ESSAYS ON LATE ANTIQUITY

S. SWAIN, M. EDWARDS (edd.): *Approaching Late Antiquity. The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*. Pp. xiv + 487, map, ills, colour pls. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Cased, £75. ISBN: 0-19-926714-6.

On the first page of an introduction which ably summarizes its contents, Simon Swain characterizes the volume under review as not 'an encyclopedia or a handbook' aiming at any sort of comprehensive coverage, but a collection of essays whose readers will be 'enjoyably informed and challenged by some of the leading scholars of the day' (p. 1). The fourteen essays vary greatly in scope and approach.

Richard Duncan-Jones considers the complex question of how economic change between 200 and 400 can be detected and measured (pp. 21–53). After surveying the evidence, particularly the archaeological evidence, area by area, he concludes that Roman Africa and the heartland provinces of the future Byzantine Empire, which either escaped or suffered little from external invasions, remained prosperous during the third century, while regions exposed to attack show clear signs of 'settlement shrinkage'. This learned and searching evaluation of a large amount of widely scattered information performs a most useful service for all who are not economic historians. It is followed by two essays of narrower compass: Emanuele Papi argues, largely from archaeology, that during the third century Etruria, Umbria, and the Sabine territory 'underwent a serious economic crisis' which led to a 'radical transformation of the traditional economy', with rural depopulation and a great increase in the population of the city of Rome (pp. 53–81), while Colin Adams argues from the contemporary papyri that Diocletian intended his reforms in Egypt to achieve three aims, (1) to improve the bureaucratic machinery, (2) to increase the agricultural yield of the province, and (3) to integrate Egypt more fully into the Roman Empire (pp. 82–108). Adams's conclusions are both reasonable and solid, but those of Papi are more original and depend on epigraphical and archaeological evidence that is more ambiguous. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of a brief review to assess Papi's arguments in any detail.

The next two essays have a legal focus. Tony Honoré considers how Roman law and Roman civil government evolved between 200 and 400 (pp. 109–32). He detects a significant divergence between East and West in this period: by 400 he finds that the eastern government possessed a 'well-organized civil service . . . committed to the rule of law' to such an extent that the East had become 'a monarchy with some characteristics of a Rechtstaat', whereas the West had not developed in the same way. Peter Garnsey asks what the effects of Caracalla's grant of Roman citizenship to all freeborn inhabitants of the empire actually were in practice (pp. 133–55). He concludes that, while profound social inequalities meant that only a minority derived substantive benefits from being citizens rather than non-citizens, citizenship was nevertheless important as marking two crucial distinctions—one between Romans and foreigners who came from outside the empire (and were regarded as barbarians), the other, equally important, between free men and slaves. Michael Whitby next contributes a trenchant treatment of 'Emperors and Armies, AD 235–395' (pp. 156–86), which voices many acute and penetrating criticisms of fashionable opinions espoused by others and observations on the evidence used to support them, but sometimes seems to apply less rigid critical standards when evaluating the author's own preferred views. For example, while it is correct to insist that the Roman

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Empire was a military monarchy from its very inception, to go on to assert that in the late third century 'the fictions of a principate were swept away by the realities of a dominate, an oriental despotism' (p. 179) now sounds rather old-fashioned. In the sphere of policy and action, as opposed to imperial ceremonial, the prominent rôle of the Roman high command in the fourth century suggests that emperors between Diocletian and Gratian often functioned more like the leaders of a military junta than as all-powerful autocrats.

Three essays concentrate on religion. Two are by Mark Edwards. His '*Romanitas* and the Church of Rome' (pp. 187–210) ranges from the New Testament to the sack of Rome by the Vandals in 455 (which is misdated) in a pleasantly superficial manner, while his 'Pagan and Christian Monotheism in the Age of Constantine' (pp. 211–34) first argues against Michael Frede and other recent writers that 'there was no such thing as pagan monotheism in the Roman Empire', then offers ten very lightly annotated pages on Constantine as an aggressively Christian emperor which mix together genuine insight, error, and speculation in a way likely to mislead the unwary. In welcome contrast, a fully documented study by Neil McLynn discusses imperial attendance at church services from Constantine to Theodosius II with a fine sensitivity to the nuances of the status of each successive emperor as a member of a Christian congregation at worship (pp. 235–70). This is an original and important essay: among its many valuable insights, I would single out the observation that the day in 364 on which Valentinian invested his brother Valens as Augustus before the army at the Hebdomon and then drove with him in a chariot into Constantinople was Palm Sunday—surely a deliberate choice and a central aspect of the occasion, though one which Ammianus Marcellinus naturally declined to mention (p. 251).

Two highly competent essays discuss late antique art. Again there is contrast, here between an overall treatment and a specific theme. Jaś Elsner poses the question of whether the concept of late antique art is legitimate and, if so, what it means (pp. 271–309). He brings a wide-ranging perspective to the problem, which he tackles with immense vigour and vast erudition. After a critique of the views that have dominated the field for a century, Elsner considers in detail the use of *spolia* and the production of exquisite miniatures in late antique art in order to define what he calls a 'cumulative aesthetic' closely akin to the 'jeweled style' which recent scholars have found in literature of the period. Susan Walker produces a concentrated analysis of mummy portraits, which she interprets as evidence for the self-representation of the aspiring élites of the smaller towns of Late Roman Egypt (pp. 310–26).

A final trio of contrasting essays deal with writers of late antiquity. Alan Cameron documents and discusses the resurgence of classicizing poetry, especially (though not exclusively) mythological epic and panegyrics in verse (pp. 327–54). He repeatedly emphasizes that such poetry was being composed and often recited in both Greek and Latin, and by both Christian and pagan authors. What is the explanation? Cameron sets the phenomenon in its social context, arguing that 'poetry became in effect a profession' leading to administrative appointments: hence poetry was a central feature of late antique literary culture, in which knowledge of classical mythology was an indispensable component of a liberal education which no longer had any religious overtones by the end of the fourth century. Simon Swain concentrates on an individual writer: he examines in detail how Libanius of Antioch functioned as a sophist, especially in his dealings with emperors (pp. 355–400), and takes issue with accepted scholarly orthodoxy on many specific points of chronology and interpretation. Some of these challenges can be sustained, but the majority probably cannot. Finally, John Dillon considers philosophy as a profession in late antiquity

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(pp. 401–18) and reaches the comforting conclusion that philosophers were normally respected and active members of the communities in which they lived.

Almost all the essays in the volume do thus both inform the reader and challenge by provoking reflection. What are its defects? There are, of course, the inevitable misprints and minor errors, of which let me note here only '*praefectus color*' for '*praefectus urbi*' in the caption to p. 54, Fig. 1 and 'the Antiochene Patriarch Gamaliel' for the Jewish patriarch resident in Tiberias (p. 383). But there are some seriously misleading statements of general import, including the passing assertion that lands owned by the Christian church were exempt from taxation (pp. 176–7: 'its increasing property holdings enjoyed freedom from tax'). Anyone who wishes to deny A. H. M. Jones's assertion that church lands 'paid the regular land tax' (*Later Roman Empire* [Oxford, 1964], p. 898) needs to document his dissent properly. Moreover, an important new theory receives no serious discussion. Twenty years ago metrological analysis of trace metals in the Roman imperial coinage led C. Morrisson, C. Brenot, J.-P. Callu, J.-N. Barrandon, J. Poirier, and R. Halleux, *L'or monnayé* 1: *Purifications et altérations de Rome à Byzance* (Paris, 1985), pp. 81–111, to the conclusion that 'à partir de 346, le stock d'or monnayable s'est enrichi d'un apport d'or nouveau en quantité importante' (p. 105). Unless I have missed something, this study is cited only for the debasement of gold coinage in the third century (p. 44 n. 110). But if the thesis just quoted is correct, then the exploitation of this postulated new source of gold, presumably in the Balkans, may do much to explain why after 395 the eastern Roman Empire, unlike the western, had adequate funds to pay subsidies to barbarians and to raise armies with relative ease.

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THE LATE ROMAN ARMY

Y. Le Bohec, C. Wolff: *L'armée romaine de Dioclétien à Valentinien Ier. Actes du Congrès de Lyon (12–14 septembre 2002)*. (Collection du Centre d'Études Romaines et Gallo-Romaines, NS 26.) Pp. 540. Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 2004. Paper. ISBN: 2-904974-25-3.

This volume collects forty papers from a conference at Lyons in September 2002. The topic is the later Roman army from the Tetrarchy to Adrianople, limits which ensure that the volume focuses on this organization during a period of considerable strength when imperial forces had recovered from the critical threats of the mid-third century but before the losses of Adrianople and the Theodosian civil wars undermined their effectiveness. Thus the common thrust is an investigation of reasonably successful responses to diverse challenges, with the older rhetoric of inexorable decline largely banished. Papers are split into four main sections: Sources; Geographical Areas; Organisation; and Role (economic, social, religious). Half the papers are in French, a reflection of the impressive quantity of recent French work on the third and early-fourth centuries as well as of the conference's location, with the remainder split between Italian, Spanish, English, and German. This reflects the international nature of the original occasion, though it must also be noted that the English, and to a lesser extent the German, contributions are not provided by the most significant scholars currently working on the field. For anglophone readers this increases the value of the volume as a digest of primarily continental scholarship, with a number of different

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