1 Modes of Knowing and Ordering Knowledge in Early Christianity

LEWIS AYRES, MICHAEL W. CHAMPION, AND MATTHEW R. CRAWFORD

For nothing is / sweeter than to know everything.

οὐδέν ‹ἐστι› γὰρ / γλυκύτερον ἢ πάντ᾽ εἰδέναι.

Menander, *Epit.* fr. 2

But since 'it is sweet to know everything', for this reason we, quite sensibly, also devote ourselves to studying the opinions of the Greeks which they have collected on each of the subjects.

Ἐπειδὴ δέ ἐστι γλυκὺ τὸ πάντα εἰδέναι, ταύτῃ τοι, καὶ μάλα ἐμφρόνως, καὶ τὰς τῶν Ἑλλήνων πολυπραγμονοῦμεν δόξας, ἃς δὴ καὶ ἐφ᾽ ἑκάστῳ συνειλόχασι τῶν πραγμάτων.

Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Julian* 7.17

Between the second and the seventh century CE, Christianity expanded throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Throughout this expansion, Christian thinkers were imbued with the intellectual currents of the Greco-Roman world even as they at times critiqued them. Believing that Christian faith pressed them to reinterpret history and divide true from false wisdom in other philosophical and religious traditions, Christians encompassed, reorganised, and reoriented existing bodies of knowledge and conceptions of the process of knowing. Appropriating earlier traditions, they integrated bodily practices, ethics, and political identities with conceptions of reasoning informed by Christian theological claims. Christian perspectives thus provided a basis for rethinking earlier notions while classical and Jewish ideas and practices nurtured and shaped Christian intellectual traditions at the very deepest levels. In this process, Christians developed cultures of interpretation and argument, defining what it meant for them to be a textually oriented religious community

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within the Roman empire, and thereby laid an intellectual foundation that would be built upon and modified in a variety of different later contexts, stretching from deep within the continents of Africa and Asia to the furthest limits of Europe.[1]

Questions of epistemology – what can be known? how can things be known? who has access to truth? is access to truth possible for sinful humans? – were highly contested in this formative period. Texts such as Matthew's 'no one has known the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son has revealed him' (Matt 11:27) placed Christ the revealer of truth at the centre of Christian intellectual endeavour and forced Christian thinkers into multifaceted, creative, generative, sometimes tense, engagements with established epistemic schemes and standards of classical philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, and medicine. Contests over theories of knowledge were, in turn, shaped by the institutional and economic realities of empire, educational establishments, and emerging Christian ecclesial communities, which together gave expression to Christian identity and transmitted it from one generation to the next. In the context of these institutional structures, Christian practices of pilgrimage, liturgy, asceticism, art and architecture, and use of sacred objects such as relics and holy books enacted and formed epistemic commitments by ordering the entire person towards the goal of becoming godlike (*theosis*).

Central to this intellectual and religious project was the notion of 'order', itself adapted from Greco-Roman philosophical and rhetorical sources. By following the divine Logos made known in Jesus Christ, Christians believed themselves to be restored to the original lost 'order', which enabled them to recognise and evaluate all other claims to knowledge. This bold stance is already staked out in the second-century *Oration to the Greeks* composed by Tatian the Assyrian[2] and would eventually result in ambitious encyclopaedic efforts such as Isidore of Seville's massive *Etymologiae*, one of the most influential works of the Middle Ages which attempted to 'order' all human knowledge. Similarly, the adaptation by early Christians of Platonic traditions of the 'ascent' of the intellect towards the intelligible world shaped ways of conceiving the activity of knowing and contemplation that would persist long into the modern period. The development of Christian thought and practice moulded patterns of ordering knowledge and modes of knowing which produced a distinct way of being in the world and flowed over into the formation of Christian communities.

[1] For Brian Stock's notion of a 'textual community', picked up by other contributors to this volume, see Stock 1983. See also caveats and discussion in Heath 2018.

[2] See Crawford 2015c.

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Many lines of investigation pursued in this volume were first traversed in recent classical scholarship, which has explored how imperial power structures and communal practices affected the ordering of knowledge in the ancient world, but without considering Christian material in any great detail. Such scholarship has, for example, considered how the Roman empire's universalising grasp is interrelated with the development of encyclopaedic tendencies in literature. Michel Foucault's insight that each society nurtures its own 'mode' or 'modes of knowing' – those discourses taken to describe that which is true, mechanisms for distinguishing truth from falsehood, institutional structures that identify particular persons as able to speak truth – was a fundamental influence for this tradition of scholarship.[3] More recently, scholarship on late antiquity has demonstrated the fruitfulness of such questions for this later period while leaving scope for further work on the entanglement of Christian theology in epistemological schemes. For example, Michael Chin and Moulie Vidas have drawn together a collection of studies, amply demonstrating that the manner in which late antique people went about knowing is bound up with questions of how they negotiated and constructed structures of power, social relationships, and intersecting imaginative universes.[4]

Although Foucault is thus a point of departure here, we also hope to move debate in new directions in our attitude towards theological discourse and in our methodological variety. In common with Foucault and other cultural historians, we maintain that early Christian ideas were deeply embedded in the cultural, political, and social worlds of the Roman empire in which they evolved. A number of contributions to the volume engage Pierre Hadot's notion of philosophy as a 'way of life', which foregrounds the ethical consequences of epistemological commitments and the ways in which thought, instantiated in forms of practice and power relations, helps to shape action.[5] But we also claim that such ideas cannot be reduced to matrices of cultural and social power, since traditions of rationality have an internal dynamic force that impels them forward with wider historical consequences beyond the strictly epistemological. We are therefore convinced that understanding early Christian thought (in all its diversity and fuzzy boundaries) requires careful attention to its internal logics and theological assumptions, which in turn inflect the wider cultural and intellectual world of the empire and changing political realities of the period. Despite, and partly because of, the endless ways in which

[3] Foucault 1966/1973, 1969/1972; König and Whitmarsh 2007b.

[4] Chin and Vidas 2015a. [5] Hadot 1995b, 1995a/2002.

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Christians participate in the wider epistemological landscape, Christianity remains identifiable as a distinct set of more and less coherent traditions: sometimes by the expression of unique Christian ideas; sometimes by the rejection of other views or practices as inconsistent with Christian faith; at other times by distinct ways of assembling or orienting those discourses, institutions, and practices that are shared with non-Christians of the period. Thus, we seek to understand how Christians attempted to order knowledge and knowing in the multiple contexts of Roman imperial culture (and ideology), Christian and non-Christian institutions and social practices and the particular *foci* of Christian beliefs about the world, its history and purpose.

This volume is intended to provide points of departure across a wide field for those who want to take forward this opportunity. The collection of case studies could never be exhaustive, and we are aware of several gaps and areas – thematic and linguistic – that could easily have been given greater prominence.[6] We hope, though, that others may find approaches and guiding questions in the individual essays productive and may be motivated to contribute to an ongoing discussion from the perspective of other scholarly specialisms.

Our original project took as its title and focus the twin themes 'modes of knowing' and 'ordering knowledge'. We understand these heuristic categories to mark out, first, the means by which knowledge is accessed or attained and, second, how one handles, processes, or arranges the knowledge thus gained. Of course, these two often overlap, since the act of knowing is contingent upon both the knowing subject and the known object. Consequently, the way in which knowledge is ordered inevitably shapes how subsequent knowers engage with it, since it delimits the modes of knowing able to be employed, opening up certain possibilities and discouraging others or even making them impossible. Nevertheless, we have found that distinguishing these two themes is useful insofar as they bring into sharper focus different aspects of the epistemological process and allow closer scrutiny of each in turn. Furthermore, our aim was to examine these twin themes across the three domains of (a) discourses, (b) the institutions that perpetuated discourses over time, and (c) the material forms that affect discourses and institutional practices. These domains likewise overlap and readers will find that frequently two or even all three are in play in the treatment of a given topic.

[6] Some of these gaps were the consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, and we thank all who worked on the project in these difficult circumstances.

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Although this volume is not structured around these two themes or the three domains of investigation, the collection of case studies our authors have contributed addresses all these issues at one point or another. What follows here is an attempt to draw out common threads across the collection. By so doing, our intention is to provide an alternate 'ordering' scheme for this volume, to complement the roughly chronological sequence of the chapters. We provide two maps of the collection, first tracing the intersecting contours of modes of knowing and the ordering of knowledge, and then charting the connections between discourses, institutions, and materiality by drawing on theoretical approaches to structure and agency to connect these phenomena.

Modes of Knowing

The question of whether the five bodily senses provide sound and trustworthy knowledge or something less certain was a long-running topic of philosophical debate. These classical debates continued throughout late antiquity and were reshaped in light of Christian concerns. The capacities of the human body understood as 'in Christ' inspired the development of the notion of analogous 'spiritual senses' modelled on the five corporeal modes of sensation. Scholars have typically gone to Origen as the source of this idea, and, although his robust elaboration of it is justly famous, Jane Heath shows that Origen was building upon an even older tradition evident in Clement of Alexandria and reaching back all the way to the apostle Paul, which emphasised the transformation of the human person effected by the Christ-event. For these authors, sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch became evocative metaphors for describing the new epistemological capacities created by undergoing the waters of baptism, being united with Christ, and joining the Christian community established by him.

Divination – a well-established and theorised mode of knowing in antiquity – depended in large part on a distinction between attaining knowledge through discursive reason and gaining insight through intuition and the senses. It is thus an important case study for thinking through bodily cognition and the relation of the embodied knower to the wider order of the material cosmos. As Peter Struck notes, Iamblichus' defence of theurgical practice against the criticisms of Porphyry was influential for later Neoplatonic philosophers and helped to establish liturgical practice as a way of knowing for Neoplatonists, as it would also be for Christians. Yet some forms of divination remained problematic for Platonists. Struck highlights

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compelling parallels between Iamblichus' notion of 'divine divination' and the explication of biblical prophecy among Christian authors like Origen, who also were highly critical of the way in which traditional divinatory practices were implicated in matter, making them epistemologically insecure. It is possible that Iamblichus was responding to such criticisms by reshaping the classical notion of divination to avoid their bite. Iamblichus comes to regard divination as capable of revealing not mundane details, such as whom to marry or whether to engage in a business transaction, but the deepest truths of reality, in a manner akin to the Christian belief that the meaning of history is unveiled in the scriptures and the person of Jesus foretold by the prophets.

This notion of 'seeing through' textually configured material things to disclose reality fundamentally shapes early Christian modes of knowing. As in the case of the wider Platonic tradition, Christians closely associated sight and knowledge in their thinking about the transformed and embodied spiritual senses. For example, Robin Jensen explores how Christian theologians regarded vision not merely as a metaphor for a non-bodily mode of knowing but also as itself a means of gaining access to invisible and transcendent realities. If meditation on Christ's incarnation led to the belief that material reality has an intrinsic potential to become the bearer of divine presence and action, then this line of reflection could be extended to other material objects, which, Jensen argues, accords with the preference for scenes of biblical narrative in surviving Christian art from the period. It was not merely that images could teach for some audiences more effectively than extended discourse – although leaders like Augustine and Paulinus recognised that they could be just as pedagogically effective as words and texts, if not even more so. At a deeper level, images could disclose truth because material creation, understood in the light of Christian narratives, could be taken to provide access to divine reality. Such a view extended from nature to claims about the revelatory potential of cultural production. Matthew Crawford takes up such themes by analysing a specific image from late antique Christian art which had a long medieval afterlife. The so-called *tholos* image that accompanies many copies of the Eusebian Canon Tables has traditionally been understood as a depiction of Constantine's *aedicula* over Christ's tomb at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Crawford argues, on the contrary, that the image is designedly abstract and undefined in order to invite an imaginative response from the viewer. Eusebius' own corpus provides evidence of Christians beginning to use sacred architecture as a sort of cognitive machine or mode of knowing, which suggests that architectural images like the *tholos* page, when activated by a biblically

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inspired *ekphrasis*, could similarly function in a symbolic and constructive fashion.

Such epistemological practices are congruent with the wider phenomenon of Christian worship becoming a key site for developing and inculcating early Christian modes of knowing. Johan Leemans examines surviving festal sermons to illustrate how preachers trained in Greek rhetoric drew upon the sacred scriptures as an authoritative archive to create an immersive world that drew the listener in and united past, present, and future in one overarching divine plan to redeem humanity. Moreover, even though we typically hear only the voice of the preacher in our surviving sources, there is compelling evidence that the sermon was, to some extent, a dialogical mode of knowing in which the preacher had to respond in the moment to his congregation's reaction. Brian Dunkle examines the hymns composed by Ambrose which construct a compelling world for the congregant through the use of evocative imagery. Ambrose's sermons presented biblical material in an 'abstract, narrative, and conceptual' manner, while his hymns repackaged the same content in terms of 'personal, concrete and actualising *exempla*', illustrating how multiple modes of knowing could be applied to the same stock of information to produce different effects. Dunkle follows John Henry Newman's development of Ambrose's epistemology to argue that the hymns were designed to effect the 'real assent' that could not be produced solely through the dialectic of a sermon. Sarah Gador-Whyte picks up similar themes in her study of hymns and homilies in sixth-century Byzantium. She broadens the scope to explore the liturgy as a whole, arguing that its various components provided participants with an all-embracing and truth-disclosing experience. This experience did not merely involve the discursive reason of the individual but aimed to produce an embodied, emotional reaction involving the whole person and the worshipping community. Gador-Whyte's analysis of the function of the hymns of Romanos and the homilies of Leontius suggests that lay communities in sixth-century Constantinople came to know what it meant in that time and place to be a Christian and were consciously and unconsciously formed, as individuals and coherent communities, in accordance with that ideal.

Ordering Knowledge

Because effective pedagogy depends upon some kind of intelligible curriculum, the classroom is a significant social location for ordering knowledge. Various ordering schemes were employed in ancient educational contexts,

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and several of our contributors highlight ways in which these were adopted, adapted, and transformed by Christians for their own purposes. One of the most common Platonic schemes was the threefold division of philosophy into ethics, physics, and epoptics (theology or contemplation of divine mysteries).[7] We see this scheme among Christian authors as early as Clement of Alexandria who, as Matyáš Havrda argues, used it to structure his own corpus. Given that Clement probably employed this division of topics in an ecclesially affiliated educational institution in Alexandria, Clement exemplifies the way existing epistemological schemes could be used for distinctly Christian ends.[8] The most striking difference between Clement and his non-Christian philosophical peers is his claim that these branches of learning mapped onto Christian sacred texts which were henceforth to serve as the foundation of the curriculum. (On this point Philo of Alexandria serves as a partial precedent in his prioritisation of the Hebrew Bible.)

The tripartite Platonic division of philosophy would be picked up in the next generation by Origen, and we see it still exerting influence three centuries later in more elaborate schemes in Boethius and Cassiodorus, as explored by John Magee. Magee traces how Boethius' understanding of this ordering scheme developed over the course of his career, as well as how the differing institutional settings of Boethius and Cassiodorus resulted in altered curricula to meet the needs of their respective communities. Such transformations would eventually crystallise in the quadrivium and trivium comprising the seven liberal arts that became a staple of the epistemological landscape of the Middle Ages. Michael Champion probes similar questions in the Eastern traditions of philosophy and asceticism, exploring how epistemological assumptions shared by Neoplatonists and the sixth-century monk Dorotheus of Gaza are transformed in Dorotheus' case by working through consequences of taking humility as an epistemic virtue within ascetic education. Platonic ordering of philosophical knowledge would be taken up into the Byzantine tradition by commentators on both Aristotle and John of Damascus. Thus, through a variety of institutional settings over the entire span of time covered by our volume, we can observe both continuity and change in the epistemological regimes represented in our case studies, as educators reshaped received traditions to meet the needs of the moment and differing pedagogical contexts.

A key problem across this collection is how to conceptualise Christian epistemological schemes in relation to other modes of ordering knowledge.

[7] Dillon 1996; Boys-Stones 2018. [8] van den Hoek 1997.

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Different authors adopt diverse approaches, characterising Christian epistemology as the adoption of philosophical or Jewish categories or their appropriation and transformation for Christian purposes. While much is taken over especially from Platonism, sometimes no doubt largely unconsciously, new institutional contexts (for example asceticism, catechetical schools), a concern to induct a large group of people from differing social classes into Christian truth claims, and the need to interpret different and newly authoritative texts often put pressure on Christian thinkers from different traditions to adapt earlier schemes and reflect on their utility. For example, Scott Johnson examines one of our earliest surviving Syriac texts, Bardaisan's *Book of the Laws of the Countries*, and highlights its innovative juxtaposition of two established genres, the Platonic dialogue and the ethnographic catalogue. The latter was, of course, a classic form used by authors since Herodotus to order the world and render its diversity intelligible. Yet Bardaisan uniquely deployed this genre within an argument against determinism and in favour of the universalising belief that all humanity can be transformed by the Christian message, no matter where they were located or what ancestral customs they practised. The fact that Bardaisan was using these well-known genres of Greek literature while writing in the dialect of Aramaic spoken in Edessa is a further innovative aspect of his literary and, most likely, educational undertaking which has otherwise almost entirely perished. Much conceptual innovation in our period was achieved through translation of intellectual traditions into new linguistic categories, as Johnson's chapter makes plain.[9]

The reconfiguring of classical traditions is also apparent in David Runia's chapter on the *Placita* composed by the shadowy figure of Aëtius who, within the tripartite division of philosophy, focused in detail on physics, compiling the views of dozens of ancient philosophers on a wide range of questions related to the natural world. Aëtius' *vademecum* of philosophical opinions perhaps originally stemmed from an educational context, though we have no way of knowing its *Sitz im Leben* with certainty. Whatever the case, its reception history runs almost entirely through the hands of Christian authors who transformed its presentation of 'structured disorder' into a deconstructive argument against non-Christian philosophy itself. As this demonstrates, attempts at ordering knowledge in one context could be put to very different uses in the hands of later pedagogues with unforeseen intellectual commitments.

[9] A parallel case is the translation of Aristotelian thought through the commentary tradition from Greek into Syriac and Arabic. See D'Ancona Costa 2002; Adamson, Baltussen, and Stone 2004; Sorabji 2004; Becker 2006; King 2010.

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The development of new information technologies also enabled the formation of distinctive schemes for ordering knowledge. Drawing upon his extensive research on information technology in classical antiquity, Andrew Riggsby considers the innovative way tabular organisation was repurposed as a knowledge-ordering device by the Christian scholars Origen of Alexandria and Eusebius of Caesarea. While Origen's massive *Hexapla* is well known, Riggsby offers a new theory of its origins by positing that Origen was adapting and expanding an existing genre of bilingual texts used for language instruction which presented corresponding words in parallel columns, for example Latin to Greek, Greek to Coptic, and so on. Because these bilingual texts were used at a fairly rudimentary level of educational instruction, they do not appear in the elite discourses captured by surviving literary sources. Origen, however, recognised that presenting information in parallel columns could be further exploited, and he produced a text, or more accurately a collection of texts, that ordered multilingual knowledge on an unprecedented scale. Eusebius, Origen's enthusiastic follower, would later adapt this information technology yet again by combining it with numerical representation to elucidate the complex relationships of similarity and difference that exist within the church's four canonical gospels.[10]

Origen's *Hexapla* and Eusebius's Canon Tables are both examples of attempts to order knowledge that is distinctly Christian in content, focused on Christian sacred texts.[11] Other attempts at ordering knowledge by Christians were also driven by specifically Christian concerns, including the needs of specific audiences. Edwina Murphy's chapter provides one such case study, examining how Cyprian of Carthage distilled the knowledge of the Christian scriptures into a memorable format that could be readily employed for the purposes of catechetical instruction. The *testimonia* collections he produced utilised classical rhetorical insights about human memory, such as the use of keywords as ordering devices, but were aimed at producing a community transformed by its adherence to the distinct ethical precepts expressed in this body of texts.

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz shines a spotlight on another Christian genre with no clear parallel in the classical world, the conciliar creed. Radde-Gallwitz argues, first, that modern scholarly attempts at organising

[10] Crawford 2019.

[11] Of course, Origen's *Hexapla* focused on the Hebrew scriptures and thus overlapped in terms of content with Jewish sacred texts. However, the existence of multiple Greek translations and their correspondence to the Hebrew version(s) seems to have been a problem felt acutely by Christians, though Rabbinic literature also demonstrates some concern with it.

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the surviving body of creedal literature from the ancient world have, in fact, hindered our understanding of them, since creeds composed for different purposes are often lumped together without appropriate differentiation. Examining the quasi-legal role played by creeds with appended anathemas, Radde-Gallwitz proposes that, in late antiquity, the anathemas were often regarded as the most important component of a creedal document and that they are a location where one can witness innovation, as bishops added new anathemas to existing creeds to address fresh doctrinal problems. Creedal formulae and their attached anathemas were thus a key mechanism by which Christians in our period ordered the body of knowledge represented by their received faith and rendered that knowledge serviceable to meet contemporary challenges.

The attempt to order Christian doctrinal knowledge remains a key concern of Christian thinkers. Dirk Krausmüller highlights four texts produced in Palestine and Egypt between the late sixth and early seventh centuries, a period when the christological debates between Miaphysites and Chalcedonians had stopped producing fresh arguments. This was instead a period of consolidation, when existing stockpiles of positions and arguments were digested and arranged in forms and structures amenable to shoring up one's base and clarifying the boundaries of one's community. In a manner similar to Aëtius' collection of philosophical opinions about the cosmos, these authors produced handbooks for non-specialists designed to enable them to understand and defend the christological position of their own community while also deconstructing the position of their opponents. The attempt to provide a clear path through competing truth claims sets these handbooks apart from Aëtius' non-partisan work, but even these texts sometimes reveal a desire to be encyclopaedic and exhaustive rather than polemical, and to treat their opponents in as fair a manner as possible.

Structures of Knowing

This volume thus approaches modes of knowing and ordering of knowledge in early Christianity through soundings from multiple sites of cultural production. Discursive structures, including translation between languages and rules for reasoning, offer modes of knowing that also limit how knowledge can be ordered. Diverse genres – including creeds, anathemas, dialogues, lives, historiography, hymnody, homiletics, narratives, mirrors to princes and advice literature, and technical writing – shape knowledge

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production and provide mechanisms for ordering knowledge. Information technologies offer ways of knowing that order knowledge in productive ways. Institutions of education, law, liturgy, and imperial administration form processes of thought and mental schemas. Theorisation of the senses themselves and evaluation of the role of sense data in the acquisition of knowledge prioritise particular ways of knowing and establish epistemic hierarchies.

This volume elucidates this dialectic between modes of knowing and ordering knowledge by thinking through the epistemic role of discourses, institutions, and materiality. Built into this account is the claim that how one goes about knowing is formed by and simultaneously configures social action. In this connection, the American historian and social scientist William Sewell's conceptualisation of structure offers one productive analytical framework.[12] For Sewell, in dialogue with Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu, structures may be defined as 'schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that action'.[13] Schemas are rules, norms, conventions, or expectations. Resources are unevenly distributed objects or capacities that can be used to establish, sustain, and increase power.[14] Structure is thus understood (with Giddens) as both material and discursive.[15] The discursive element is most clearly taken up in the notion of schemas, which are at least partially transposable between cultural domains but are limited by diverse material factors.[16] Resources are similarly dual – as objects and physical capacities that set material limits on interactions and ideas and as entities which themselves carry and shape meaning. Given that rules, norms, and the evaluation and distribution of resources are each difficult to change, this account of structure is consistent with the observation that cultures tend to reproduce established patterns of social interaction, embodied practices, institutional forms, and thought. It can help to explain the striking continuities between Jewish and classical epistemologies and associated ethical practices into early Christianity. But Sewell's notion of structure also makes room for cultural and intellectual changes such as the developments in early Christian epistemologies that are traced in this book. People have agency to the extent that they can manipulate schemas and access and deploy resources in new ways or in novel contexts. Such cultural reproduction and transformation through utilising schemas and resources is risky and contingent, always dependent

[12] Sewell 1992, 2005. [13] Sewell 1992: 19. See also Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984.
[14] Sewell 1992: 19–20. [15] Sewell 1992: 4.
[16] In Marshall Sahlins' terms, they are 'burdened by the world' (1985: 138). See Sewell 1992: 18.

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on multiple factors and never merely on single actors. In contrast to more homogenous accounts of structure, Sewell's account also foregrounds its multiplicity in various areas of life. Such multiplicity enables actors to apply incompatible structures in different domains. This is one mechanism by which cultural change can take place: structures from one local culture can shift the established conventions or distribution of resources in another. Intersections between different local cultures are particularly crucial for understanding the establishment of Christian epistemology and associated communal norms, given that Christians in late antiquity – as today – inhabited, influenced, and were formed by multiple institutions and domains of social life.

This collection does not adopt a single analytical framework for exploring modes of knowing and the ordering of knowledge in early Christianity. But it does insist that there is a complex interaction between tradition and innovation in early Christian epistemology. Elucidating this complex interaction requires the consideration of discursive, institutional, and material factors, since structures generate and are moulded by these phenomena. The chapters in this volume can test theorisations like Sewell's, partly by mapping the mechanics of continuity and change in epistemological commitments and their associated social practices through exploring discursive, institutional, and material constraints and affordances. The book thus explores the manifold and contingent ways in which early Christian knowers were implicated in discourses, institutions, and materiality – both as these were put into practice and as they shaped practice and thought. We also explore (unlike earlier social science theories of structure) how early Christians changed structures of knowledge – in their discursive, institutional, and material forms. Key questions, then, across the volume, include: what were the sites of cultural and intellectual reproduction and change; what attempts were made to refashion discourses, institutions, and the material world to embody and open up new schemas of knowledge and ways of knowing; and the extent to which the result was a transformation of structures of knowledge instead of a reproduction of Greco-Roman or Jewish schemas and resources.

Discourses

With the claim that God is the Word, Christians had distinctive reasons to care about discourse. As they developed ways of knowing, early Christian thinkers paid careful attention to grammatical categories. Carol Harrison

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focuses on Augustine's intricate and evolving account of language across his career. She probes the function in Augustine's thought of the grammatical distinction between the *vox confusa* and the *vox articulata*, finding theological significance in non-verbal voices. Her chapter explores just one example of early Christian thought on the relationship between thought and discourse, word and sound, and words and the Word. Augustine's startling claim that language – discourse itself – is mere sound unless it points towards and is given meaning by the Word illumines a fundamental aspect of early Christian epistemology. In engaging with the intellectual traditions of grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, medicine, and law, Christians often sought to incorporate established discourses into a larger set of claims about discourse itself, what Averil Cameron has called a 'totalising discourse', setting Christian truth claims at the heart of any work of meaning-making.[17]

Practising and engaging with the discourses of grammar, rhetoric, law, philosophy, and medicine partly legitimised early Christian ways of knowing and ordering knowledge by grounding them in established discourses. Christian use and adaptation of these elite discourses was shaped by institutional and material factors discussed below, while also being influenced by questions of literary form and tradition. Several contributors focus on one or more of these discourses and their generic contours. In different contexts, Cilliers Breytenbach and Johan Leemans investigate how homilies and biblical commentaries may be formed by the discursive power of commentary evident in late antiquity across the domains of grammar, rhetoric, law, medicine, and philosophy. In the area of genre, Dawn LaValle Norman argues that competing generic expectations enabled knowledge to be configured – and gendered – in different ways in lives and philosophical dialogues, while Bronwen Neil analyses how genres of epistolography, homiletics, commentaries, rules, and dialogues generate different forms of knowledge across Gregory the Great's oeuvre. Mark Edwards argues that Christian Latin poetry, for all its continuation of earlier discursive traditions, enabled forms of expression which increased the cultural and political power of the church. Michael Hanaghan teases apart Christian and classical literary and philosophical presentations of divination to explore Augustine's epistemological criticisms of the practice. Gerald Boersma explores the construction of epistemological authority in Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues through interaction with philosophical traditions. Jonathan Zecher studies grammatical, philosophical, and medical lists

[17] Cameron 1994.

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to explore how they established discursive possibilities, drawing on earlier schemas from different domains of knowledge and shifting them by rearranging key terms, adding new ones and introducing revised conceptual schemes derived from the Christian scriptures. Paul Blowers traces how Christians developed a totalising cosmology by drawing on Platonic discursive constructions of *theoria* and the performance of the *theoros*, attending carefully to the different political ramifications of competing accounts. The exploration of the natural world alongside scrutiny of the biblical text is also the topic of the chapter by Helen Foxhall Forbes, which focuses on commentaries and educational texts produced in the British Isles and neighbouring regions. Jan Stenger interrogates the discourse of education; schemas of otherness, ethnicity, and kinship; and the philosophical ideal of *morphosis* in his chapter on Gregory of Nyssa's pedagogy. As in other areas of late antique education, mimesis plays a key role. It reproduces established discourses, while Moses as the object of imitation offers a radical configuration of possibilities of knowledge and ways of knowing. Across contributions like these, ways in which elite discourses generate and are shaped by multiple intersecting genres come to the fore, as do mechanisms for the appropriation, reproduction, and transformation of earlier discourses in the development of early Christian epistemologies.

In thinking about the Christian reproduction and reconfiguration of earlier discourses, the chapters in this volume explore how the assumptions, axioms, and conventions of earlier knowledge systems affected early Christian thought. This phenomenon also highlights ways in which the epistemological presuppositions and conventional knowledge hierarchies of contemporary scholars affect their treatment of early Christian ways of organising knowledge and knowing. Our own scholarly discourses and discursive categories affect *our* knowledge about early Christian knowing, as we already observed above with respect to the chapter by Radde-Gallwitz. Jeffrey Wickes' chapter on Ephrem the Syrian also explores these issues, arguing that modern claims about authorship and authenticity and the unique epistemological insight of the so-called literary genius have negatively affected understanding of the Ephraemic corpus.[18] He uses this case study to suggest that epistemological assumptions in the history of scholarship create models for organising the past which often conceal as much as they illumine. The mechanisms by which early Christians ordered their own knowledge and interacted with other ways of knowing may themselves be held up as a mirror to modern scholarship, helping contemporary

[18] On questions of classifications of early Christian literature and their effects, see Martens 2022.

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historians, literary scholars, and theologians reflect on their own methodologies and epistemological commitments. Teresa Morgan's Epilogue returns to some of these questions.

A recurring claim across this volume is that discourse affects social formations and individual human actions. In investigating the 'intellectual world' of early Christianity, the contributors aim to get at Yeats's 'lasting song' of those who 'think in the marrow bone'. As Andrew McGowan argues in his chapter on sacrificial knowing, citing the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, discourses are not immaterial (Geertz's 'unobservable mental stuff'). Sacrifice is given all manner of discursive meanings that are in part limited by material affordances and in part generated by them. This reminds us that the discursive is bound up with the institutional and the material, that knowing affects how people act, and that Christian epistemological claims shape religious practice, ethical behaviour, and communal norms. One claim of this volume is that understanding these wider domains of late antique life requires richly characterising the diverse ways in which Christians interacted with earlier discourses from other religious and intellectual traditions in forming their own epistemologies.

Institutions

Discourses are embodied in institutions. Institutions organise knowledge, affecting how it is generated, rendered powerful, and transmitted across time. They establish hierarchies by differentiating between expert and non-expert knowledge and by authorising roles that give people capacity to exercise knowledge in particular ways while constraining other ways of knowing.[19] Key sites of the institutional production of knowledge explored in this volume are education (classical and Christian), liturgy, asceticism, law, the church and its structures of governance, and imperial government and bureaucracy.[20] Three brief examples from education, law, and imperial administration may elucidate aspects of the institutional formation of early Christian epistemologies.

Taking education first, Peter Martens focuses on Origen, exploring how pedagogical institutions influenced how the Bible was interpreted and used.

[19] See the essays in Ayres and Ward 2020.

[20] Asceticism: Champion, Guiliano, Mellon Saint-Laurent, Zecher. Education: Champion, Havrda, Magee, Martens, Murphy, Stenger. Church: Havrda, Krausmüller, McGowan, Murphy, Neil, Radde-Gallwitz. Empire and administration: Blowers, Ahbel-Rappe. Liturgy: Gador-Whyte, Leemans, Breytenbach, Dunkle, McGowan, Murphy. Law: Sarris.

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As Martens argues, the diversity of institutional contexts for Christian knowledge production is crucial. Christians moved between different institutional domains. Their epistemologies were shaped by classical schools (especially of grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy) and by the institutional requirements of the Christian community, as it sought to educate both lay Christians with differing educational backgrounds and also ascetics and those who would take on leadership roles in the church. Martens argues that in Origen's case, we see much reproduction of powerful institutional forms and associated knowledge structures. But agency is exercised within established institutional parameters and results in a new curriculum, that is, in power given to a new set of cultural and intellectual resources and to the experts who preside over them. Knowledge is ordered through prioritising one institution over another, as the demands of catechetical schools trump those of classical rhetorical education.

In the case of law, Peter Sarris explores how legal systems – and the social and political institutions which they license – organised knowledge near the end of late antiquity under the emperor Justinian. Law is bound up in and structures discourses of morality and epistemology and, as such, is crucial for the formation of knowers' minds and habits as well as communal norms. As in the case of epistemology affected by imperial institutions, ascent through the legal *cursus* can be likened to the progress of the soul and the grasping of higher order truths; institutionalised legal knowledge becomes embodied in the practitioners it forms. The institution of the law also provides multiple mechanisms for transmitting knowledge which shapes individual minds and communities, for example through legal judgments, through public proclamations in civic or religious contexts, or through encyclopaedic collections and commentaries. This determined what people knew about imperial and ecclesiastical law, and about a range of related areas, across a broad swathe of society. Sarris shows that legal institutions transmitted knowledge to the peasantry in ways that gave lower social groups some measure of agency, although where peasants sought to take advantage of legal frameworks, legislators could be quick to close down legal avenues for redistributing power. The law thus established epistemic power differentials which, in turn, solidified powerful discursive oppositions, leading to the persecution and disenfranchisement of outsider groups, such as schismatics, Jews, pagans, and ethnic minorities. The social function of the law had always been tied to moral demands; under Christian emperors, there is an increasing connection between legal institutions and the maintenance of religious order.

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Our final example of interrelationships between epistemology and institutions comes from Sara Ahbel-Rappe's chapter on the relationship between imperial bureaucracy and philosophical epistemology. Ahbel-Rappe draws attention to similar assumptions that underpin the cascading hierarchies of imperial bureaucracy and late antique Platonism. Eric Osborn long ago identified the 'bureaucratic fallacy' of some gnosticisms (also found in Plotinus and later Platonism), where multiplying levels between humans and the One provide a means of ascent by analogy with government departments, where, it is spuriously claimed, adding levels of bureaucracy makes it possible for citizens to communicate with the exalted Minister.[21] The epistemic claim is that bureaucrats can represent, enforce, and make the emperor's *imperium* accessible at different levels of specificity and abstraction; just so, lower orders of the metaphysical hierarchy, which operate as one travels down the ladder with increasingly limited but more concrete power, can relate philosophers to the One. The later Platonic ontological hierarchy seems persuasive, on this view, because the bureaucracy to which it is so similar is taken to be unproblematic. Ahbel-Rappe does not make an argument about influence but draws out close coincidences between literature describing institutions of imperial bureaucracy and the fine metaphysical distinctions of the fifth-century Neoplatonist Proclus. She argues that there are important epistemological implications generated by Proclus' 'proliferative' account of metaphysical hierarchy which are shared in some Christian literature, especially Pseudo-Dionysius. Ahbel-Rappe postulates a 'bureaucratic way of knowing' that is totalising both in its domain of applicability and in its authorisation of vertical hierarchies of power and knowledge, although there are also points of resistance. Within this epistemology, reason plays a central role, but there is also a need for the knower to be united to the one truth through faith and love. This may threaten to undermine the place of reason in Proclus' system and provides a potential parallel with Christianity.

Materiality

As we have argued, the reality of material existence and human embodiment similarly both generates and constrains epistemic schemes. Most basically, material resources are required for knowledge production: money for providing time and space for education, resources and technologies for

[21] Osborn 1993.

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inscribing and transmitting knowledge. Zachary Guiliano's chapter on Bede explores in detail how wealth and social status undergirded Bede's ordering of knowledge and privileged ways of knowing, establishing and maintaining an 'inequality regime' (in Piketty's formulation). The function and affordances of materiality itself open a way into complex epistemic schemes, as we have already seen, for example, in Jensen's exploration of early Christian vision and Crawford's discussion of architecture. Material embodiment also shapes knowing and helps to order knowledge as, for example, Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent argues in her investigation of knowing and gluttony, Harrison traces in the case of sound and senses, or Gador-Whyte, Neil, and Zecher explore in the case of emotions. Paul Saieg argues that Irenaeus of Lyons has left us the earliest fully developed Christian account of embodiment, which grants a prominent role to an empirical epistemology and emphasises the need for all Christians to practise self-control and disciplined attention to enable the true perception of the world and their place within it – themes that reverberate in later authors. Rebecca Lyman also foregrounds the epistemic implications and pitfalls of materiality in her chapter on the early Arian controversy, lived religion in Alexandria, and debates over visuality and materialism.

Inscriptions illuminate how material objects can serve as modes of knowing and how objects interact with and generate discursive constructions of knowledge. Cilliers Breytenbach investigates how inscriptions in churches, in cemeteries, and on mosaics transmit knowledge and shape other knowledge-producing practices, including liturgical performances. The difficulty of deciding what constitutes a Christian inscription is an instance of a general question across the volume about the distinctiveness of 'Christian' forms of knowing. His chapter also charts significant interactions between the material and the discursive by comparing homilies and inscriptions.

Most generally, the 'scriptural universe' of which Guy Strousma writes and which provided significant epistemic parameters for early Christianity is impoverished without dedicated attention to the material productions of Christian communities and to how they affected what could be thought or imagined.[22] Inscriptional evidence suggests ways of thinking about scripture and its role in constructing Christian minds that are sometimes overlooked in merely textual histories. Scripture was heard, memorised, and performed in liturgical contexts, and inscriptions record benedictions, supplications, invocations, and a variety of other prayers, foregrounding

[22] Stroumsa 2016.

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how liturgical experience of scripture influenced people's lives. The lived experience of scripture, embodied in liturgy or chiselled into sacred objects, is thus entangled with a variety of practices implicating the whole person. Again, the discursive is shaped by material contexts even as it gives meaning to significant objects.

Investigating early Christian ways of knowing and ordering of knowledge, then, offers stimulating perspectives on intriguing and persistent questions about how epistemology affects social action and agency, about how Christians interacted with other cultural groups in their discursive, institutional, and material formations, about how knowing generates individual and communal practices and norms, and about the mechanics of the reproduction, reconfiguration, and transformation of traditions. The chapters in this volume grapple with case studies of phenomena like these, foregrounding how Christian ways of knowing and ordering of knowledge were embedded in a range of different traditions while offering a distinctive account inflected by theological commitments. They seek to open up new avenues of research into the intellectual world of late antique Christianity and its cultural forms.

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