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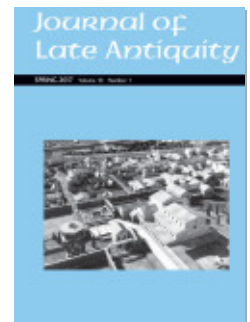
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*Augustine's Vergilian Retreat: Reading the Auctores at Cassiciacum* by Joseph Pucci (review)

Stefan Freund

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(Review)

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The results were mixed. Aspiring monks did not simply choose to turn left for basket-weaving in Egypt or right to beg or stand on pillars in Syria. Indeed, Brown's characteristic nuancing of the diverse threads across these polarities is perhaps (at least to this reviewer) the most appealing strength of this compact and welcome study. For instance, "holy poor" might still own property despite rhetoric to the contrary. Monasteries were surrounded by social bustle, often a few hundred yards from the nearest village. Families took individual monks under their special care to benefit from their power to heal, bless, and pray. And "sons" and "daughters of the Covenant" across Syria tended to stay put at home and were not necessarily poor at all.

So why did the pro-work model win out for the West? Why are modern Christian ideals of ascetics different from, say, the Hindu sadhu or the Buddhist with a begging bowl? One answer, Brown suggests, may lie in an element often "air-brushed out" of these ascetic narratives: the role and influence of the proximal laity. As both church and monks gained wealth and institutional stability into the fifth century, donors increased their generosity to both "holy" and "real" poor. And work, at least conceptually, was part of dynamic appeals for "treasure in heaven," particularly through language of sacred abundance and incarnational theology. For Egyptian monks, "to accept the body was to abandon any pretense to be an angel. It involved taking on the poor, so as to show compassion for bodies like one's own. . . . Condemned to work so as to eat, the monks were linked by labor to the sufferings of the poor" (108, 117). Lay connections were fundamental to these dynamics.

This does not mean the Syrian model disappeared, of course. Ascetics in both Egypt and Syria were implacably "linked by a continuous muffled dialogue" (xiii) across borders in an interdependent world. By the fifth century, Brown concludes, we find clear evidence of a "blended tradition" that draws from both.

In sum, *Treasure in Heaven* reminds us how religious meaning takes shape in distinctly non-angelic social realities, and what such ideological differences may look like in community and individual expressions of aid, "holy" poverty, and wealth. Its broad-scope exegetical exploration on how work shaped sacred meaning in an important historical moment has far-reaching implications for global conversations that continue today.

***Augustine's Vergilian Retreat:  
Reading the Auctores at Cassiciacum***

JOSEPH PUCCI

Turnhout: Brepols, 2014. Pp. xvi + 192.

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After his conversion in summer 386, Augustine left Milan for Cassiciacum. There, in a friend's country house, he stayed with his closest relatives and confidants until he returned to the city for his baptism during the Easter vigil of 387. During this period of seclusion, Augustine produced his first extant writings *Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita*, *De ordine*, and the *Soliloquia*, in which the author, in dialogic form, reflects on the fundamental questions of happiness and truth in a way that starts from pagan philosophy and leads to God. In his book, Pucci takes both these dialogues from Cassiciacum and the *De doctrina Christiana*—composed a

decade later and sketching the hermeneutics of a Christian (reading) culture—and focuses on the use of classical literature, especially of Virgil. He attempts to show “a pedagogy in place devoted to making Virgil possible for Christianity” (xiii).

Pucci (“*Confessiones*: The problem of reading Virgil,” 1–32) starts from the famous passage *Confessiones* 1.13: Augustine condemns the vanity of Virgil’s Dido tale which deeply impressed him as a schoolboy, but he does so using poetic style and quotations. This requires, as Pucci argues, a hermeneutic model for rereading ancient authors. In Cassiciacum, Augustine developed a philosophical and pedagogic program of reading and understanding classical authors in a specifically Christian way, based on the traditions of ancient philosophy and of ancient classrooms, both referring to poetry. Pucci finds this model revealed in *Contra Academicos* 2.4.10 by *recensere*, *tractare*, and *congruere*. The author supposes these verbs to be something like *termini technici* (“to review,” “to ponder,” “to suite to”) sketching the way “in which Virgil’s words were in some way fitted to the larger project of engaging the skeptical tradition” (25). Subsequently (“*Contra Academicos*: Recuperating Virgil,” 33–71), Pucci delves deeper into the text in order to make clear what he supposes to be Augustine’s method of reviving Virgil: Licentius, he argues, in *Contra Academicos* 1.5.14, quotes *Aeneid* 1.401 *perge modo et, qua te ducit via, dirige gressum*, which, however, fits with the philosophical point his opponent Trygetius had made rather than with his own. Within the rest of the work, Pucci argues, Augustine presents his disputants using poetry and especially Virgil, often in a superficial way, which does not yet meet the ideal of revival the author has

in mind. In the end, Augustine (*Contra Academicos* 3.4.9) alludes to *Eclogues* 3.104–107 in order to reveal through Damoetas’s and Menalcas’s competition, which cannot be judged by Palaemon, his own dissatisfaction with the state of the philosophical debates which the participants had reached up to this point.

The next chapter (“*De beata vita*: Remedial Recuperation,” 72–86) starts from a comparison between *Contra Academicos* and *De beata vita*: Although both dialogues, of course, deal with happiness, the first one ends with an *aporia*, the latter one, however, tends to show consensus and solution. Pucci supposes this to be a pedagogic development. Part of it, he argues, is the use of Terence whose *sententiae* harmoniously fit into the philosophical discourse. In the chapter “*De ordine*: Recuperating at night” (87–126), Pucci analyses the nocturnal scenery in the beginning of the dialogue: Augustine fears that Licentius’s enthusiasm for “poetics” (see Pucci’s semantic differentiation, 98–99) might separate him from philosophical thinking. The author supposes this to refer to a wrong use and understanding of poetry, which separates it from the seeking of truth like the wall that separates Thisbe from Pyramus, whose name the pupil is singing (*De ordine* 1.3.8). Licentius’s subsequent (1.3.9) use of a quotation from Terence, *Eunuchus* 1024, however, hermeneutically characterized by the verb *vertere* (“to turn”), introduces and shows his “philosophic progress” and “seems in league with his [sc. Licentius] new found recuperative abilities” (107). Delighted by this pedagogic success, Pucci argues, Augustine reacts with “turning” a Virgilian verse (1.4.10, *Aeneid* 10.875). The *Soliloquia* (“The philosophical Bases of Recuperation,” 127–139), according to

Pucci, contain “[t]he philosophic basis for recuperation [ . . . ] in Augustine’s notion of verbal mimesis” (128): as language in general, poetic words can convey falsehood and truth. In the last chapter (“*De doctrina christiana: Recuperation and Charity*,” 140–178), Pucci shows how the concept of recuperation, developed at Cassiciacum, fits with and is continued in Augustine’s teaching on redemption as a way from paganism to Christianity, and thus to truth. The book ends with a chronological list of poetic quotations in the Cassiciacum dialogues, an index and a bibliography.

Looking at *Augustine’s Vergilian Retreat* as a whole, one can first say that Pucci is innovative and helpful in drawing the reader’s attention to Augustine’s repeated meta-intertextual remarks on the reading of Virgil during the stay at Cassiciacum and in the dialogues taking place there. Partially, the author offers exciting reinterpretations of Augustine’s hermeneutic semantics (e.g. 59–68). On the other hand, however, he does not pay much attention to the philological details of individual quotations. Just to give an example: Dealing with Augustine’s quotation (*De beata vita* 4.25 *verissima est enim illa sententia: nam tu quod vitare possis, stultum admittere est.*) of Terence, *Eunuchus* 761 *tu quod cauere possis, stultum admittere est* (79–81), the author neither discusses the change of the wording nor the question whether, as Pucci supposes, a reader can be expected to re-contextualize a moral commonplace (“if you can avoid an evil, do so”) within the notoriously complicated plot of a comedy. This does, of course, not weaken the general line of argumentation (in fact, the quotation fits with Augustine’s philosophical purpose at this point), nevertheless, the inspired interpretation could here and

in many other cases have been supported by some reflections concerning the philological aspects of intertextuality. There is, of course, scholarship dealing with these questions, which might have been taken into account. The bibliography lists titles which are not actually referred to, e.g. G.A. Müller’s important book *Formen und Funktionen der Vergilzitate bei Augustin von Hippo* (Paderborn, 2003). Furthermore, the pedagogic recuperation of Virgil at Cassiciacum which Pucci tries to outline could also have been examined against the background of the earlier Christian appropriation of Virgil—strategies of recuperation of Virgil can already be found in Minucius Felix and Lactantius. But on the other hand, one must confess that one of the several assets of Pucci’s book is its clear focus. The most important innovation made in Pucci’s book is his pedagogic reading of the Cassiciacum dialogues and the use of Virgil and, more generally, the pagan poetry within them. Thus, Pucci gives an impressive example of how Christian thinking has been cultivated on a pagan cultural substrate.

### ***Designing Identity: The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity***

THELMA K. THOMAS, ED.

Princeton: Princeton University Press 2016.

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Reviewed by Mary Harlow  
(University of Leicester)

This exhibition catalog contains excellent colour illustrations, catalog information, and accompanying scholarly chapters. It will appeal to a wide audience of textile archaeologists, specialists in Late Antiquity, museum curators, collectors, and art historians as well as to those with a general interest in the past and in textile art.