

Possidius. **Het leven van Augustinus.** Biografie uit de vijfde eeuw, met een lijst van al zijn werken. Vertaald en toegelicht door Vincent HUNINK, ingeleid door Paul VAN GEEST. Budel, Damon, 2016, 191 p. [ISBN 978-94-6340-022-0]

Compared with St Augustine's autobiographical *Confessiones*, his biography, written in the thirties of the fifth century by his friend, pupil, and fellow-bishop Possidius of Calama, has received relatively little attention. Italy has been good, with four editions in the past sixty years or so, some of them reprinted several times, but, after the two German editions, by von Harnack (1930) and W. Geerlings (2005), translations in other major languages are few. H. Weiskotten's English edition appeared a century ago, in 1919, and seems to have been followed only by its reprint in 2008. It must be a cause of considerable pride for tiny Netherlands that there is now a new Dutch edition of the *Vita Augustini*, the first, by T. J. van Bavel, dating from 1986. (Curiously, it is only mentioned in the translator's note, not in the bibliography, in which the 2008 Weiskotten reprint is also missing.) It is principally the work of V. Hunink, who ever since his doctorate in 1992, occupies himself with excellent translations of a broad range of Classical and Medieval Latin authors, among whom Augustine features regularly. Where possible, these works are mentioned in the footnotes to this edition, together with other relevant titles of his publisher. This may well fit into his ambition "to render *everything*" (p. 190), as does his inclusion of the *Indiculus*, a list of 453 of Augustine's works (1,030, according to Possidius, who counts separately each letter and homily, but also the 'books' of a work). In most modern translations of the *Vita*, this list is unfortunately omitted.

The substantial introduction by P. van Geest (p. 7-52), followed by an exemplary ten-page bibliography, has among its merits the convincing case made for Possidius being not only a reliable biographer, as scholarship had established two generations ago, but also an accomplished hagiographer, for whom examples are more important than miracles. Van Geest concurs with L. Hamilton's 2004 article in *Journal of Early Christian studies* (p. 85-105) that Possidius did not primarily write for the faithful at large, but for the clerical elite faced with the same challenges and aspirations as its saintly hero. In that sense, one cannot but be surprised that the inclusion of Augustine's long letter to Bishop Honoratus of Thiabe on how the clergy ought to behave in the face of approaching enemies (i.e. the Vandals) is mentioned only in passing by Van Geest (p. 27) and is criticized by Hunink as possibly disturbing the balance in the biography's composition (p. 122, n. 148). Hamilton's thesis seems to explain quite well why it was included and why it may have been more important than, say, the rules for community life that, strictly speaking, comprise only one 'chapter' (25), but tend to attract much more attention nowadays. Van Geest, for example, writing about Possidius "hidden message" (p. 42-52), focuses on St Augustine as spiritual master, the embodiment of his own *Praeceptum* or Rule, and leaves aside somewhat his role as fighter of heresies in general and of human nature in particular, even though (minimally) ten of the *Vita*'s 31 'chapters' can be – and are – aptly titled "Against" one or another group of heretics. This is also – as Van Geest points out quite correctly (p. 29) – Possidius's main criterion to

categorize the works of Augustine, the list of which is not a mere appendix to the biography, but ‘essential reading’ (cf. his advice to the reader on p. 100).

In the same vein, Augustine’s religious community in Hippo is described by Possidius as a training camp for ascetic and learned clergy, ready to go out and fight for the peace and unity of the Church against its enemies (p. 83-85), more than a school of monastic life as such. Given the stress on its apostolic goals, one can doubt whether its description, in the midst of a section on Augustine’s problems with the Circumcellions, is a pivotal as Van Geest proposes (p. 26, 42) and not more a compositional “error” than the insertion of the letter to Honoratus in the story about the saint’s final days, where it becomes a kind of spiritual testament to his beleaguered fellow priests and bishops. As regards the *Praeceptum*, mark that it has no place of prominence in the *Indiculus*, as one would have expected, had Possidius thought it so important for his readers. So did the *Vita Augustini* and the *Praeceptum* really have the same goal, as Van Geest asserts, echoing the thesis proposed by Augustine expert L. Verheijen (p. 45)? Might it not be that the disciple, pressed by the circumstances of his time, had at least momentarily other priorities than his master and wrote the latter’s biography as a ‘combat manual’ rather than a monastic rule? This fine new translation and edition of the *Vita Augustini* will certainly advance its continuing exegesis, at least among those knowing Dutch.

M. LINDEIJER

Byzantine Hagiography. Texts, Themes and Projects. Ed. Antonio RIGO, in collab. with Michele TRIZIO and Eleftherios DESPOTAKIS (= *Βυζάντιος. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization*, 13). Turnhout, Brepols, 2018, IX-506 p., ill. [ISBN 978-2-503-57771-5]

La publication rassemble les communications prononcées lors de la 23^{ème} conférence annuelle organisée par la section de théologie byzantine de l’Université orthodoxe Saint-Tikhon de Moscou, du 12 au 14 novembre 2012, et dédiée à la thématique qui sert de titre au recueil:

- B. FLUSIN, *L’hagiographie byzantine et la recherche: tendances actuelles* (p. 1-18): revue des différents types d’approche (sociologie, éditions critiques, objets littéraires, canaux de transmission) appliqués à la littérature en relation avec le culte des saints à Byzance, durant ces trois dernières décennies.
- X. LEQUEUX, *La Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca: origine – développements – mise à jour* (p. 19-35): la mise à jour de la *BHG*, dont la première édition date de 1895, s’intéressera davantage aux œuvres, en évitant de se perdre dans les méandres de la transmission des textes, ce qui devrait sensiblement simplifier la structure des dossiers hagiographiques.
- D. BUCCA, «*Codices hymnographici Byzantini antiquiores*»: descrizione del *database* (p. 37-54): le projet interuniversitaire C.YM.B.A. se propose de recenser et de décrire, sous forme électronique, les manuscrits byzantins à contenu hymnographique copiés avant l’an Mil; le dépouillement des catalogues et de la littérature spécialisée a déjà permis de repérer quelque 350 recueils antérieurs au XIII^e s.