

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians.* By KENDRA ESHLEMAN. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. ix + 293. Hardcover, \$99.00. ISBN 978-1-107-02638-4.

This impressive work focusses on the solidification of intellectual authority and expertise in the second and third centuries CE. Eshleman focuses on the three categories of authors captured by her subtitle. She uses the same adjective—prickly—to describe the relationship between these groups as well as relations among members of either community (14, 98). The latter, internal sort is Eshleman's main interest, and the bulk of the book is devoted to relations within groups of sophists and Christians. Both of these terms are problematic, but the Introduction helpfully offers a summary of both ancient and modern definitions of "sophist" and "Christian." This study deals with the processes by which these categories were defined in the Empire, and by whom. The thesis is that these identities were not only functions of one's intellectual proclivities, but also of the relationships one maintained. *Who* you knew was as important as *what* you knew.

Chapter 1 is an admirable combination of sophistic and early Christian evidence. First, it examines how sophists tried to tie membership to participation in activities (21). Lectures were the most important of these, but venues varied considerably (from private to public) and this made policing membership difficult or impossible, yet sophists tried nonetheless. As Eshleman eloquently describes it, this logistical factor was unavoidable in early Christian communities as well. The fact that cells met at homes allowed for strained relations with patrons, and physical divisions lent themselves to doctrinal differences. Eshleman's concern is not so much these sociological realities as the intellectual (textual) debates surrounding various "alternatives" which would become "heresies" (51).

The focus of the remaining chapters tends to toggle between sophists (2 and 4) and Christians (3 and 5). The pair of sophistic chapters deals with the internal construction of identity and the "Second Sophistic." The most significant contribution of Chapter 2 is its sustained analysis of a specific example of the shared

lexicon of Christians and contemporary sophists and philosophers. All three distinguished *idiotai* from experts. Eshleman helpfully renders *idiotai* as “non-specialists” or “amateurs,” and offers a taxonomy which intriguingly includes both positive and negative uses. Ignorance could be a vice or virtue, depending on whether knowledge constituted sophistic prowess or religious heresy. In any case, the person doing the labeling sought legitimacy for himself.

Chapter 3 contains a discussion of the Christian uses of *idiotai* in efforts to establish the authority of “experts” from less sophisticated members (*simpli-ciores*). The emergence of the “threefold ministry” (bishop-elder-deacon) that came to dominate Christianity is still mysterious, but Eshleman offers a sophisticated review of the scholarship on the separation of institutional leadership from charismatic authority (121–124).

After discussing the emergence of authority in general, Eshleman moves to two specific projects of identity formation. Chapter 4, on Philostratus’ “invention” of the Second Sophistic, is of value to anyone interested in the period. Eshleman offers a cogent summary of the cultural “movement,” but she also interrogates the very notion of such a phenomenon. She faults Philostratus for his sample size: his *Lives of the Sophists* mentions 42 “sophists,” but historians can identify some 150 (128). Anyone who tries to work around Philostratus faces a “prosopographical blizzard,” but Eshleman has done the work for us; she presents her findings in the form of a stemma (130). This sophistic “family tree” is important because it illustrates Philostratus’ construction of the Second Sophistic, and it certainly enriches our understanding of the period. For Eshleman, Philostratus’ stemma comes down to relationships: social affiliation determines intellectual classification as a “sophist.”

Both Philostratus and his Christian contemporaries, in their struggle to separate genuine members from posers, are engaged in “orthocracy” (146–152). This is fleshed out in Chapter 5, on Christian efforts to develop orthodoxy by identifying and classifying heresies (heresiology). The chapter focuses on Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus, all of whom flourished around 200 CE. As an “official” sophist requires a link to Philostratus, so the authentic Christ-follower needs an association with an apostle or his (suitable) successors.

Chapters 6 and 7 show how intellectuals used history to legitimate their credentials—to impose order through pedigree. Chapter 6 highlights the philosopher Numenius to illustrate the importance of successors (*diadochai*) to consensus (*homodoxia*). Numenius’ effort to finalize an official history of philosophy finds an analogue in early Christian attempts to tell the story of orthodoxy:

Clement, Origen, and Eusebius each cite him (210, with n. 133). Eshleman takes up this Christian project in her final chapter, where she uses the work of Hippolytus, which probably dates to the early third century, to illustrate a “genealogy” of all heresies (228). Like the sophistic family tree in Chapter 4, the stemma here enhances her analysis of intellectual debates.

The prose here and elsewhere tends to be more dense than necessary, making the book more useful to teachers than their students. Nevertheless Eshleman gives valuable insight on how a number of competing succession lists evolved into a single doctrine of apostolic succession, with Jesus and “authorizing ancestors” (i.e. apostles and martyrs) at its beginning. The book is particularly valuable because it demonstrates the sheer uncertainty at play in the processes by which authority is established. By focusing on the social aspect of the story, Eshleman offers a clear sense of the contingency inherent to the processes of defining authority, particularly among sophists and Christians. This is especially admirable given that Eshleman and her audience know how the stories end.

JOSHUA KINLAW

*Queens College* (jkinlaw@qc.cuny.edu)