

The Garb of Being: Embodiment and the Pursuit of Holiness in Late Ancient Christianity, edited by Georgia Frank, Susan R. Holman and Andrew S. Jacobs. Fordham University Press, 2020. 384pp., Hb., \$65. ISBN-13: 9780823287024.

Reviewed by Jade Weimer, Instructor, Department of Religion, University of Manitoba, Jade.weimer@umanitoba.ca

The Garb of Being is a fascinating and well-organized collection of essays that each further our understanding of the body and bodily experience in the context of Late Antique Christianity. Several essays draw on the work of Susan Ashbrook Harvey, whose contributions to the study of early Christian asceticism and embodiment are considerable. The volume is divided into three main sections that all examine various aspects of the *Garb of Being*. The first section, “Making Bodies,” includes three essays that consider how early Christians understood the “production of individual bodies as Christian bodies” (5). Frances Young’s essay problematizes the idea of normative soul-body dualism in late antique Christianity. Despite varying views on the relationship between body and soul, she argues the general consensus was integration but the nature of that integration was considered beyond human comprehension. Arthur Urbano’s work analyzes the significance of references to Jesus’ clothing and body in the transfiguration described in the synoptic gospels and he argues that “clothing itself is a medium of revelation” (36) in this context. Thomas Arentzen also emphasizes the intercessory power of garb through an examination of relics (Mary’s belt) and the significance of these items can be understood as “alive and responsive to human needs” (6).

The second section, “Performing Bodies,” considers the different elements of the performative body “as revealed through hagiographers’, hymnographers’, and poets’ works” (5). Through various actions including singing, suffering, and dying, Christian bodies presented opportunities for others to reimagine their own embodied experience of a Christian identity. Sidney H. Griffith analyzes the hymns found in *Madrāshê* 22–24, composed by Ephraem the Syrian, which were meant to reinforce a particular form of orthodoxy and function as both didactic and performative works while Georgia Frank’s essay argues the hymns of Romanos the Melodist created a model of collective emotion for the congregants through the embodied practice of ritualized singing. The next essay by Rebecca

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Stephens Falcasantos discusses the works of John Chrysostom whose rhetorical compositions were meant to evoke responses of disgust or delight in order to discourage particular behaviours learned by mimesis from one's social environment. Andrew S. Jacobs focuses on asceticism in his essay and employs theories of modern celebrity culture to understand the nature of ascetic fame in late antiquity. Using Simeon the Elder as an example, he contends that the fame of certain ascetics often resulted in the commodification of the ascetic body. Next, Rebecca Kraweic explores the works of Theodoret of Cyrrhus and contends that his compositional works about monastic figures can be understood as "preventative medicine," where he privileges the ascetic body because of its "access to God" (126). Finally, Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent examines the link between themes of sacrifice and familial relations in the context of Persian hagiographies. She explores the complexities of scriptural discourse on the family and describes the nature of the "new families" that are created through religious conversion or ascetic practice.

The third section focuses on the question of how early Christian texts play(ed) a role in creating the communal body. Sebastian Brock's essay examines Syrian martyrdom stories of five particular women, which highlights the nature and impact of their collective voices. Suzanne Abrams Rebillard analyzes the poetic compositions of Gregory of Nazianzus and contends that poetry has a transformative power which can act as a purificatory rite, while Bernadette McNary-Zak examines the letters of Athanasius during his third exile and argues that the "production of textual bodies was instrumental in consolidating communal bodies" among Ethiopian desert monks (9). Constance M. Furey's essay explores questions of textual authority and claims that ascetic practices and values provide a possibility "for living out familial bonds under different premises" (277). The next essay by Susan R. Holman focuses on Patristic sermons about the afterlife, which she argues reveal the political, economic, and social contexts of a Patristic understanding of embodiment. The final essay by Caroline T. Schroeder examines questions pertaining to digital categorization of ancient texts which, can preserve cultural and literary heritage but also risks perpetuating "Western canonical impulses" (9).

This volume contains an diverse collection of engaging essays that provide a range of perspectives on the nature of the body in early Christianity. The most significant contribution is the wide-ranging definition of *garb* articulated in the volume, which expands the utility and functionality of this concept in a meaningful way. This classification pertains

to material clothing but also the body itself can be understood as garb. Garb can function in a paradoxical fashion insofar as clothing/body can both signify various aspects of our identity like gender, class, or religious identity but it can also “be used to subvert such significations” (2). Additionally, garb is a communicative medium, that reveals identity, power, and emotion. The “Performing Bodies” section offers a particularly interesting selection of essays that further our understanding of the role that clothing and the body play in performative contexts, which contributes much to current scholarly discussions on ritual, collective identity, and piety in early Christianity. One suggestion would be to utilize a cognitive science framework in some cases in order to provide an additional and nuanced perspective on embodiment, emotion, and ritual practice. Several essays in this volume mention emotion (For example, Frank’s essay has a small section on emotional contagion) but more explicit connections could be drawn between emotion and other recurrent themes in the volume including social bonding, mimesis, and asceticism, especially since performative and ritualized contexts have the potential to shape and arouse particular mental states, which can result in the acquisition of religious or social norms by others. Overall, this volume contains a terrific collection of essays and advances our understanding of embodiment in Late Antique Christianity.