

explains the reference at this point very simply, such as describing who the referent is and anything else that may ease comprehension. Once all the authors for the chapter have had their work presented the contents are discussed. At this point, to follow the argument, one must constantly flip back to the passage in question. As an example: ‘Thus like the epithalamia Statius 1 and Claudian 3, the later examples of the genre, Sidonius 5, and Venantius 3, continue this tradition of solely mythological and legendary reference, as does also much of the later love poetry.’ This occurs on page 127. Statius 1 is on pages 86-87, divided into 1a, 1b and 1c. Claudian 3 is on pages 90-91 and is similarly divided into sections. Sidonius 5 is described over three pages, 95-97 and Venantius 3 is on page 99. In each of these cases, it was not necessary to reread the whole passage, but in attempting to understand the argument I found myself constantly going back and forth to prompt my memory. Perhaps if samples were embedded into the discussion, it might have been easier to follow.

Another concern was whether this book was based on samples or was exhaustive. This is not spelled out in the introduction or conclusion. The absence of any examples of exemplarity in the works of Boccaccio, while including those of Dante, Petrarch and Cino di Pistoia suggests it was samples, but then how was the rather large sample that was included selected?

The chapters that have the most relevance to an early medieval readership are the first four, which deal with the classical pre-twelfth-century materials. The provision of good indexes and explanatory notes makes it a good resource for finding material, even if the discussion of ideas is complex.

R Natasha Amendola
School of Historical Studies, Monash University

Silvas, Anna M, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God*

(Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts* 22, 2008) hardback; xiv + 264 pages; 1 b/w illustration; RRP 60.00€; ISBN 9782503523903

Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God is primarily a series of translations from Greek to English of ancient texts. Macrina was the elder sister of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa. Silvas had previously studied monastic life through the writings of Basil and Gregory. In this study and through the series of translations, she carefully reconstructs Macrina’s life, times and influences. The translations include the first translation of Letter 19 by Gregory of Nyssa. This letter contains descriptions of Macrina’s way of life, discusses her personality and includes the details of Gregory’s last visit to Macrina before her death. Also from

Gregory of Nyssa is 'The life of the Holy Macrina,' which describes details of her life and her early betrothal at the age of 12. This, according to Gregory, was 'the age when the bloom of youth begins to appear' (114). With the death of her betrothed, she pledged herself to a monastic life as she considered that her betrothed was not dead but was alive with God 'and was away on a journey, not dead, and that it was out of order not to keep faith with one's bridegroom who had gone abroad' (116). The pattern of her life at Annisa is uncovered. Her life was one of piety and humility. At Annisa they 'were not occupied with the pursuits of this life, or rather, not preoccupied, but solely with meditation on divine things, unceasing prayer and uninterrupted hymnody, which was extended evenly over the whole time, throughout the night and day so that it became for them both work and respite from work' (122).

These translations also reveal interesting aspects of the emergence of Christian monasticism in Asia Minor and the role that women played in this process. Within the monastery, there were separate houses for the women, children and men. Each house had its own head. However, the philosophical head of all the houses in religious instruction at Annisa was Macrina, and this status is included in her brother's writings. In the 'Testimonies of St Basil the Great' he did not mention his sister by name, but referred to her in the third person. He defended her female asceticism, saying that 'thanks to her virility of soul ... Many women have excelled not one whit less than men. Indeed some have proved themselves even more outstanding' (61). He emphasised the central role of Macrina and of other women in the development monasticism.

The 'Epigrams of Gregory Nazianzen' describe her as 'illustrious virgin Macrina', who 'kept herself from the eyes of all men, is now on the tongues of all and has a glory greater than any' (82). Gregory's 'On the soul and the Resurrection' is a dialogue between himself and Macrina that discusses their shared interests.

There are no surviving works or letters from Macrina herself. However, her life and philosophy are preserved through these translations. Silvas's excellent commentary and translations build up a fascinating image of Macrina, as distinct from her more famous brothers, and cast her in the role of a philosopher and spiritual leader of an aescetic community early in the development of Christianity.

Tessa Morrison

School of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Newcastle