

Harry O. Maier/Katharina Waldner (eds.): *Desiring Martyrs. Locating Martyrs in Space and Time*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg 2021 (SpatioTemporality/RaumZeitlichkeit 10). VIII, 236 p. € 59.95/£ 54.50/\$ 68.99. ISBN: 978-3-11-068248-9.

Anyone with a serious interest in early Christian martyrdom will be drawn to this collection of nine essays from a range of European and North American scholars. The volume began as a workshop organized by the editors in 2017 at the University of Erfurt: “Martyrs in Space and Time/ Die Raumzeitlichkeit des Martyriums.” All the essays are in English.

As the workshop title suggests, the organizing theme of the volume is spatio-temporality as a concept, specifically the way in which examining issues around the cultural conceptualization of space and time might help us to draw new insights around the phenomenon of early Christian martyrdom. The subfield of martyrdom studies has enjoyed a heyday of late, initiated perhaps by Judith Perkins’s classic, “The Suffering Self. Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era.”¹ ‘Minimizers’ – particularly Candida Moss – point out that although the idea of the Christian martyrs loomed large in the psyche of Christians from antiquity through to at least the last century, the actual numbers were few. Other to lead the charge in new approaches to Christian martyrdom include Paul Middleton, L. Stephanie Cobb, and perhaps most recently, Éric Rebillard. Only one of these scholars contributes to the present volume, Cobb, who contributes a characteristically insightful essay on early Christian reconceptualizations of ancient prisons as heterotopic space. However, the fact that certain ‘all-star’ contemporary scholars of martyrdom are absent from this volume does not mean that it is not worthy of reading. Its constitutive essays – all very different from one another – are very good.

After a brief introduction (Harry O. Maier/Katharina Waldner, pp. 1–13) that also provides an overview of recent scholarship on Christian martyrdom, Michael J. Thate contributes the first essay, “Sacral Meals and Post-Traumatic Places: Revision and Coherence in the Epistle to the Hebrews” (pp. 15–39) that focuses on “post-traumatic place-making” (p. 15). Beautifully written, Thate’s essay weaves together critical theory, a deep

1 J. Perkins: *The Suffering Self. Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*. London/New York 1995.

diverge into scriptural study in both Hebrew and *koine* Greek, and a full consideration of the immediate context which produced the most neglected and perhaps unloved of New Testament books. The trauma of Jesus's crucifixion effected, Thate argues, a series of "sacerdotal shifts: violent death becomes a sacrifice; the transgenerational trauma of a community is mark[ed] as membership within the polity of priesthood; somatic insecurity congeals in the sharing of a sacral meal; and desolate space becomes a commemorative place" (p. 34).

The second essay, "Who are these clothed in white robes and whence have they come?' The Book of Revelation and the Spatiotemporal Creation of Trauma" (pp. 41–62) by editor Harry O. Maier draws on the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's temporal chronotope to assess the role of characters in the Book of Revelation. Maier takes on a key issue in our studies of Revelation; namely, that although it has long been held that the book, like all apocalyptic literature, was produced under a traumatic situation as a response to that crisis, Roman historians have found no particular crisis situation in first-century Asia Minor. Maier effectively turns this idea on its head: "trauma," he writes, "is not an outcome of the world behind the text, but a position arising out of the text and placed before the world of the audience. Revelation is not a response to trauma, it is intended as the creation of it in order to achieve its persuasive ends" (p. 53).

Christopher A. Frilingos's "Murder at the Temple: Space, Time and Concealment in the *Proto-gospel of James*" (pp. 63–79) reads like an enjoyable murder mystery. Who killed the priest Zacharias, the father of the infant John the Baptist, in the apocryphal infancy narrative, the *Protoevangelium of James*? Although Zacharias has traditionally been treated as a martyr, Frilingos turns this notion on its head, arguing instead that (spoiler!) Zacharias willingly sacrificed himself not for religion but for love of his family. While I found Frilingos's contribution to this volume to be a great read, it engages far less critical theory than the first two essays, giving the impression that Frilingos had a paper ready on the 'martyrdom' of Zacharias that he retrofitted, so to speak, to better fit the volume's focus on spatio-temporality. He addresses this focus only in the paper's third and final part,

drawing on C. M. Chin’s wonderful essay, “Cosmos,”² but it is more of a coda for his paper than an integrated whole.

Jan N. Bremmer’s “Roman Judge vs. Christian Bishop: The Trial of Phileas During the Great Persecution” (pp. 81–117) is classic Bremmer: exquisitely detailed and thoroughly researched and documented. Bremmer works not at the level of narrative but of manuscript. He delves into the question of the degree to which Roman court trial records embedded into Christian documents are reliable, pushing back against the recent scholarship of Éric Rebillard. Bremmer concedes that “there is no satisfactory solution to the problem of authenticity that covers all cases, and we will have to be content with the fact that we can reconstruct the original *ipsisima verba* in the trials only to a certain extent without ever being able to reach absolute certainty” (p. 86). Nevertheless, he finds one manuscript (“Be”) of the *Trial of Phileas* to be particularly reliable source that can help us to “reconstruct the original martyr’s Acts to a very large extent” (p. 105). Like Frilingos, the volume’s organizing theme of spatio-temporality seems tangential to Bremmer’s engagement with the ancient material, beyond locating the *Trial of Phileas* in Egypt at a time of imperial persecution of Christians.

The fifth essay, Eric C. Smith’s “Pure Bread of Christ: Imperial Necropolitics and the Eucharistic Martyrdom of Ignatius” (pp. 119–135), uses Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics to reframe Ignatius of Antioch’s willful march toward death in the amphitheater as an expression of agency against the power of empire. This is a gem of an essay – sophisticated without being full of jargon, it establishes a paradigm for the way in which post-colonial theory can help us to think differently about the ancient world. Smith writes, “Ignatius was journeying from the periphery of the empire to the center, intending by the death of his body to uncenter altogether the Empire and its claims on dominated bodies” (p. 133). Smith’s is the first of two contributions in this volume on Ignatius; the second is Nicole Hartmann’s “Bones Ground by Wild Beast’s Teeth. Late Ancient Imaginations of the Death of Ignatius of Antioch” (pp. 155–175). In fact, Hartmann’s focus is not on Ignatius himself but on the *Nachleben* of Ignatius’s seven letters, particularly in the construction of two late antique martyr acts

2 C. M. Chin: Cosmos. In: C. M. Chin/M. Vidas (eds.): Late Ancient Knowing. Explorations in Intellectual History. Oakland, CA 2015, pp. 99–116.

featuring Ignatius's martyrdom: the Roman and the Antiochene Acts. Hartmann follows Christian networks and traditions concerning Ignatius's relics as the cult of the saints begins to dominate late antique imaginations. Hartmann sees these later Acts as "products of the late antique cultural battle ground of the cult of saints, which was about the highest awareness and importance attributed to cities and places by the number and importance of their executed Christians" (p. 172).

Sandwiched between Smith's and Hartmann's Ignatius articles is another tightly constructed use of critical theory applied to early Christian martyrdom: L. Stephanie Cobb's "From Prison to Palace: The *Carcer* as Heterotopia in North African Martyr Accounts" (pp. 137–153). Here, Cobb applies Foucault's concept of the heterotopia – "spaces of *otherness* [...] in which new modes of sociality are imagined and practiced" (p. 146) – to Roman prisons, which she describes using a variety of Latin authors as filthy, inhuman spaces of darkness, desperation, and death. She contrasts the reality of ancient prisons with the manner in which early Christian writers such as Perpetua conceived of them as places of *refrigerium*, literally a cooling, refreshing place of blessed rest and repose. Cobb notes, "Theories of critical spatiality bring to our awareness that space is not an objective reality but – like the amphitheater and the prison in Christian martyr narratives – spaces are always constructed through social practices and discourses" (pp. 151–152).

Co-editor Katharina Waldner's "When the City Cries: The Spacetime of Persecution in Eusebius' *Martyrs of Palestine*" (pp. 177–192), investigates the traumatic events of the 'Great Persecution' (303–311 CE). Although the events of the persecution were personally traumatic to Eusebius, Waldner argues, his *Martyrs of Palestine* transposes the local (even 'his' local) to the universal by the way in which his martyrological account re-figures Palestine and particularly Caesarea into a more universalized, typical late-Roman city. By using martyrdom as a structuring principle in his church history, Waldner writes, Eusebius invents "a new kind of history," transforming "an individual trauma into a cultural one" (p. 183). Waldner's essay is thoughtful and interesting, although her suggestion that Eusebius introduces the heavenly Jerusalem as a sort of 'thirdspace' remains tantalizing but never fleshed out.

The final contribution, Jennifer Otto's "Making Martyrs Mennonite" (pp. 193–209), focuses on the *Martyrs Mirror* (1660) that constitutes the

second most revered book after the Bible to contemporary Mennonites. Although the second half of the *Martyrs Mirror* recounts the gory executions of 803 Anabaptists in the early modern period, Otto notes that the first half recounts a long history of martyrdom, extending from Jesus and John the Baptist to classic early Christian martyrs, including Polycarp, Ignatius, Blandina, and Perpetua. Otto demonstrates that this listing, however, is not exhaustive but selective; the Anabaptists, she notes, saw themselves as heirs to the early Christian martyr tradition, an “unbroken chain” (p. 200). Yet, the key editor of the *Martyrs Mirror*, Thieleman van Braght, freely editorialized on the martyr narratives, drawing out points that suited the particular ideological positions of the Mennonites and pulling the early narratives into conformity with later martyrs and the Mennonite faith: “Layering narratives from disparate times and places, *Martyrs Mirror* encourages readers to see their own lives refracted in the singular narrative of faithfulness at any cost, told over and over again” (p. 208).

This volume is quite slim, coming in at just over two hundred pages. Individual contributions, therefore, are quite brief. Each essay includes a brief and useful abstract and a dedicated bibliography, as well as extensive footnotes. The editors have done a fine job into coaxing uniformity from otherwise disparate contributions; I noticed only a few typos littered throughout. The volume concludes with author biographies (pp. 211–214), a subject index (pp. 229–236), and an extensive index of ancient authors (pp. 215–227). I recommend it for both general and specific research into the phenomenon of early Christian martyrdom, and believe that the essays would be highly useful in the classroom as well.

Nicola Denzey Lewis, Claremont Graduate University
 School of Arts & Humanities – Religion Department
 Professor of Religion
 nicola.denzey-lewis@cgu.edu

www.plekos.de

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Nicola Denzey Lewis: Rezension zu: Harry O. Maier/Katharina Waldner (eds.): *Desiring Martyrs. Locating Martyrs in Space and Time*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg 2021 (SpatioTemporality/RaumZeitlichkeit 10). In: Plekos 24, 2022, S. 277–281 (URL: https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2022/r-maier_waldner.pdf).
