(1986b)', not '(1986)'; p. 261 'reign of Marcus Aurelius', not 'reigh'; p. 290 n. 99 'Eck (1992d)' not '(1992)'; p. 365 n. 14 'Spanish towns', not 'town'; p. 413 'Athenaeus', not 'Athanaeus'; p. 467 'risen', not 'arisen'; p. 469 'sometimes', not 'sometime'; p. 1143 Barnes (1981)—'T.D.', not 'J.'; p. 1209 romanization entry in index—'544', not '545'; p. 308 death of Gaius Caesar not in 2 B.C., but in A.D. 4; pp. 876 and 891 Villa of Papyri is at Herculaneum, not Pompeii (consequently index entries need changing); p. 887 attributing over 3,000 inscriptions to Ostia is probably an underestimate by a couple of thousand.

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doi:10.1093/clrevj/bni345

THE THIRD AND FOURTH CENTURIES A.D.

D. S. POTTER: *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395*. (Routledge History of the Ancient World.) Pp. xxii + 762, maps, ills. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Paper, £25. ISBN: 0-415-10058-5 (0-415-10057-7 hbk).

The Routledge History of the Ancient World nears completion. Over the last decade, the series has included volumes which are of great interest to both novice and specialist, striking a good balance between innovation and information. The book under review fits the pattern well. The first of a number of more general volumes dealing with the third century (the long-awaited *CAH* XII^2 should appear shortly, whilst Clifford Ando is working on a volume called *The Critical Century, AD 193–284* for EUP), *The Roman Empire at Bay* sets high standards. Its scope, chronologically, thematically and in terms of learning, is majestic; its size somewhat daunting at almost 800 pages, of which 133 are filled with endnotes and thirty-seven with bibliography.

The number of pages, however, is an absolute necessity in order to deal properly with the Roman Empire at large over a period of more than two centuries which saw several major transitions. These changes—political/institutional, socio-economic, and religious/intellectual—dominate the development of empire, as Potter makes abundantly clear. This was inevitable: 'no large institution can exist in a steady state' (p. xi). How transitions affect the institution thus becomes the central question. This question lies at the heart of the book. How did the Roman Empire change from being the greatest power in the world in A.D. 180 to its distinctly less dominant position in A.D. 395? Potter argues that the main cause was the creation of administrative homogenization through the hands of military and court bureaucracy. Thus, local reactions against imperial centralization, such as the 'empires' of Postumus in the West and Odaenathus in the East were, rather than a problem in themselves, 'a sign that the centralizing tendencies that were in evidence from the Severan period onwards had yet to choke the life out of' local institutions (p. 262). The growing gap between the interest of the ruling officials and the needs of the realm hampered the functioning of the empire as a whole. Even in 'political stability, the administrative apparatus of the army was not well suited to handing sudden threats' (p. 226). The third and fourth centuries, as this book makes clear once more, were anything but politically stable.

Changes to military and institutional structure are, as Potter rightly emphasizes,

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https://doi.org/10.1093/clrevj/bni346 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'at least to some degree, features of an overall mentality of government, and of a governing class' (p. 172). Throughout the book, therefore, much attention is paid to intellectual and religious trends. Indeed, 'the most dramatic transformation in the fourth century was the establishment of Christianity as the dominant religion in the empire' (p. xiii). Such transitions are made an inherent part of the discourse. They are one aspect of what P. calls 'the centrality of narrative to the definition of power' (p. 577). Different narratives, either the 'grand narrative of imperial history', 'narratives of local focus', or 'alternative narratives' (such as Manichaeism or Neoplatonism) (pp. 301–2) created, shaped, and stabilized identities, and helped people define their place and rôle in society. Constantine took pride of place in shaping such narratives, and receives more attention than any other individual (except, perhaps, Septimius Severus). Through his actions, after all, Christian narratives were given place along the other narratives of power: 'through a combination of small progressive steps within traditional institutions, and increasingly radical steps within a new one—the Christian church—. . . Constantine reshaped the intellectual landscape of his realm' (p. 401). This landscape aimed at inclusion rather than exclusion ('neither polytheist nor Christian. It was both', p. 435). For P., the different narratives—old and new—became mutually implicated, allowing for some form of continuity of 'cultural life, despite the great changes in the political and intellectual landscape of the Mediterranean . . . old forms were adapted to new realities' (p. 576).

These key themes come continuously to the fore. But the book as such is structured along more conventional chronological lines. An extensive introduction (pp. 3–82) sets the scene, describing 'the shape of the Roman Empire' with apparent appreciation of Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*. It is followed by Part II on 'Reshaping the Old Order' (pp. 83–213), analysing the period from Commodus to the accession of Gordian III. Much attention goes to the involvement of the military in politics and of lawyers in government. A chapter on 'intellectual trends in the early third century' (pp. 173–213) rightly points out how the dominance of the classical tradition 'may also have led to difficulty in hearing what was actually being said' (p. 213). A veneer of tradition hid the changes and problems that the empire was to face. The third part of the book, 'The Roman Empire and its neighbors: 225–99' (pp. 217–298), places these problems in a geographic context, emphasizing the importance of the Sassanids whilst stressing the 'increasing disjuncture between the policies of centralization and the realities of diversity' (p. 298).The notion of narrative is crucial for Part IV, 'The Constantian Empire' (pp. 301–439), in which the various religious, political and economic reformulations of power are discussed. The last part, 'Losing Power' (pp. 443–575) discusses events from A.D. 337 till 395. Being fairly unencumbered by knowledge of these events, I learned much here, but was also struck by what might affect undergraduates using the book. Its very learnedness, its striving to make important intellectual points whilst teaching facts, makes it occasionally a difficult book to handle. Then again, it also makes it a highly rewarding book, of interest to students and specialists alike. The in-depth mastery over an enormously large amount of material (both ancient and modern), the ability to place that material in a coherent context, and the many examples presented throughout the volume to illustrate relevant points (through images, maps, and passages) makes *The Empire at Bay* the authoritative synthesis of the third and fourth centuries. Forthcoming volumes will have to strive very hard to do better.

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doi:10.1093/clrevj/bni346

https://doi.org/10.1093/clrevj/bni346 Published online by Cambridge University Press