

REVIEW

GENRES AND CONVENTION IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Geoffrey Greatrex and Hugh Elton, edd., *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*. Farnham and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2015. Pp. xv + 341. Hardback, £75.00. ISBN 978-1-4724-4348-9.

Note: The Table of Contents for this volume appears at the end of the review.

This bilingual volume of essays is the result of the tenth *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* conference, which took place in Ottawa, Canada, in 2013. It is fittingly dedicated to Averil Cameron, since it responds to two broad trends in scholarship in which she has played a central role. First, as part of the general rehabilitation of late antiquity and its literature, this volume responds to the traditional view that the blurring of genre in late antiquity was one symptom of a decline in literary quality catalysed by troubled political times.¹ Second, the volume takes as its cue the loss of confidence in the ‘taxonomic straitjacket’ (4) of genre and consequent nuancing of how we should approach categorization and convention in antiquity.² These two historiographical trajectories are laid out in Geoffrey Greatrex’s ‘Introduction’, which also introduces the papers to come and potential thematic links between them, on which more below.

Part I, ‘Homiletics and Disputations’, contains four articles. Wendy Mayer considers the transformation of the medical treatise into the homily. Using the homilies of John Chrysostom as a case study, Mayer demonstrates that medical metaphors and theory are not mere literary embellishments, but indicative of how the homily is a Christianised form of the medical treatise and itself medicinal therapy for its hearers’ spiritual health. Tiphanie Moreau offers a detailed study of Ambrose of Milan’s eclectic oration on the death of the emperor Theodosius, considering its debts to panegyric, homily, and ecclesiastical history, and ascribing that deliberate blurring of styles to Ambrose’s desire to create a new kind of ‘political homily’ suitable to the evolving relationship between church and state. Colin Whiting provides an excellent rehabilitation of

¹ E.g. A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley, 1991).

² E.g. A. Cameron, ‘Apologetics in the Roman Empire—A Genre of Intolerance’, in J.-M. Carrié and R. Lizzi Testa, edd., *Humana Sapit: études d'Antiquité tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini* (Turnhout, 2002) 219–27.

Jerome's *De viris illustribus*, arguing persuasively that rather than being an apologetic demonstration of Christian literary superiority for pagans, as Jerome claims, it is in fact an early example of a newly needed genre of reference handbook for use in intra-Christian debate. The further question of course is why Jerome misrepresents his own text, and what that deception can tell us about generic expectations at the time. Finally, Young Richard Kim considers the evolution of heresiology from Irenaeus, through Hippolytus to Epiphanius via their respective treatments of the heresiarch Marcos. Considered thus, Epiphanius' position as both inheritor and innovator, and his unique contribution—the use of animal metaphors to justify concrete violence against heretics—becomes clear.

Part II, 'Ecclesiastical Genres', begins with Philippe Blaudeau's treatment of Liberatus of Carthage's sixth century *Breviarium causae nestorianorum et eutychianorum*, which is, as it turns out, not so brief, and often seems more inspired by verbose ecclesiastical histories. Blaudeau proposes that Liberatus does this deliberately to free himself from post-Justinianic restraints on historical writing. Geoffrey Dunn's paper uses letters of Zosimus of Rome to explode the myth that papal decretals represented an emerging new genre; 'decretal' was rather an interpretative label applied by later collectors, who thereby invested these letters with an authority unintended by their original author. Dana Iuliana Viezure considers the internal coherence of the *Collectio Avellana*, proposing a desire to edit out anything that implied Ostrogothic influence on the church as an additional unifying theme (in addition to its interest in schism and imperial-papal relations), and using that to suggest possible contexts of production. Éric Fournier considers the influence of hagiography, historiography, and apology on Victor of Vita's *Historia Persecutionis Africanae provinciae*. The first, he argues, was employed to present the Vandals as persecutors, the second to authenticate his account, and the third to revive in his audience the old Christian spirit of resistance. Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe concludes the section by using the evolving role of demonic agency in late antique historiography as a lens to assess the viability of that generic category.

Part III, 'Visual Genres', begins with Mariana Bodnaruk's paper on changing representations of senatorial elites and emperors in Constantinian sculpture portraits. Via a discussion of the interchanging adoption and abandonment of assorted fashions by these two groups, culminating in a discussion of the arch of Constantine, Bodnaruk demonstrates how both Constantine and his Senate manipulated generic conventions to create new modes of self-representation and designate new social boundaries. Christopher Doyle considers the respective representations of victory in panegyric and coinage by emperors and usurpers alike, and argues that a continuity of iconography went hand in hand with a changing symbolism. The third paper, Alice Christ's homage to the work of Kathleen Shelton, starts from Shelton's de-identification of the

Stilicho diptych, and uses it to problematize the common distinction made between ‘public’ and ‘private’ diptychs, and hypothesise instead a generic cultural practice whereby such diptychs were associated with official sponsoring of events.

Part IV, ‘Procopius and Literature in the Sixth-Century Eastern Empire’, contains three papers on Procopius and a fourth on contemporary Justinianic literature. Federico Montinaro’s article reiterates his theory expounded elsewhere that the short recension of Procopius’ *Buildings* is earlier than the longer, which represents a later, and incomplete, version. If true, it is interesting that both Procopius’ technical digressions, and the passages that indicate he is writing ‘to order’, are to be found in the long recension, suggesting that the technical details were not his main interest but added as part of his revisions to a commissioned work that did not meet initial expectations. Charles Pazdernik considers allusions to Thucydides’ last speech of Pericles in Procopius’ *Wars*, as compared to those in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Aelius Aristides, demonstrating continuity and difference in how these authors employ ‘genre confusion’ (where a character speaks in a manner inappropriate to narrative setting). Elodie Turquois, like Montinaro, focuses on the *Buildings*’ technical digressions. Finding them indicative of limited technical expertise, she reads them as akin to Procopius’ interest in curiosities and thus hypothesises the influence of late antique paradoxical literature. Marion Kruse considers the interrelated invocation of Republican offices in Justinianic legal material and Zosimus and Jordanes’ historical writings, demonstrating that shared interest but extensive disagreement over the causes of Rome’s successes and failures motivated a blurring of generic conventions.

Part V, ‘Technical Genres’, begins with Conor Whately’s investigation of the context of the motley assortment of late antique military manuals. Christel Freu then uses Augustine’s famous letter on slave-traders’ abduction of children as a way into a wider problematisation of the related ideas that late antiquity oversaw a fundamental change in legal contracts, and that labourers’ conditions declined. Mathisen then adopts a broad definition of genre to investigate the shifting genres of identity and citizenship in late antique epigraphic material. Adding nuance to the common conception that municipal identity became more important in late antiquity, Mathisen demonstrates that geographical and ethnic forms of identity were of even greater importance, and could also be expressed in terms of citizenship. Since the regions referred to increasingly bore no resemblance to the Empire’s administrative units, Mathisen suggests that this shift is a feature of the general distancing of personal identity from Rome in this period.

Part VI, the amorphous ‘Other Literary Genres’, contains three papers. Shane Bjornlie considers Cassiodorus’ inheritance and reuse of encyclopaedic and epistolary traditions in his *Variae*. *Varietas*, he suggests, was both an organ-

isational principle and a means to claim a moral authority associated with eclectic knowledge. By incorporating encyclopaedic digressions into his collection of administrative letters Cassiodorus could use underlying shared knowledge and the authority derived from it to provide the sense of community typical of more traditional collections of private letters, and provide justifications for the various actions and decisions taken in the letters. Sergei Mariev then considers whether the chronicle constituted a separate genre from works of history and ecclesiastical history in late antiquity. In spite of evidence that Byzantine readers saw little distinction, Mariev argues for the validity of the category based on shared message rather than shared format. Finally Edward Watt's provides a neat demonstration of late antique experimentation with monodies—short, mournful works of commemoration. Via a study of Himerius' fourth century lament for his son Rufinus, Watts demonstrates that monodies of this period continue to conform to earlier generic conventions but increasingly place the speaker, rather than the subject, at the monody's heart.

The topic is both timely and fascinating, and the volume does for the most part a very good job of covering an eclectic range of material both familiar and exotic, while asking and answering pertinent questions that when taken together advance our understanding of the chosen theme. It does however suffer from some of the common problems of edited collections, some more serious than others. While the range of topics and materials is generally good—law and visual material make particularly welcome appearances—coverage is uneven. Procopius alone, for example, receives three papers while hagiography is almost entirely omitted (acknowledged on p. 1) and verse material receives only limited consideration. More problematic, while some pieces treat the central thematic issues of the volume head on, others were clearly conceived independently but adapted to treat them tangentially, and still others simply use genre as a loose hook on which to hang largely independent studies.

Editors' hands are often rather bound in such regards. Coverage and coherence are always somewhat beholden to the range and quality of abstracts offered for publication. But the volume's structure also exacerbates the issues. The groupings not only highlight the uneven distribution by papers but at times obscure the volume's intentions—there are groupings alternatively by content, chronology, and medium, as well as one simply containing leftovers. A thematic arrangement building on the evocative ties between papers drawn by Greatrex in his introduction would have been preferable. Moreau, Whiting, Dunn, Shelton, and Mariev, for example, cohere in discussing new genres; Richard Kim, Bodnaruk, Freu, and Watts their evolution; and Mayer, Blandeau, Fournier, Turquois, Kruse, and Bjornlie their merging. More provocative groupings would also be possible; perhaps Richard Kim, Turquois, and Bjornlie on the influence of the 'encyclopaedic habit' on diverse late antiquity literary forms, or Whiting, Blandeau, and Watts on generic deception. Such structures would help the reader of the volume as a whole see how each piece contributes

to its larger questions, and help the volume add up to more than the sum of its parts.

The text is extremely well edited, and I noted very few typographical errors. Given that, the odd formatting of the cover images seems a shame.

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