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Brian P. Sowers, *In Her Own Words: The Life and Poetry of Aelia Eudocia*. Cambridge, MA.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2020. Pp. 224. Paper (ISBN 978-0-674-98737-1) \$24.95.

A female writer of the fifth century CE, the empress Aelia Eudocia stands as one of the preeminent authors of the Late Antique Greek world. Not only is she of great interest to historians as an important political figure, but to philologists as well. She is known for her poetry in the epic genre, her most famous works being in the styles of paraphrasis and cento, which seek to elevate the content of Christian stories to classical epic proportions. Most philological analyses of the recent decades, including editions, commentaries, and monographs on her *Homerocentones* and the *Martyrdom of Cyprian*, have focused on in-depth examinations of one particular work within the literary corpus of this intriguing figure (see for example the many works by Bevegni, Schembra, and Usher). Sowers' recent contribution is also of a philological nature, but it takes an entirely different approach from previous studies. In his own words, Sowers' objective is "to recover the literary Eudocia" (p. 2). His book successfully investigates the self-image that Eudocia presented throughout her works, which complements well the portrait that has thus far been reconstructed on the basis of historical evidence.

In order to present a well-rounded account of Eudocia's literary identity, Sowers discusses select passages from each of her extant works: what little remains of her speech in Antioch, the honorific poem at Hammat Gader, the Homeric Cento, and the *Martyrdom of Cyprian*. The lattermost receives a treatment in two separate chapters dedicated to each of the two extant books, entitled the *Conversion* and the *Confession*. The book also helpfully includes the first complete English translation of the entire *Martyrdom of Cyprian* as an appendix. After a brief introductory chapter that outlines the overarching arguments of the book, the first chapter introduces Eudocia as a "Homeric benefactress" by focusing on Eudocia's speech at Antioch as well as on the poem at Hammat Gader. With the term "Homeric *euergetes*," Sowers is referring to Eudocia's imperial projects that included local socio-economic initiatives, such as building and alimentary programs, which she framed in a Homeric, literary context. For example, Eudocia's economic support to the city of Antioch, which included the construction of a basilica, was accompanied by a speech that adapts a Homeric line from the *Iliad* featuring Diomedes and Glaucos in battle. The famous scene depicts the two Homeric heroes refusing to fight on the basis of a preexisting relationship of *xenia* between their two families. By creating a parallel between the heroes' relationship and her relationship with the city of Antioch, Sowers argues that Eudocia lends greater authority to the latter, while also displaying her erudition.

Despite the author's earlier statement that he would only mention historical details when necessary to support his philological analysis, this first chapter still describes Eudocia's early life, marriage, travels, and finally her exile in the Holy Land and the events leading up to it in quite some detail. Scholars unfamiliar with her biography will find in this chapter a clear and well-written summary of the most important events of her life as well as an abundance of footnotes that provide suggestions for further reading. The true highlight of the chapter, though, lies in the analysis of the inscription itself for which Sowers has provided his own translation. The poem's close reading clearly and convincingly reveals Eudocia's use of Homeric word-choice and imagery to further her *euergetistic* agenda.

In chapter two, the focus shifts to her Homeric Cento, a patchwork poem that uses Homeric verses or half-verses word-for-word to recount the stories of the bible. The chapter deals briefly with preceding centonic traditions, including those in Latin from authors such as Ausonius and Proba, the introductory preface of Eudocia's cento, and finally, a passage from the cento itself. As in chapter 1, the close-reading analysis of the text itself, and especially the preface, is particularly convincing. The comparisons with Ausonius and Proba provide a fruitful point of reference and could perhaps even be investigated in greater detail. Eudocia, being a female cento author, has been compared before to the Latin female cento author, Proba, but the comparison with Ausonius is more novel and represents a most welcome innovation. Furthermore, by focusing on Eudocia's introductory passage as a site for her own self-presentation as an editor and critic of her predecessor Patricius, Sowers sketches an interesting image of her poetic circle, which is characterized by mutual exchange and literary critique.

The second half of this chapter analyzes the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, a biblical story found in John 4. Sowers argues that through Eudocia's interventions in the biblical text, namely by removing characters and elements specific to first-century sociohistorical realities (such as Samaritan-Jewish references), and by introducing epic-style ring-composition in Jesus' conversation, she updates the biblical moral of the story to reflect fifth-century sensibilities with regards to the female gender and conversion; the convert not only believes in Jesus but also returns to convert others to Christianity. Finally, through intertextual allusions to Nausicaa and Penelope, the character of the Samaritan woman is granted epic status. Though the literary analysis itself is detailed and well-thought-out, it would have been easier for the reader to follow the analysis if the Greek text and/or an English translation of the passage had been provided. Furthermore, since the beginning of the chapter makes the important point that Eudocia's relationship to the text is closer to that of an editor as she reworks an already existing cento, the discussion of the passage in the second half of the chapter would have benefitted from reintroducing Patricius into the conversation rather than implying that Eudocia was the sole author. This point notwithstanding, the chapter is very useful in providing new approaches to the cento genre in that it introduces Latin authors such as Ausonius and Proba as points of reference for close-reading of the texts, and in explaining some of Eudocia's theological aims in her cento.

The third and fourth chapter respectively deal with the first and second book of Eudocia's *Martyrdom of Cyprian*. Eudocia was inspired by the fourth-century legend of Saint Cyprian which recounts the story of an Antiochene, pagan magician, who attempts to seduce the young Christian Justina, fails, and subsequently converts to Christianity. The first chapter introduces the story of Justina primarily, and then goes on to discuss intertextual relations between Eudocia's narrative and other Christian prose fictions, such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (APT). The chapter also engages with Victor Turner's theory of social drama (see e.g. Turner 1981) for which Turner proposes four stages, namely breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration. This theory, as explained by Sowers, has already been applied to Medieval hagiographies by scholars such as Bynum (1991), who argues that this theory, though useful for male-authored stories, does not apply well to female-authored stories. Sowers builds upon her work by discussing how we have to nuance Turner's theory when adapting it to a story like Justina's which was written by a woman. Sowers argues that Eudocia disrupts social drama theory by presenting Justina as a new type of feminine ideal that does not go against patriarchal authority but also as someone who represents, in her own way, female agency. Indeed, Justina, unlike the heroine of the APT, does not adopt traditionally male characteristics nor engage in socially transgressive actions. Eudocia's main character, however, adheres to more feminine social expectations, but is still able to defeat the demons she encounters. The book's engagement with these theoretical concepts offers a new perspective on Justina's representation. The fourth chapter, on the other hand, focuses more on Cyprian himself. In parallel to the third, the author investigates intertextual connections to other pagan itinerant magicians and argues that Eudocia's version presents Cyprian as surpassing the previous literary models. These chapters represent a slight shift from the previous sections of the book, which consist of close-reading analyses of shorter passages of text. In this way, I believe, they could be of particular interest to scholars in women and gender studies and to those investigating Christian attitudes towards and portrayals of Late Antique paganism and ritual.

As a monograph investigating Eudocia's self-portrayal as seen through her works, this book succeeds in establishing a multi-faceted and nuanced image of the author. The book represents an indispensable addition to the corpus of scholarship on this topic as it combines her many literary endeavors and offers a novel perspective from which specialists may better understand this complex figures of late antique literature. Sowers' modern and accessible translation in the appendix of the book also broadens the potential audience for Eudocia's work; one could easily imagine using this translation in a higher-education

classroom setting. That having been said, the analysis itself does appear to tend towards a specialist audience in that it presupposes familiarity with many late antique phenomena and literary and theological concepts, such as paraphrase and monophysitism. As the introduction itself states, the book is primarily intended for an audience of “classicists, experts in late antique poetry, and colleagues in women and gender studies” (p. 2). Members of this audience will find in this book a most notable and thought-provoking contribution to a quickly expanding scholarly field.

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