedicated to Damasus' contemporaries – family and acquaintances – so as to serve as their epitaphs. For example, there are the epitaphs for Damasus' mother Laurentia (no. 10), his sister Irene (no. 11), and Damasus himself (no. 12), all of which verse inscriptions adorned their burials at the cemetery of Marcus and Marcellianus in the vicinity of the catacombs of S. Callisto. Likewise, although the precise connection to Damasus is unclear, there is an epitaph for Proiecta (no. 51), a young bride who died at the age of sixteen late in AD 383. Yet others commemorate Damasan building projects such as the creation of a baptistery at the Vatican (nos. 3–4) or the *titulus* of S. Lorenzo in Damaso (nos. 57–58). A handful of poems, it should be added, either derive from the theological writings of Damasus (nos. 1–[2], 60b) or come from well beyond the city of Rome (nos. 67*, 59). Shedding light on the preoccupations of Damasus and the age in which he lived, the Damasan poetic corpus is attractively presented here in a manner that will assist understanding of a key moment of transition and at the same time invite readers to pose new, searching questions.⁴

2 Epigrammata Damasiana. Recensuit et adnotavit A. Ferrua. Rom 1942 (Sussidi allo studio delle antichità cristiane 2).

3 Apparently, that aspect was not of particular interest to Damasus, who is conversely said to have been attracted to the perks of office.

4 For instance, the *elogium* of Tarsicius (no. 15) invites the modern reader not only to reflect upon the anti-Judaic sentiments increasingly on view in early Christianity, but also to investigate the practice of *fermentum* whereby the sacraments were transmitted

True to the nature of the series to which this book belongs (Oxford Early Christian Texts), it has a whole host of additional features that make this slim volume extremely useful. Paratextual materials at the beginning of the book include: a preface (pp. vii–viii), the table of contents (pp. ix–x), a list of illustrations (p. xi), a list of the bishops of Rome from the third to the seventh century (p. xiii), a list of abbreviations of frequently cited works (pp. xv–xvii), a list of frequently cited ancient authors (p. xix), a map of Damasan Rome (p. xxi), and photographs illustrating various aspects of the Damasan poetic *corpus* (pp. xxii–xxvi). The photographs have turned out beautifully, even if another photograph or two offering close-ups of another letter (e.g. “V”), of a ligature (e.g. “NT” two-thirds of the way through line 5 of the *Elogium* of Euty chius [fig. 5]), and of the fractured state of many of the texts (e.g. *Elogium* of the Saints [fig. 4]). Paratextual materials at the end of the book include: a bibliography listing works cited (pp. 195–212), a concordance with the *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae* (p. 213), an index of the proper names that appear in Damasan poems (pp. 215–216), an index of Latin expressions worthy of note (pp. 217–224), and a general index (pp. 225–229). These are all of high quality, and the reviewer singles out the index of Latin expressions to note that it may be of especial interest to those teaching Latin as well as to those investigating the poetic expressions of Late Antiquity.

The quality of the text is uniformly high. There are occasional errors of proofreading (e.g. p. 9)⁵ and the decision to mix Latin, Italian, and English in the map of Damasan Rome (p. xxi) seems somewhat infelicitous. Indeed, to speak of “Damasan Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries” is misleading in view of the fact that Damasus was a fourth-century figure (*ca.* 305–384) and the revolution that he accomplished in his time as the bishop of Rome (366–384) can hardly be said to belong to the fifth century. Perhaps the most significant problem is the editorial decision – in line with current Oxford guidelines, or so it would seem in a world of constantly changing editorial policies, but contrary to the practice embodied the Philocalian script – to utilise “U” and “V” to distinguish between vocalic and consonantal “V”. Letter-forms ought to be faithful to the original text when possible, so as to

across the urban landscape of Rome. No less interesting, perhaps, is the linguistic phenomenon whereby the name “Tarsicius” became “Tarcisius”.

5 “Ladies” should be the Anglo-Saxon possessive plural, as indicated by the Latin *feminarum*.

remind readers of the nature of the evidence that they are viewing. On the other hand, the reviewer is not so conservative as to suggest that a modern editor also make use of *scripta continua*, which graphic phenomenon is visible in the Philocalian inscriptions as well. Legibility and fidelity are the two basic requirements for any modern edited text. Overall, this is an extremely carefully curated volume, which bespeaks hard work on the part of the author/editor and the series editors. They are to be felicitated for having produced an attractive volume that will be a pleasure for many to use in the coming years.

Whether in the classroom or on the bus, in church or at the archaeological site, this is an essential instrument for those working upon or merely interested in the Christian antiquities of late antique Rome. It is to be hoped that a paperback volume will soon be produced, so as to make it available to a wider audience. Trout's book constitutes a useful and timely contribution to a subject that has yet to yield up many of its most basic truths. Let the debates begin!

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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