

All the Names of the Lord: Lists, Mysticism, and Magic.

By VALENTINA IZMIRLIEVA. Pp. xii + 238. Illustrated.
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2008. ISBN 978 0 226 38870 0. \$45/£23.50.

THE practice of listing the names of God is widespread in antiquity and is not confined to the monotheistic religions. Classification is a way of imposing order, although such lists of divine attributes may have a wide range of uses. This book is an in-depth study of the way that lists of divine names are used in two Christian texts: the sixth-century *Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and a thirteenth-century Slavonic amulet, *The 72 Names of the Lord*. While the first of these has been studied extensively (although not from this aspect), the amulet has barely been studied at all, which is why this is such an intriguing exercise. The texts illustrate two alternative ways of listing the names of God: the *Divine Names* is an open-ended list; *The 72 Names of the Lord* is a closed list. While open-ended lists are associated with orthodox Christian theology, the closed list occurs where divine names are used magically, to ensure well-being and protection. Both are about imposing social control, but they result in two different visions of Christian order, and hence of Christian behaviour. The first is about overcoming our limitations in order to effect a radical transformation, while the second is aimed at safety and material well-being. These two models of Christian life, metaphysical desire and existential need, may seem incompatible, but are in fact complementary. Contrary to popular assumption, this implies 'that Christianity does not propose a single, unified vision of order'.

The first part of the book discusses the *Divine Names*, showing how this treatise 'endorses the open-ended list of divine names as the "proper" name of God'. One small quibble: on pp. 15 and 35 Professor Izmirlieva quotes from an anonymous pagan hymn, the *Hymn to the Unknown God* (which she calls *Hymn to God*). Migne attributed it to Gregory Nazianzen, but it is now known not to be by him, nor by Pseudo-Dionysius, nor Proclus, both of whom have also been suggested. Some of Migne's attributions need to be taken with a pinch of salt! I would also differ from her as to whether the Dionysian corpus is a work of systematic theology; he clearly intended that it should be taken as such, but there are indications that it was more polemic in nature. There is a valuable section on the translators of the Dionysian

corpus; many readers will not be familiar with the study of Dionysius in the Slavic churches. There is another interesting section on the history of listing the names of God in Christian tradition.

The most interesting section of the book is the second part, which deals with the significance of the 72 names of God and their use in magic. The use of divine names in written form, in magical objects intended to be worn for protection and healing, is found in earliest antiquity and has persisted into modern times. The power inherent in such names is transferred to the wearer of the amulet through contact with his/her body. Although 72 is not explicitly stated to be the total number of the names of God, 72 is itself a highly significant number. In the duodecimal system it is a round number, one that 'seems inscribed in the very texture of creation', the number of totality. It is a number associated with other lists, including disciples of Christ, languages of the world, the names of the Theotokos, etc.

The text chosen for study, *The 72 Names of the Lord*, is found in several sources, including the Berlin Codex, MS Slav *Jerusalem 22*, dated 1498, from Macedonia, and the thirteenth-century Provençal *Roman de Flamenca*. Krasnoseltsev notes that *Jerusalem 22* shows Kabbalistic traits. The practical Kabbalah was much concerned with the protective power of the names of God, and also with the number 72, which undoubtedly explains the Kabbalistic influence. The dating of *Jerusalem 22* is significant, following closely on the banishing of Jews from almost the whole of western Europe; many of these, as well as a number of Cathars from Provence, settled in the Balkans. The Jewish background of *Jerusalem 22* is further suggested by the inclusion of the *Nomina Angelorum*; such linking of angelic and divine names has a very long history in Judaism. Another Jewish feature is the presence in the codex of a number of magical figures, one page of which is illustrated. Christian interest in the Kabbalah is thought to have first developed at the Platonic Academy in Florence in the mid-fifteenth century under the influence of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. However, there may have been some Kabbalistic influence on Christianity as early as the twelfth century, when the *Sefer ha-Bahir* appeared in Provence. It is perhaps no coincidence that this was also the milieu of the Cathars.

This work has entailed an impressive amount of scholarship on primary sources in libraries around the world. The choice of illustrations is inspired; they include an icon of 'Dionysius the Areopagite' as well as a photograph of a silver amulet on

which is inscribed the 72-letter name, and some fascinating prints from early printed books which contain the text of the amulet. There are excellent footnotes and bibliography and a comprehensive index. This book will be greatly appreciated by students of medieval theology and magic.

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Gildas's De Excidio Britonum and the Early British Church. By KAREN GEORGE. Pp. x + 199. (Studies in Celtic History, 26.) Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009. ISBN 978 184 38453 59. £50/\$95.

THIS is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation which Karen George completed under the supervision of Professor I. N. Wood of the School of History at the University of Leeds in 2005. The British author Gildas composed the *De Excidio Britonum* (henceforth *DEB*) c.540, and this is the first monograph devoted to this perplexing text since that by T. D. O'Sullivan in 1978, and the first major publication on it since the important collection of essays edited by M. Lapidge and D. N. Dumville in 1984. George does not set out to prove one major thesis, nor does she restrict herself to a single approach or methodology. Instead, she attempts 'to explore how far an interdisciplinary approach to the text, utilising the methodologies of textual criticism, theology and history, may help to establish a context for the work' (p. 1). This means that she touches on most major issues, although her prime concerns lie in the literary structures and purpose of the text. There are seven chapters in all, some rather short, followed by a reproduction of the standard edition of the *DEB* by Professor M. Winterbottom.

The first chapter, 'The Preface', analyses the contents of the preface to the *DEB*, the first part of Book 1, with particular emphasis upon the questions this raises as to why Gildas wrote what he did. The second chapter, 'Gildas and the Lamentations of Jeremiah', sets out to prove the presence of patterns of symmetrical repetition in the *DEB*, and to explain the thematic function of the same, while the third chapter, 'The Construction of the Patterns in the *DEB*', sets out to demonstrate different patterns of parallelism in the *DEB* also. In these chapters,