

BOOK REVIEW

Reading Medieval Latin with the Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat. Edited by DONKA D. MARKUS. Michigan Classical Commentaries. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018. Pp. xv + 146. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0-472-05384-1.

Donka Markus has chosen an ideal text to introduce Latin students to the world of medieval Latin. Heroic quest, wisdom tale, example of world theology, the Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat is a fast-moving story that will engage Latin students. It traces the trials of Josaphat, as he frees himself from his helicopter father to become an independent young man who is led on the path of wisdom through his mentor and guide Barlaam. Through a series of parables and fables, debates and temptations, Josaphat learns to navigate the path between secular and divine authority, between worldly riches and the delights of his father King Avenir and the spiritual guidance of his teacher Barlaam, and between the “illusory nature of the visible world” and that which is invisible, but real and permanent. In the process, Josaphat fulfills his true potential to become both a hero who is capable of action and a saint who is receptive to divine guidance. Thus, although the story may begin as a coming of age tale, it continues into adulthood and speaks to readers of many different life stages.

Besides being an appealing story in its own right, the Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat offers readers three additional cultural and cross-cultural explorations. First, Markus’ superb introduction traces the story’s transmission and transformation from its origin as an account of the story of Siddhartha attaining enlightenment as the Bodhisattva through its many transformations into Arabic, Georgian, Greek, and Latin. Second, the introduction shows how Jacobus de Voragine’s 13th-century account from the *Legenda Aurea* provides a glimpse into the medieval Christian mind, permitting readers to recognize themes such as light and vision, asceticism, scholastic debate, resistance to temptation and the potential in each human being to achieve sainthood. Finally, the introduction puts the Life of the Buddha in dialogue with the legend. As a result, readers can deepen their intercultural understanding by comparing key elements of Buddhism with those of Christianity.

The Introduction concludes with a discussion of the legend's genre (hagiography and romance), setting (India), date (era of the desert fathers) and an outline of the story. Markus divides the text into ten parts: Part 1, introduction to the setting and characters; Parts 2-4, Josaphat comes to understand that the world contains suffering, sickness, and death; Part 5, Barlaam arrives and teaches Josaphat through a series of six parables, which leads to his conversion; Parts 6-9, Josaphat faces two trials testing his faith, false teachers and sexual temptation; and Part 10, Josaphat withdraws to the desert and becomes a saint. Given the compressed nature of Jacobus de Voragine's text, Markus' deep knowledge of previous versions and her extended discussion of each section help the reader keep track of the storyline, characters and themes and interpret the symbolism and twists in plot.

Markus constantly keeps the reader's needs in mind. One of the challenges for those coming to medieval Latin from classical is recognizing medieval spellings of words, e.g., *que* = *quae*, *cepit* = *coepit*, *misterio* = *mysterio*. To help readers adjust to this new orthography, she presents the text in two ways, first, a continuous text with medieval Latin spelling, and then in the commentary section in classical Latin orthography, signaling words that have been changed by underlining them. The double presentation of the text allows students to learn to read the text with greater confidence and compare the different spellings.

The commentary continues to keep the reader's needs at the forefront. In this portion of the edition, each section of the text begins with a short paragraph in English summarizing what will unfold. A paragraph of the text is presented in classical Latin spelling, followed by notes and vocabulary. The notes identify people, gloss unusual words, reference quotations from scripture, comment on philosophical themes, discuss the historical reception of the text and review less familiar grammar. For example, her note on the parable of the Four Caskets (sections 87-95) points the reader to Shakespeare's adaptation of this folktale in *The Merchant of Venice*, and her comment on the date of Barlaam's death in 380 CE (section 290) acknowledges it as fictional, but highlights the connection to desert monasticism in 4th-century Egypt. Throughout the notes, Markus reveals her complete command of both classical and medieval features, regularly comparing Late Latin (LL) constructions to classical Latin (CL) grammar and syntax. For example, a note on *indignus* clarifies that it takes the dative in LL, but the ablative in CL; or a note on *quoniam* taking the subjunctive in LL reminds readers that *quoniam* takes the indicative in CL, because it "introduces a reason given on the authority of the writer." Such comparisons help improve the reader's knowledge of CL as well as LL. At end of the volume, the edition contains a concise (16 pages) grammar of Late

Latin constructions and favored classical constructions (including comments on orthography, word order and uses of *quod*), a high frequency word list and an appendix of personal names and characters.

To sum up, Markus has given both medievalists and classicists an outstanding edition of the Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat. Her deep learning is evident on every page. Yet even more importantly, she provides at every turn the tools a student will need to encounter a marvelous and thought-provoking text, a text that places the medieval Latin legend into the broader context of world literature and wisdom tales. Moreover, this exemplary edition prepares students to ponder textual transmission, the structure of folktales, the values of medieval Christianity and the teachings of Buddha, not to mention the tools needed to continue to read medieval Latin with confidence and pleasure. Suited to any student who has completed the elementary Latin sequence, this edition of the Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat by Donka Markus is an outstanding introduction to the joys and rewards to be found in medieval Latin.

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