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Marianne Bielland Kartzow presents insightful new interpretations of previously marginalized persons in NT and early Christian texts. The texts that Kartzow selects for treatment are those that present characters who have been marginalized by both ancient society and by modern interpreters, usually due to the contextual and historical complexities of class, gender, or social status. These marginalized characters include: those directly affected by slave violence and ‘slave motherhood’ (Luke 12:45-6; 1 Tim 2:9-16), the future-telling slave girl of Acts 16:16-8, the Egyptian Eunuch from Acts 8:26-40, and talkative widows (Luke 18:2-5 and 1 Tim 5:13-4). Kartzow’s analysis also addresses the intersectional issues around crucial sociological ideas: the concept of virginity, the nexus between orality and resurrection in the Gospels, the Colossian household codes and the memory of Hagar. Despite the complexity of her methods, the book is quite short at a manageable 180 pages.

Kartzow uses an intersectional method combined with memory theory to question what key texts might have meant to early Christian communities, how early Christian audiences would have received these texts, and how modern readers might understand the texts today. Intersectionality requires quite a bit of defining and teasing out through close readings of the ancient texts. In her own rather understated summary of her method, Kartzow insists that “[i]nstead of examining gender, race, class, age, and sexuality as separate categories of oppression, intersectionality explores how these categories overlap” (p. 15). But there are sometimes reasons why gender, race, class, age, and sexuality are treated as separate categories—each one of these terms has necessitated entire schools of thought, and independent methodologies and expertise have been developed around them. Having a functioning knowledge of contemporary thought on all these topics would be impressive in itself, but trying to ascertain what the ancients might have made of these terms and then seeking to translate those sentiments into modern terms seems too ambitious a project for one short volume.

Memory theory considers how a marginalized person in the text is remembered in many overlapping contexts, how power and identity is shaped in both the past and the present, and how this memory worked within early Christian communities. After considering the historical information that is required for understanding an ancient text, Kartzow asks numerous questions of the texts based on this method.

Taking up the example of the Ethiopian eunuch, Kartzow’s method directs us to explore now familiar questions: whether the eunuch’s castration was voluntary, involuntary, or natural, and she explores how all of these options can contribute to how we determine social status. After these questions are introduced and addressed, Kartzow explores the more novel issue of intersection. Two questions serve as nice examples here (1) would a eunuch who had once been free and then voluntarily castrated himself belong to different social class than those eunuchs who were slaves? (p. 49), and (2) “How did the eunuch stigma control the identity of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts?” (p. 51). At first glance, these questions appear unanswerable and almost rhetorical. Yet Kartzow finds a way to introduce possible answers using the very little evidence that we have to address such questions.
Kartzow uses Catullus’s poem 63 to show how slave language was used to describe the effect that castration has on class and gender. A wealthy young man who castrates himself in honor of the *Magna Mater* describes himself as a slave who has left his master because he can no longer participate in society as a man. Castration had a negative effect on his gender identification and class; he was an emasculated slave. Kartzow then examines the afterlife of the Ethiopian eunuch in the church fathers that show some similarity with Catullus. Kartzow shows that the church fathers affirm the masculinity of the eunuch (as if it were questioned), they note that the eunuch represented the Queen’s court (an indicator of higher class/status), he was free from sexual lust and family responsibilities, and he is used in anti-Jewish polemic. These findings allow Kartzow to conclude that as a person of uncertain gender, social class, and status, the Ethiopian eunuch represents traditionally marginalized and stigmatized people, making him a relevant character to explore.

Throughout the book, Kartzow continues to ask creative questions concerning the intersection of gender, class, race, and social status as it relates to biblical stories and Christian traditions. As such, this book is a good introduction to memory theory and intersectional methods, and it is accessible to the non-expert. It would serve as an excellent textbook for a graduate course, generating discussion and inspiring research topics. Kartzow’s use of ancient sources and their interpretations are quite judicious and provide a good introduction to issues like slavery (which is examined from several different angles in the course of the volume) and family life. When Kartzow presents historical information and various interpretations of ancient texts, her work is up to date and scholarly. Given the massive amount of discussion on Roman slavery and family life, it is very good to have a concise summary of these topics and their various impacts on understanding the early Christian communities.

For the same reasons, the book would be useful to researchers of family life or slavery in early Christianity. Kartzow is not presenting her readers with radically different scholarship here, but using theory to build a more sensitive interpretation of these texts. Her chapter on the Ethiopian Eunuch presents new and as yet unanswered questions about the eunuch’s social status, class, gender, and stigmas based on the intersectional method. Included in this discussion is an enormously useful review of how the eunuch is treated in other Christian literature. In the end, Kartzow demonstrates the insufficiency of conventional interpretations and drives her readers towards more sensitive questions.

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