

Chapter 5, “Foreign Languages and the Discourse of Otherness,” addresses the book’s basic question of understanding what being Christian meant when different communities of the faith spoke languages foreign to each other. Focusing on Greek, Latin, and Syriac writers, she notes how all languages were thought capable of carrying the divine message. This gradually changed in the fourth century, and in the fifth, theological controversies began to treat languages as markers of confessional identity. In Greek, Latin, and Syriac Christianity, different ideologies of language emerged that linked growing doctrinal disparities to notions of heresy. The ties between language and credal affiliation were not absolute, however.

Chapter 6, “The Language of Saints and Demons,” turns to Christian hagiography and the connection between holiness and language use in the Christian imagination. In Late Antiquity, demons spoke foreign languages and holy persons performed miraculous linguistic feats.

In her final chapter, “Conclusion: “What’s in the Language?,” Minets summarizes and highlights major points of her previous discussion of linguistic awareness among a relative handful of Christian intellectuals. She offers a particularly valuable discussion of the languages of heretics, wisely noting that although orthodox and heterodox churchmen alike sometimes associated heresies with certain linguistic groups, these associations were largely rhetorical and not accurate indicators of actual practice. Minets also puts forward the useful concept of constantly readjusting communities of linguistic sensitivities, referring to “those who share similar language-related socio-cultural stereotypes and subscribe to approximately the same views and ideas about linguistic history and linguistic diversity” (326).

In this major study, Yuliya Minets makes linguistic theory, patristics, imperial history, Christian theology, and the history of a broad range of languages and literatures equally accessible as part of the same late antique story. It is an impressive first book, innovative and well written, that is sure to stimulate much positive discussion and further research. The author deserves high praise, and the book deserves a wide audience.

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***Death of the Desert: Monastic Memory and the Loss of Egypt’s Golden Age.* By Christine Luckritz Marquis. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. 212 pp. \$65.00 hardcover.**

Scholars who have studied the *Apophthegmata Patrum* or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* will be familiar with the notion of monks withdrawing into the desert to achieve spiritual perfection and the trials that accompanied such a life. Specifically, they would be well aware of these monks’ vulnerability to demons. Luckritz Marquis challenges this model for understanding the earliest monks with the argument that the monks of Scetis, Nitria, and Kellia feared not just violence from demons but also from ecclesiastical authorities. Starting with Theophilus’s attack upon the monks of Nitria in 401 CE,

Luckritz Marquis details how this assault visited upon a community, who had previously envisioned themselves as living an angelic life on earth, tainted the monastic promise of the desert. She acknowledges that the attack was rooted in the ideological divisions surrounding Origenism and contends that the event had a long-lasting impact on monasticism and monastic literature. Indeed, Marquis asserts that “. . . this violent incident ought to hold an important place in historical narrations not only of the Origenist controversy but also of the late fourth-century Egyptian monasticism more broadly, and how it was remembered” (2). And yet, she insists the impact of this event has largely been neglected because the late compilation date of the *Sayings* obfuscated this incident through the use of convenient scapegoats—barbarians. To support this argument, she focuses on the increasingly ambivalent nature of the desert in monastic works, the pervasiveness of violence in monastic thought, and the complex attempts to reconcile the violence of 401 CE with the ideals of a monastic utopian society. Taken together, Luckritz Marquis traces how violence—both tangible and intangible—transformed monastic perceptions of the desert experience and how it was remembered.

Luckritz Marquis’s book, barring the introduction and conclusion, can be thematically separated in two parts—the violence, both physical and ideological, inherent in monastic society (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) and the rewriting of monastic history in light of such violence (Chapters 4 and 5). In the first portion of the book, we are introduced to the violent nature of the monastic life, including the internal and external battles of monks who believed themselves at war with demonic forces, heterodox belief, and their very own selves. After all, Luckritz Marquis informs us that “[d]emons were believed to embody that which ascetics sought to deny in their own persons” (28), and of course, ascetics viewed themselves as armed for battle with weapons of psalmody and monastic prayer (56–60). Her point that even the pursuit of the life of the angels could be tantamount to pursuing fearsomeness (63–72) is well noted. However, she does not stop with these arguments; Luckritz Marquis turns to acts of *damnatio memoriae* to understand the legacy of violence. On the one hand, she argues that the *damnatio memoriae* perpetuated against pagan temples and structures served (73–83) as evidence of both tangible and intangible religious violence. On the other hand, she insists that monks extended the notion of *damnatio memoriae*, into what she terms memory sanctions, a means for monks to forget their past lives and worldly concerns in general (84–87). Her discussion of memory sanctions and physical defacement of pagan structures brings to light the seeming impossibility for monks or even contemporaneous lay persons to forget the real threat of religiously motivated violence.

The second portion of her book shifts to the legacy of Theophilus’s violence. It is here that she makes some more interesting assertions. For example, she contends that the *Sayings* depend heavily on the rhetorical construction of the barbarian to explain the exodus from Scetis and that evidence for real barbarian incursions is limited if not entirely nonexistent (116–119). Here, she challenges the work of Evelyn White and his successors who have directly tied the depopulation of Scetis to barbarian mischief. Interestingly enough, if Luckritz Marquis’s view is accurate, it begs the question of why Scetis was eventually abandoned. She refers to various texts emphasizing overpopulation, excessive vegetation, and the chaos of too many youths (116–117)—an idea she lends more credence than the others—but otherwise does not examine the reasons closely. To be fully persuaded on this important assertion, readers may desire a more detailed examination of the sources, such as AP Sisoës 28 (PG 65:402) where Sisoës admits he has taken up residence on Anthony’s mountain because “. . . Scetis became

too crowded.” On firmer ground stand Luckritz Marquis’s points about the *Sayings* as a work of Gaza and therefore the result of the complex intersection of monastic and ecclesiastical divisions (149–154). We would do well to remember that the *Sayings* preserved the memories of dispossessed monks and sought to navigate incendiary contemporary debates.

Although some of her assertions may need more discussion, such as the suggestion that some discourse concerning monastic forgetting mimics the call and answer of traditional *damnatio memoriae* (95), and the suggestion that fire imagery was closely tied to violence and heresy (117–118). I am acutely convinced that violence remained an integral part of monastic life. Indeed, where Luckritz Marquis innovates is her focus on violence for analyzing and approaching monastic thought. She has highlighted how scholars often have taken for granted a rhetoric of violence deeply entrenched in monastic literature, especially in the *Sayings*. For her, Theophilus’s assault demonstrated a rift between ecclesiastical and monastic authorities that ultimately necessitated a rewriting of monastic history. If nothing else, we all would do well to remember that monks who dwelled in the desert thought of themselves as warriors wielding weaponry of prayer and unflinching belief in God, and they normalized violence against demons, heterodox believers, and even their own bodies, as a part of their ascetic experience. Luckritz Marquis reminds us of this fact.

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***Claiming the Mantle of Cyril: Cyril of Alexandria and the Road to Chalcedon.* By Patrick T. R. Gray. Late Antique History and Religion 24. Leuven: Peeters, 2021. xiv + 306 pp. €95.00 hardcover.**

A seminary History of Christianity professor had just concluded the description of the complex and conflicted events of the Council of Chalcedon 451. He paused, and then with a smile said, “The amazing thing is that in the end the right decision was made.” Patrick T. R. Gray observes that this has been the accepted assessment of the Council for several centuries—an inevitable decision that had finally found its way home. Gray is here to tell us that there was nothing obvious and straightforward about the road to Chalcedon. Sometimes prior councils had engineered pre-planned decisions and indictments, yet there were many occasions in which significantly different roads would have been taken if the synod attendees had spoken or acted differently.

Gray slows down the story and presents a detailed and lively narrative of every step along the way, beginning with the *theotokos* controversy of 428 involving Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria. Drawing upon a voluminous number of council reports, doctrinal statements, letters and responses to those letters, Gray connects the personalities, motives, controversies, and conniving on the long and winding road of twenty-three years. The companion along the road is Cyril of Alexandria, both in person and later through his theological spirit. Cyril was considered the standard-bearer of orthodoxy, so that everyone, no matter which side of an issue, wanted to appear to think like