

CLAIR MCPHERSON, Nilus of Ancyra, Byzantine Theologian and Ascetic (Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics 81). Piscataway: Gorgias Press 2024. viii, 337 pp. – ISBN 978-1-4632-4609-9

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Nilus of Ancyra – or the fifth-century authors whose writings fall under that *nom de plume* – has been overshadowed in modern times by other ascetic writers from the same period. The book in hand could have introduced Nilus to Anglophone readers of Byzantine literature. Unfortunately, CLAIR MCPHERSON squanders that opportunity. His work should never have been submitted by the author in its current state, never approved by the series editorial board, and never published by the press.

Questions of who Nilus of Ancyra was, and of the authorship of various treatises attributed to him, are well known. It is now generally agreed that the Nilus who was monk, author, and disciple of John Chrysostom should be distinguished from Nilus of Sinai who wrote the *Narrationes* (CPG 6044) and the Nilus to whom the *Peristeria* (*ad Agathium monachum*) (CPG 6047) are attributed. A number of works formerly ascribed to Nilus are now known to be by Evagrius of Pontus. In the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, eleven texts are attributed with certainty to ‘Nilus Ancyrae’ (treated by the CPG as a general category, because disputes over authorship are alive), and many more are listed under fragments, *dubia*, and *spuria* (uncontested: CPG 6043–53; fragments: CPG 6054–6070; spurious: CPG 6075–6084, some of which are Evagriana). Although research on Nilus is not voluminous, important studies have appeared from time to time. These are cited in all standard reference works.¹ In his introduction, MCPHERSON (herein M) mentions just the seminal but old one by HEUSSI.²

1. E.g., OLIVER NICHOLSON (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*. Oxford 2018, vol. 2, p. 1077; JOHANNES QUASTEN, *Patrology*. Westminster MD 1950, vol. 3, pp. 496–504; MAURICE GEERARD, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, vol. 3. A Cyrillo Alexandrino ad Iohannem Damascenum qua optimae quaeque scriptorum patrum Graecorum recensiones a primaevis saeculis usque ad octavum commode recluduntur (*Corpus Christianorum*). Turnhout 1979, pp. 173–182.

2. KARL HEUSSI, *Untersuchungen zu Nilus dem Asketen* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 42, 2). Leipzig 1917.

In fact, M does not raise the question of authorship at all. For him, '[a]ll of Nilus' known writings are in volume 79 of the *Patrologia Graeca*' (p. 29). The reader's first encounter with Nilus's biography is M's translation of a passage by Nikephoros Xanthopoulos (also published in *PG* 79), which M dismisses as fiction. M's alternative account amounts to presenting Nilus as an early fifth-century monk who prolifically defended Nicene orthodoxy, but he does not corroborate his account with primary source citation or quotation. M acknowledges that the Nilian letters are in disarray (p. 4), but he nowhere explains the problems in the epistolary corpus, all the more problematic given that M translates a healthy selection from it (Chapter 6). Even a distilled version of ALAN CAMERON's excellent article would have sufficed here.³ But the bar should be higher. This is the first English translation of many of the works ascribed to Nilus, issued under the imprint of a scholarly press, so readers are justified in expecting original scholarly insights into the textual problems of the letters. None are given.

There are significant departures from what is expected in a scholarly translation of a late antique corpus. Immediately after the brief historical context, M provides a section called 'Nilus' Correspondents', followed by a list of fifteen names, each with a paragraph. But the paragraphs are not about the correspondents themselves, but about the titles that they carried. Even that is deeply flawed, because M appears unaware of the problematic nature of many of these titles.⁴ There are no footnote references to scholarly research on offices and titles. The discussion is riddled with typographic errors (e.g., 'Roamns', 'froma', 'office', 'esponsibilities', all on a single page [9]) and unfinished sentences ('Timothy as ὑποδιάκονος' [p. 8]). Greek words are sometimes accented and sometimes not.

The section that follows, 'Nilus' Dogmatic Theology: Return to Irenaeus', is a thematic sequence of quotations that appeal to M. The first block quote, apparently a translation of something, has no citation, nor is the translator credited. The other block quotations are similarly unreferenced, and some of them include material that cannot be part of the original quotation (e.g., p. 12). At p. 14 we encounter a random paragraph promoting M's doctoral thesis. Sometimes the material is presented as being M's own words, but feels as if it is quotation (pp. 16–17). Arbitrary meandering of this sort continues for pages.

3. ALAN CAMERON, *The Authenticity of the Letters of St Nilus of Ancyra*. *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 17 (1976) pp. 181–196.

4. See CAMERON, *Authenticity*.

A section on neologisms falsely credits to Nilus the coining of προσχάσκω, δοξομανία, and εὐφθαρτος, among others. These claims are attached only to uncited translations, and the underlying Greek word is not provided, except through cryptic second-tier analysis. Later claims falsely credit Nilus with coining the phrase ἄνθρωπος κυριακὸς (p. 25; already used by Evagrius of Pontus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Epiphaneus of Cyprus) and the word πολυκτημῶν (p. 185; of Homeric vintage). At p. 253, n. 54 credits Nilus with coining κακοφίλους (*sic*), but Nilus nowhere uses that word in his corpus (the word at Letter 2.242 is φιλορύπαρος, which is, indeed, uniquely attested in Nilus's correspondence). The next section in the introduction, on Nilus's etymological vocabulary, says nothing about etymology itself. Rather, it is another arbitrary collection of terms that M found interesting. All the problems mentioned above afflict the rest of the book, which is devoted to the translation of specific texts. The translations come without the original Greek; in the discussion below, I have supplied the relevant excerpts.

Chapter Two translates the *Peristeria* (*ad Agathium monachum*) (CPG 6047; PG 79: 812–968), likely not by the same author as the letters, as noted by KARL HEUSSI.⁵ In the introduction M compares the text to a letter from Mother Theresa, and characterizes the *Peristeria* as a hagiody, an explanation of how to cultivate the virtues. An arbitrary paragraph on asceticism closes out the introduction, but the reader is not given any preparation for what the text is, who its audience was, when it may have been written, and so forth.

The translation is marred at the very outset:

Ἔθος ἔχοντί μοι τὰ πολλά, τὰς ἀκαίρους τῶν ὀχληρῶν ἐκκλίνειν συνουσίας, ὡς οἶσθα, σπουδαιότατε Ἀγάθιε, καὶ τοῖς μᾶλλον ἡρεμοῦσιν ἐνδιατρίβειν τόποις, ὅταν τις ἀνάγκη τοῦ δωματίου προελθεῖν ἔξω βιάσῃται, χθὲς πρὸ τοῦ ἄστεως ἀναπατοῦντι, καὶ κρεμάστραν αἰώραν ποιούμενῳ τήν τε τοῦ ἄλσους ὄψιν, καὶ τὸ μέλος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ μουσικῶς ἡχούντων ὀρνίθων, καὶ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ αἰθρίου καθαρὰν αὔραν τοῦ πνεύματος, προσελθὼν, ὀκνηρότερον μὲν τοῦτο γὰρ ἐδήλους τῷ σχήματι βαδίζων ἀγρότερον, καὶ τῷ ἀπαναδυομένῳ ἐκ τοῦ συνεχῶς ὀκλάζειν ἐοικώς.

As you know, my scholarly friend Agathios, my custom is usually to decline pointless meetings with annoying people, and to stay in

5. HEUSSI, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 160–163.

the wilderness far from the usual traffic, until necessity compels me to venture out from my little home. Well, yesterday I was walking up and down around town when you appeared. You approached me rather slowly, even sluggishly, like someone getting his bearings after falling.

This passage features questionable amplifications: ‘my scholarly friend’, ‘pointless’. It also places his little home within the wilderness, whereas the Greek places the wilderness as something to which Nilus (I adopt the name provisionally, with implied square quotes) goes when he leaves his little home. M has Nilus in the streets of the town, whereas the Greek has him do the opposite, strolling through a grove outside the city. M declines to translate the ekphrastic imagery of the forest chandelier canopy, the chorus of birds, and the clean breeze – all of which are a foil to Agathios’s slow emergence as a wild, slinking creature. I do not understand how M arrived at his final sentence.

M is out of his depths, not only in the lofty rhetoric of the preface, but even in more conversational passages. At 9.1 (p. 59), in the context of critiquing the wealthy who draw up wills, Nilus writes, ‘Εἴη μὲν ἐμοὶ ζῆν, φησί, καὶ τῶν ἐμῶν τοῦ δεσπόζειν, πρὶν δωρήσωνται’. The straightforward translation should be something like: ‘They say, “May I live and govern what is mine, before it is disbursed”’. M renders this as, ‘To me, what they are really saying is, “Leave me alone for now and have control over what is mine before I give it away”’. The first phrase is utterly botched, the second is negated, and the third is nonsense. The stock phrase Εἴη μὲν ἐμοὶ ζῆν is repeated three more times in this section, where M translates it with ‘That’s life, I guess’, ‘So, such is life?’, and ‘that’s life’.

The translation ends suddenly at *PG* 79: 949D with the incomprehensible ‘...making it impossible to make the transition from (*sic*) one age to another or to leap over the next stage with an odd motion’. One is hard-pressed to find the underlying Greek passage here, and happily the translation sputters and dies. But the reader is not warned that they have been saved from roughly nine more *PG* columns of Greek, which M chose not to translate.

Throughout the translation, Bible quotations are not referenced, if even marked. Classical language and allusions left unmarked and unannotated. And as if the reader were not confused enough, we have two random quotations (by M, not by Nilus) of Evagrius inserted at 5.3 (p. 55). At 11.13 (p. 91) M comments on the meaning of ἐρρησάτο (*sic*), but the passage is formatted as if the actual words of Nilus.

Chapter Three translates the *Liber de monastic exercitatione* (CPG 6046; PG 79: 720–809). The introduction begins with a romanticized (and unfootnoted) depiction of early monasticism, then turns to arbitrary ideas, and even nonsensical sentences (e.g., ‘But to call a life style a philosophy was, and in this treatise, Nilus offers a rationale for so doing’ [p. 109]). Among other problems, M absurdly claims that φιλοσοφειν (*sic*), a word used continuously since the pre-Socratics, was of recent coinage (p. 110). A section titled ‘Evagrian Asceticism’ says nothing about that topic, but merely points out a textual parallel, and uses the balance of the section to discuss passages that M found interesting in the text. By the time the introduction is finished, the reader has very little context for the *Liber* (e.g., authorship, audience, date, later reception).

Once again, the translation is problematic from the outset:

Φιλοσοφεῖν ἐπετήδευσαν μὲν καὶ Ἑλλήνων πολλοὶ, καὶ Ἰουδαίων δὲ οὐκ ὀλίγοι· μόνοι δὲ τὴν ἀληθῆ φιλοσοφίαν ἐζήλωσαν οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μαθηταί, ἐπεὶ καὶ μόνοι τὴν σοφίαν αὐτὴν ἔσχον διδάσκαλον, ἔργῳ ἐπιδεικνύουσιν τὴν πρέπουσαν τῷ τοιούτῳ ἐπιτηδεύματι ἀγωγὴν.

Many Greeks make a profession of philosophizing – and so do not a few Jews. But in fact, only the disciples of Christ really follow philosophy. For they alone have the only Teacher, Wisdom, who showed, by the profession of his acts, the genuine way to live.

The rhetorical register is graceful, but not as lofty as that of the *Peristeria*, so M’s translation approaches the original, but at the expense of grace, clarity, and accuracy. ‘Really follow’ sanitizes ἐζήλωσαν, and the grammar in the second half winds up subordinating ‘Wisdom’ to ‘Teacher’. Most problematic is the obscuring of ἐπιτηδεύω/ἐπιτηδεύμα, which, being the second and penultimate words, are the interpretive key to the passage. A bit later we get the following:

οὐκ εἰδότες, ὅτι πρὸ πάντων ἐλεύθερον εἶναι δεῖ τὸν φιλόσοφον, καὶ μᾶλλον φεύγειν τὸ δοῦλον εἶναι παθῶν, ἢ ἀργυρώνητον, καὶ οἰκοτρίβων οἰκότριβα.

Normally we would expect a translation along the lines of:

...unaware that above all the philosopher must be free, and especially flee being a slave of the passions, or being silver-minded, or being a house slave of house slaves.

Instead, M gives us the following:

Not knowing that before all else the Philosopher has to be free, and to strain the nerve to keep from being a servant of feelings, or of silver – a slave of slaves.

The English weds woodenness and unjustified expansion, a translation style that surfaces time and again throughout.

M indicates clearly that he has omitted sections 3, 21b but does not say why. The translation jumps from section 47 to 52 but he does not tell the reader whether he has omitted material, or if it is simply not extant. Most of section 28 is missing, but M does not signal that omission. One wonders whether these passages, which would have added relatively few pages, simply outstripped the translator's skills.

Chapter Four translates *On Monastic Superiority* / *De monachorum praesentia* (CPG 6049; PG 79: 1061–1093). The introduction is mercifully shorter, and therefore less problematic than earlier ones. The translation that ensues appears to be complete, except that M omits part of section 13, without explanation.

The opening sentence, up to section 1, signals the quality of translation to follow:

Τέχνης μὲν ἀπάσης τὰ τεχνητὰ κρίνοντες ἄπειρα, σφόδρα σφάλλονται περὶ τὴν κρίσιν εἰκότως· λόγοις δὲ δικάζοντες, οἱ τούτων ἀμύητοι, πλημμελῇ κατ' αὐτῶν τὴν κρίσιν ἐκφέρουσιν, οὐκ εἰδότες ἐκάστου τὴν ἀκριβῆ παρατήρησιν· ὅτι μὴ ταῖς κατὰ μέρος αὐτοῖς γυμνασίαις εἰς ἕξιν ἢ ἐπιστήμη προέκοψεν.

The inexperienced, when they make judgments about this or that art, will stumble and stagger in their judgment: when they try to analyze some system into which they are not initiated, they inevitably carry away a verdict that strikes a very sour note, since they cannot make an accurate, close observation: their knowledge will not make a web of progress because of their exercises.

The translation roughly matches the Greek but resorts to amplification and unnatural English phraseology. What is a 'web of progress'? Where is ἕξιν / habit or κατὰ μέρος / partial? More such questions are in store for the reader. Section 2, for example, begins with:

Ὡς γὰρ τὸ ἔσω τοῦ ποτηρίου πρὸς τέρψιν τοῦ πίνοντος δεῖ πάντως καθαρὸν εἶναι, οὕτω τὴν καρδίαν πρὸ τοῦ σώματος ἔχειν ἀμόλυντον

χρὴ πρὸς τὸ ἀρέσκον τῷ τοιαύτῃν ὄρῳ αὐτὴν βουλομένῳ Θεῷ.

So, just as because the pleasure of drinking is within the cup, the cup must be completely clean, so the heart rather than the body must first be likewise spotless in order to please God, who wishes to see it in that condition.

The translation is unnecessarily expansive, and it completely misses the analogy – cup exterior is to cup interior is to drinker as body is to heart is to God. Because of the misunderstanding, God’s pleasure is converted to the monk pleasing God, and God’s gaze is sapped of its metaphorical power.

Chapter Five translates *On Holy Poverty / De voluntaria paupertate ad Magnam* (CPG 6048; PG 79: 968–1060). The introduction begins with an uncredited quote from Homer, *Odyssey* 18.1–9, on Arnaeos (Iros) to contrast Christian and non-Christian attitudes toward the poor (πτωχός, repeatedly called πτωκός) and to motivate the monastic call to voluntary poverty (ἀκτημοσύνη).

The opening reads:

Πρώην μὲν πρὸς τοὺς ἀμελέστερον μετιόντας τὸν μοναδικὸν βίον γράφοντες λόγον, ἱκανῶς κατηψάμεθα τούτων, ὅσον ὑπέβησαν τῆς ἀποστολικῆς ἀκπριβείας δεικνύοντες τῇ περὶ τὰ μάταια αὐτῶν σπουδῇ κτημάτων ἀντεχόμενοι, καὶ τοῖς τοῦ βίου τῶν φιλοπλούτων οὐχ ἥκιστα περισπασμοῖς ἐμφυρόμενοι.

Not long ago, writing on the subject of those who have let the monastic life grow slack, we have criticized them sufficiently, and shown how far from the apostolic diligence they have strayed, in that they have concentrated on the empty issue of their possessions, and are just as distracted by life as those who are entirely wrapped up in their love of riches.

The opening phrase is paraphrastic and insipid, losing the comparative force of the original ἱκανῶς / ὅσον contrast. Apostolic exactitude becomes apostolic diligence. M appears not to have understood that in the middle voice ἀντέχω takes the genitive, and he converts ‘clung’ to ‘concentrated’. Μάταια are vain things, not ‘empty issues’. M’s conclusion to the sentence appears to mistake the litotes οὐχ ἥκιστα (‘not least’) as a comparative and so must introduce a verb not found in the Greek, ‘entirely wrapped up’.

Such problematic translations are common, e.g., Poverty 16 (p. 200), Καὶ μάρτυς τούτων ἡ πεῖρα ('Experience is a witness of these things') is translated as 'Now the proof is in the experiment'.

The translation features several lengthy notes – sometimes footnotes, sometimes inline commentary – which, scarcely clarifying the text, come across as personal meditations inspired by favorite passages. In places, the author seems to have left in place some private notes (p. 191 n. 3 last paragraph, meaningless here, but perhaps relevant to material on p. 192). In section 5, Nilus suddenly begins to talk about Heraclitus, Alasdair McIntyre (*sic*), and himself.

The translation is incomplete. The passage marked section 1 (pp. 188–193) is actually a combination of sections 1 through 3, and it omits *PG* 79: 969BC. In sections 9 and 10, M does not translate about half the material at *PG* 79: 980D–984A, and does not warn the reader. The translation goes from 11 to 13, and the reader is uncertain: is section 11 a combination of 11 and 12, the same way section 1 combined 1 through 3, or has the author skipped 12? Well, M has skipped 12 and a little bit more, because the last part of section 11 is hastily epitomized. Most of sections 17 and 20 and part of 18 are untranslated (again without notification). Section 20 (which does not correspond to the Greek) skips to section 29 (omitting the first half of it). The last part of sections 41 and 47 are dropped. M's last section is 48, but he does not indicate that he has dropped sections 49 through 67 (*PG* 79: 1032B–1060D). I estimate that between a fourth and a third of the treatise has been omitted.

Chapter Six translates the letters (*CPG* 6043; *PG* 79: 81–581). The introduction proceeds through a variety of arbitrary topics. The reader is not told about the textual state of the letter corpus, how strange it is, or the possible presence of letters that should not belong.⁶ More bewilderingly, the structure and organization of the corpus is nowhere explained. So the first header, '1. 1–3 To Ptolemy Sincleticus', suggests that there is a letter with some double-numbered reference scheme. But the reality is that the first 1 points to the first book of letters. And the '1–3' indicates that M has translated three letters as a single block. In fact, even if the reader figures this out, s/he will not know when the translation moves from one letter to the next. The letters are already a puzzle, many of them starting and ending

6. CAMERON, Authenticity; LEON NIEŚCIOR, Anlehnungen an andere Autoren in Briefen des Nilus von Ankyra. Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum 27 (2023) pp. 484–499.

abruptly, with little context. Now, when conflated and arbitrarily redacted, the corpus of letters attains new heights of confusion.

M's translation of the letters exhibits the same problems seen in prior chapters. For example, at 1.1–3 *To Ptolemy Sincreticus*, the beginning of Letter Two reads:

Πολλάκις μὲν γράφειν σοι παρασκευάζεις, δυσωπῶν τὴν ἐμὴν ταπείνωσιν, οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἐγὼ πρὸς τοῦτό γε ὀκνηρός.

(I am abashed at your writing so many letters, but I have not been slow in answering them.)

It is unclear why this sentence is punctuated as a parenthetical comment, unless M meant it as a segue of sorts, to help conflate the two letters. The translation converts Ptolemy's nagging into Nilus's abashment, and removes Nilus's self-deprecation. M gives prominence to Ptolemy's letters, which can be inferred, but which are subordinate in the Greek to the notion of Nilus's act of authorship. The Greek is more along the lines of 'You frequently contrive, importuning my lowliness, that I write to you, but for this certainly I am not reluctant'.

M begins a new paragraph to translate Letter 3, but the change is unmarked. So when the reader finishes Letter 2, which interprets Calvary and its role in Biblical history and prophecy, they next encounter this:

Τὰ μὲν ἄλλα τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων, καὶ ἔστι χαλεπά, καὶ νομίζεται εἶναι. Χαλεπὰ ὁ φόνος, καὶ ἡ μοιχεία· καὶ γὰρ ἔστι χαλεπὸν, καὶ νομίζεται εἶναι χαλεπὸν. Ὁ δὲ ὄρκος ἔστι μὲν χαλεπός, οὐ νομίζεται δὲ εἶναι χαλεπός. Διόπερ μᾶλλον αὐτὸν φυλαξώμεθα· κἂν τε δικαίως, κἂν τε οὐ δικαίως ὁμνύηται, ἵνα μὴ εἰς αὐτὸν κρημνισθέντες, τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς ἐξορισθῶμεν.

On the other hand it is, as we know very well, the grievous place where all sins are gathered together. Murder and adultery are serious, and they are considered serious. But an oath is also serious, but is not so considered. Thus we should be careful about our vows, lest we be thrown from the heights and exiled from eternal life – whether we consider that fair or not.

The first sentence has nearly no correlation with the Greek. Because M wishes it to be a continuation of Letter 2, he invents text. In reality, Letter 3 is about a completely new topic. It begins abruptly (characteristic of many letters in the corpus) with a discussion on grave sin, distinguishing between perception and reality, to make the argument that oath-taking is, in

this regard, more treacherous than murder or adultery. Nilus's admonition to be even more diligent about oathtaking, regardless of whether it is just or unjust, is turned by M into a discussion of vows (monastic?) and attitudes toward eternal judgment. And because the passage is commandeered into explaining Letter 2, Nilus comes across as arbitrary and meandering as M. Such passages can be found throughout the translation. At Letter 1.22, for example, M has Nilus promising salvation to those who are 'numb' (ἀναίσθητος) when Nilus says exactly the opposite. And as with the other texts in this volume, one is never quite certain when M will omit passages without warning or introduce them. For example, Letters 1.85–88 to Philagrius begins with a translation of Letter 1.84, while Letter 1.86 is omitted; the translation without warning continues through 1.92 then skips to 1.94 (in a botched translation that elides Nilus's comparison of monks to Levites). Letter 4.25, to a monk Theodore, is rather short, but M's entry is quite lengthy. The first paragraph roughly translates the Greek, the second lengthy paragraph corresponds to nothing I have been able to locate anywhere in the corpus of letters, and the remaining seven paragraphs repeats (but not verbatim!) M's translation of Letters 1.88–92.

The notes, ironically, take pains to point out standard rhetorical devices or insignificant grammatical points (e.g., p. 230 n. 27 on ἄνθρωπε). A lengthy note 17 (p. 226) on gnosis is attached to a paragraph after the relevant one. It concludes with a discussion on σωτηρ (*sic*), and presumes the reader knows why the word is being discussed. But 'savior' and related words are nowhere to be found in his translation of 11.8–19. In fact, Σωτήρα Χριστὸν is quite prominent in Letter 8, but M has translated this as simply 'Christ'. Note 18 on Eunomius does not provide biographical details; rather, M simply joins Nilus and heaps more coals on the dead man's memory.

Chapter Seven translates the first part of the commentary on the Song of Songs (CPG 6051). M acknowledges ROSENBAUM's 2004 edition, chooses to follow GUÉRARD's older one, but seems unaware of its second volume (2022).⁷

The chapter introduction starts off badly, as sentences 3 and 4 repeat sentences 1 and 2. In his discussion of the catena on the Song of Songs, he refers to 'the # century' and 'volume # of PG'. Despite these blemishes, M

7. Nilus of Ancyra, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des cantiques*, ed. MARIE-GABRIELLE GUÉRARD (Sources chrétiennes 403, 623). Paris 1994–2022; Nilus of Ancyra, *Kommentar zum Hohelied*, ed. HANS-UDO ROSENBAUM (Patristische Texte und Studien 57). Berlin – New York 2004.

at least stays on point, briefly contextualizing the commentary within the larger early Christian exegetical tradition.

The translation indulges in the kind of legerdemain we have already seen. Only half of section 8 is translated; section 14 is completely dropped; only half of the last sentence of section 23 is translated; a large part of section 31 is dropped; half of 68 is dropped. Sections 18–20, 56, 59, 66, 68 include paragraphs formatted as if part of the translation, which in reality are the author’s underdeveloped commentary. At section 62, the third and fourth paragraphs in the ‘Commentary’ section are actually a return to the translation.

The lemmas from the Song of Songs are inconsistently rendered. Many times, only the English translation of the verse is presented. Other times it includes the Greek. Sometimes the Greek is properly accented and punctuated, and other times it is not. Sometimes it includes translations of the Hebrew (M has a fondness for Pope’s translation). Sometimes M attempts to delve into differences between the LXX and Hebrew. At the lemma for section 63, for example, Songs 2:16–17 (pp. 317–319), M provides three translations of the verses, then takes three paragraphs to comment on the LXX and Hebrew variations (in one place cross-referencing a nonexistent note 223).

The character of the translation is much like that found in the rest of the book, with wooden or unintelligible English phrases, amplifications, paraphrase, and occasional failures to understand the Greek text. And just like the previous translations, one can scarcely find a page that is not marred by errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, or formatting. So as not to belabor a review that is already longer than it should be, here is a brief example. Songs 55 (p. 308), Βαιθήλ ἐστὶ τε καὶ ἐρμηνεύεται οἶκος θεοῦ, ὅρη δὲ ταύτης οἱ διὰ μέγεθος ἀρετῆς οὕτω χρηματίζοντες is translated as ‘Bethel is a real place and its meaning is “house of God”. Those who bear this title because of the magnitude of their arête (*sic*) are “mountains”...’. Here are the usual problems, along with inventions. ‘Real place?’ ‘This title?’

When the translation of the commentary on the Song is finished, all that remain are a few lingering white pages. No general index. No index of Scripture. That is fitting, because in all the translations, many Bible quotations are not marked, and most are not referenced.

The book under review does a disservice to various Nilii who have written graceful, insightful, profound treatises. Blame should not be assigned to the author alone; Gorgias Press and the series board have their share of

responsibility. In fact, it would have been impossible for the book to appear in its current form without all three parties – scholars, press, and author – failing to do their jobs. The honorable thing would be to withdraw the book from circulation.

Keywords

Byzantine theology; Nilus of Ancyra; patristic Greek