

## BOOK REVIEW

*Damasus of Rome. The Epigraphic Poetry.* Edited by DENNIS TROUT. Oxford Early Christian Texts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxvi + 229. Hardcover, \$155.00. ISBN 978-0-19-873537-3.

Dennis Trout claims that his new text of Damasus' epigraphic (and other) poems is neither a new critical edition nor intended to replace A. Ferrua's standard edition of 1942, but only to make Damasus' work more widely available (vii). Trout is far too modest. This work exceeds the editor's stated purpose and will become the preferred text of Damasus—at least until the new edition from the Centre Paul-Albert Février is published. Indeed, the only barrier now standing between potential readers of Damasus and a useful, modern text is the whopping great price of this volume; one can only hope that it will be widely acquired by libraries with holdings in classics, patristics and late ancient history. It is probably asking too much of the press to issue a less expensive version of the text in paper covers.

Trout's introduction will acquaint first-time readers with Damasus (bishop of Rome from 366 to 384 CE, elected not without controversy and even a bit of bloodshed), and catch them up on controversies and even some Damasan arcana; neophytes especially will appreciate the "reader's guide" (53—68), which serves as an introduction to the corpus of poems, their sources, and their place in the greater scope of early Christian *encomia* of the martyrs. Trout also provides translations of the poems and other passages for those with shaky Latin—and, of course, sometimes the best commentary is a translation. On the other hand, Trout's treatment of Damasus' prosody, vocabulary and style will be useful to the expert Latinist for its judicious marshalling of evidence and prior scholarship, especially on such vexed questions as the relationship between Damasus and the author of the *Carmen contra paganos* (26–30; Trout is rightly—in my opinion—non-committal on this question).

The book presents Damasus' poems in such a way that the reader can tell immediately whether a given text is preserved as an inscription (in which case it is presented in upper-case letters) or in a codex (all lower-case)—or both, which can yield lines such as "CONversi fugiunt, ducis impia castrA RELINQUUNT" (from

poem 8, the *elogium* of Nereus and Achilleus from the cemetery of Domitilla). There is no critical apparatus as such; instead, Trout comments on his selection of readings in notes before the commentary proper. At times, these notes are almost as lapidary as a conventional apparatus. This is just fine for readers who are Damasan adepts, but for beginners Trout's brevity may be a cause for some initial frustration. But it will not be difficult for readers new to the text to grow accustomed to the ways of Trout's text; epigraphic sources for the poems are by nature limited, and in this case the literary sources are likewise few in number and conveniently listed in the reader's guide.

Trout's control of the secondary literature on Damasus is excellent and apparently complete. In addition, Trout's commentary reveals much first-hand knowledge of the catacombs and other monuments connected with Damasus. Also, Trout usefully (if briefly) comments on the larger significance of many of the poems; see for example poem 20 (*Elogium* of Peter and Paul in S. Sebastiano, 121—122), a text which provides interesting evidence on the development of the cults of those saints in Rome. Trout sums up the evidence clearly and succinctly, and then directs the reader to more comprehensive scholarship on the ecclesiastical and political ramifications of the cult of Peter and Paul.

The volume contains a useful map locating churches and other sites of Damasan poems (xxi), as well as clear photographs of some of the inscriptions. The map is especially useful, because Trout presents Damasas' poems by locality; thus, the book functions somewhat as an *itinerarium* and modern readers can, to some extent, encounter these texts in roughly the same order in which pilgrims may have done in the late antiquity and the middle-ages. There is also a useful concordance of this edition's order of the poems with that of the *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*. Finally, there is an index of Damasan vocabulary for such concepts as heaven, torture/martyrdom, clerical offices, sin, death, etc. Even though these concepts bleed into one another, this index, combined with study of resources like the online Migne or Corpus Christianorum, will yield a deepened understanding and appreciation of Damasus' poetic sensibility as well as his Christian perspective on these and related topics.

Not every heart will beat faster at the prospect of a new edition of Damasus, granted. But Trout has done this author a great service, and along with him, a service to philologists and historians as well.

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