was coherent and possibly programmatic, and a seemingly widespread acceptance of that imagery suggests that this imagery was understood.

H. argues that the literary sources are senatorial and dispose us to dislike the emperor, distorting a rational political programme. Similar stories could be told of Domitian and Nero. Like Nero, Commodus was not universally unpopular and his reputation was at least in part recalled by some of his successors, eager to win some of his legitimacy and prestige. To see Commodus as a populist done down by aristocratic *littérateurs* may appeal, but if one places any credence in the events as recalled by the literary sources, it is difficult not to see Commodus as an emperor whose political and personal abilities were so refined that he led a politically stable dynastic system, operating without significant strain or ideological dispute, through a series of crises so severe that eventually it brought about his own downfall. The iconography does not radically change this story.

H. presents Commodus as a thoughtful monarch experimenting with different ways of representing his power, and one supposes that the metaphoric use of 'crossroads' could suggest the various stylistic choices open to the emperor. H. hints, however, that the crossroads is one for the empire at which a decision was taken to take the empire down a certain route which resulted in the Severan monarchy and, presumably, all that followed. I wonder whether, if one is interested in the great historical watersheds, biography will provide much insight; a Roman empire and even an imperial position which could withstand Gaius, Nero, and Domitian is unlikely to have crumbled because of Commodus. It seems difficult to believe that Commodus had a decisive effect on the course of the Roman empire. We may be looking not so much at a crossroads as a pothole.

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CAH XIV

A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, M. Whitby (edd.): *The Cambridge Ancient History. Second edition. Vol. XIV. Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425–600*. Pp. xx + 1166. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Cased, £110. ISBN: 0-521-32591-9.

This is the second of the two volumes which extend the coverage of the second edition of this series beyond its original completion date at A.D. 324 until A.D. 600. It covers the period A.D. 425–600, and is the concluding volume of the new edition of *CAH*, although not the last actually published. It consists of five parts—'Chronological Overview', 'Government and Institutions', 'East and West: Economy and Society', 'The Provinces and the Non-Roman World', and 'Religion and Culture'—containing thirty-five chapters penned by twenty-eight different contributors. For the most part, these are senior scholars whose views are well known already. Hence *CAH* 14 follows the same basic pattern as in *CAH* 13, except that it includes religion and culture together in the one part, whereas the editors of *CAH* 13 had treated these separately in two parts. There is one noticeable improvement, however, in that *CAH* 14 contains many more maps (twenty-three) and figures (sixty-three) than does *CAH* 13 (seven maps and twelve figures). In particular, this makes the chapters on art and architecture much more intelligible.

The latest items cited in any of the bibliographies date to 1999, but the weighting of

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https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.1.185 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the more recent citations towards work published in 1996 suggests that we should regard this as the effective cut-off date for contributions to this volume. Unfortunately, this means that the contributors did not have access to the many valuable papers that have appeared in the series *The Transformation of the Roman World*, whose first volume was only published in 1997.

There is little one can say about a book such as this, a fitting conclusion to a fine series. One suspects that the contributors have done their best within tight word limits, and that they themselves are well aware that the evidence for many of their statements is often a little more complex or controversial than they seem to suggest. If one dares to venture any criticisms of *CAH* 14 it is that its inconsistencies in so many matters can become annoying after a while. This is true in matters both of presentation and of substance. As is suggested by the listing of the contents, and confirmed by the chapters themselves, some contributors have divided their chapters into a number of different sections, but others have not. So, for example, Ian Wood delivers his chapter 'The North-western Provinces' without a break, while the next contributor, Mark Humphries, 'Italy, A.D. 425–605', subdivides his chapter into nine different sections. The latter approach is far preferable in so far as it makes reading much easier, not least for students and interested members of the general public at whom this series is surely aimed. As regards substance, it is noteworthy that the chapter-headings alone betray a certain disagreement as to whether the cut-off date for this volume should have been A.D. 602, 605, or 640. Furthermore, despite the title of the book, the chronological table proceeds as far as A.D. 640 also (p. 985), and several contributors do end with a breathless gallop until this date too. For what it is worth, I think that most readers would have been better served had the editors decided to continue this volume until the death of the emperor Heraclius in A.D. 641. The end of his reign witnessed the final destruction of the old enemy Persia, the rise of a new enemy in Islam, and the permanent loss of much of the empire's eastern territory. Greater discontinuity with the past there could not have been. Furthermore, one might have expected the publisher to try and ensure consistency with the cut-off date used in its other great reference work for this period, the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, which does end in A.D. 641. There are minor inconsistencies also, or so they appear to a professional in the field. The general reader may be less forgiving. For example, what is the difference between 'Aremorica' (pp. 498–506) and 'Armorica' (pp. 8, 28), 'Tingitania' (pp. 3, 10) and 'Mauretania Tingitana' (p. 564), 'Nicholas' and 'Nicolaus' (p. 1145)? Such inconsistent treatments of the same names do not aid intelligibility.

Finally, misprints are rare, and the context usually exposes these for what they are. So Constans II reigned for the period 641-68 rather than 641–8 (p. 563).

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THE EASTERN FRONTIER

G. GREATREX, S. N. C. LIEU (edd.): *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, Part II: AD 363–630*. Pp. xxxii + 373, maps. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Cased, £60. ISBN: 0-415-14687-9.

This sequel to M. H. Dodgeon and S. N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (AD 226–363)* (London and New York, 1991) (reviewed in

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https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.1.185 Published online by Cambridge University Press