

Moritz Kuhn: *Philologischer Kommentar zur Vita Augustini des Possidius von Calama*. Münster: Aschendorff 2023 (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsbände. Kleine Reihe 17). VI, 372 pp. € 62.00. ISBN: 978-3-402-10929-8.

Moritz Kuhn's monograph, "Philologischer Kommentar zur Vita Augustini des Possidius von Calama", is a revised and expanded version of a doctoral dissertation, defended early in 2020. The subject of this monograph is the hagiography *Vita Augustini* ("The Life of Augustine"), written by Augustine's younger friend Possidius of Calama. The aim and the structure of the monograph is clearly laid out: Kuhn provides a philological commentary on the *Vita Augustini*, and the structure of the monograph, in five sections, supports his approach. The *Vita* itself is given in Latin and with a facing German translation on pp. 27–99 (Section II: "Text und Übersetzung der *Vita Augustini*"), whereas the commentary proper comprises pp. 101–337 (Section III: "Kommentar zur *Vita Augustini*"). An introductory chapter (Section I: "Einleitung", pp. 1–25) gives a brief overview of the historical context of the *Vita*, and of major topics in scholarship on the *Vita*. It should be emphasized here that Kuhn is concerned specifically with the *Vita Augustini* of Possidius, and not with the life (or study thereof) of Possidius in general. Thus, scholarship on Possidius that does not deal with the *Vita* lies outside the scope of this monograph. The commentary is followed by several thematic expositions (Section IV: "Exkurse", pp. 338–352), and a discussion of further research avenues and the way in which the monograph is imbedded in its scholarly context (Section V: "Ausblick", pp. 353–356). An "English Summary" (pp. 357–358), an overview of abbreviations and literature (pp. 359–370), and a brief index (ancient names, places, and key topics, pp. 371–372) conclude the monograph.

Throughout the monograph, Kuhn discusses the *Vita Augustini* on its own merits and as a literary product with its own aims. As Kuhn describes in his introduction, many of the earliest scholars on the *Vita* read the work through the lens of classical Latin literature. These scholars would then judge the *Vita* as a work of inferior and inept Latin at worst, and derivative of Augustine at best. More recent scholarship, and Kuhn clearly follows this approach, argues that the *Vita* should be read within its literary context as a hagiographical text. Possidius follows hagiographical conventions in his own

Vita Augustini, and his idiom is that of fifth-century late Latin, influenced by biblical language and patristic predecessors, most notably Augustine himself.

The title of the book promises a philological commentary on the *Vita*, and so it may be useful to check which philological topics Kuhn explores, and which philological methods he applies to the *Vita*. I will first discuss the edition itself. The monograph does not contain a new critical edition of the *Vita*. For the edition as well as the discussion of manuscript witnesses of the *Vita*, Kuhn refers to previous editors, in particular the 1989 edition by Antoon A. R. Bastiaensen.¹ His text and critical apparatus are identical to those of Bastiaensen. In a few instances, Kuhn deviates from Bastiaensen's readings (overview on p. 27). The critical apparatus has been carefully adjusted in these instances. In the commentary, Kuhn explains these decisions further. The edition is, in sum, for the most part a meticulous reprint of Bastiaensen.

Many lemmata in Kuhn's commentary deal with word meaning and the origins of certain expressions. Kuhn compares evidence from the *Vita* with broader ancient literature. Most often, Possidius is compared to other hagiographies or parallels in Augustine, but Kuhn also pays attention to broader patristic literature, to biblical language and imagery (in *Vulgate* and *Vetus Latina* recensions) and to non-Christian literature. Most discussed parallels hail from the Latin world, but often Kuhn refers to Greek expressions and sources, and on a few occasions, to biblical Hebrew. Other lemmata explain the theological relevance of Possidius' selection and presentation of themes, for example within the context of the Pelagian controversy. In this regard, his "Exkurse", mostly dealing with the theological adversaries of Augustine, introduce the reader to the various controversies Augustine was involved with throughout his life. Other matters discussed in the commentary are the syntax and grammar of Possidius' *Vita*. An example of such a syntactical/grammatical matter is the conjugation of *esse* in conjunction with the perfect participle (pp. 105–106). From time to time, Kuhn addresses matters of composition (such as the use of *catholicus* to form a contrast with *haereticus*, p. 103) and style (for example, whether a reading in *Vita*, praef. 1 is corrupt or perhaps a conscious use of anacoluthon). Nevertheless, such matters are perhaps not as prevalent throughout the commentary as the introduction

1 Vita di Cipriano, Vita di Ambrogio, Vita di Agostino. Testo critico e commento a cura di A. A. R. Bastiaensen. 3rd ed. Milan 1989 (*Vite dei santi* 3).

may have suggested. There, Kuhn had addressed the issue of *Africitas*, namely, the “Africanness” or “African style” of authors like Augustine and Possidius. Overall, the philological commentary and the “Exkurse” seem to aim primarily to elucidate word meaning in the literary and theological context of the *Vita*. On the whole, Kuhn’s work is analytical rather than synthesizing.

Kuhn’s edition of the *Vita* is paired with a facing German translation. As far as I am able to judge, the translation is clear and elegant, rendering the Latin expression in a way that is both transparent towards the Latin and pleasant to read. The clarity of the translation can point to what the monograph accomplishes as a whole: it successfully bridges the fields of classical studies, more specifically the study of ancient Latin literature, with that of patristic studies. It accomplishes this on the basis of a case study of Possidius’ *Vita Augustini*. Kuhn’s work would be an excellent starting point for a scholar (or student) of classical studies with an interest in late Latin literature; likewise, a scholar or student of early Christian theology or the history of early Christianity will find an analysis of the work founded on an excellent grasp of Possidius’ Latin expression and his broader literary context. Readers already familiar with both domains may find that the added value of Kuhn’s monograph lies mostly in his detailed, engaging and analytical commentary.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Aäron Vanspauwen: Rezension zu: Moritz Kuhn: Philologischer Kommentar zur Vita Augustini des Possidius von Calama. Münster: Aschendorff 2023 (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsbände. Kleine Reihe 17). In: Plekos 27, 2025, S. 115–117 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2025/r-kuhn.pdf>).

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