

Neil McLynn's close reading of the transcript of the Conference of Carthage in 411 (ch. 10) is an outstanding piece, both in terms of its incisive analysis and its questioning of the degree of Catholic dominance of proceedings. While Whitehouse dismisses this event as a 'kangaroo court' (31), McLynn proposes seeing the Catholic side as less united and organised than is usually assumed, as well as arguing convincingly that the presiding official Marcellinus was not significantly partisan, despite later accusations against him. As well as affecting reconstructions of the Conference, this argument could also lead to a re-examination of narratives that stress the control exerted in this period by Augustine and his Carthaginian counterpart Aurelius, the traditional Big Men in histories of the demise of Donatism. For example, Aurelius' treatment of the emperor Honorius and his court is described by Noel Lenski as 'manipulating them like marionettes on a string' (182), which also perpetuates a long-standing view of imperial weakness in the early fifth century. More generally, it would have been useful to see greater cross-fertilisation between chapters, especially other authors responding to the hypotheses of McLynn and Pottier. Nonetheless, this is an excellent collection of papers, testifying to the recent upsurge of research on Donatism. It surely deserves to become the first port of call for any Anglophone student or scholar interested in the subject.

University of Exeter
r.flower@exeter.ac.uk

RICHARD FLOWER

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DAVID WALSH, *THE CULT OF MITHRAS IN LATE ANTIQUITY: DEVELOPMENT, DECLINE, AND DEMISE CA. A.D. 270–430*. (Late Antique archaeology, Supplementary series 2). Leiden: Brill, 2019. Pp. xii + 145, illus., maps. ISBN 9789004380806. €110.00/US\$132.00.

Academic interest in Roman Mithraic cult has largely focused on its high imperial moment, as opposed to its late antique. The abundance of epigraphic, sculptural and architectural evidence for Mithras-worship dating to the second and third centuries A.D. must partly account for this focus, contrasting as it does with the paucity of such finds from the fourth century onwards. The relative lack of scholarly discussion of Mithras-worship in Late Antiquity has also been compounded by two prevailing assumptions: first, that it was in precipitous decline; and second, that this can be explained, more or less satisfactorily, by its direct competition with Christianity, an understanding that relies on combative references to Mithras-worship by the Church Fathers, from Justin Martyr to Jerome.

David Walsh's work offers a challenge to assumptions of this decline-through-conflict narrative, necessarily complicating the picture by drawing together what evidence we have from across the Roman world between A.D. 270 and 430. The work begins with an introduction summarising scholarly approaches and offering an outline of 'The Cult of Mithras' (1–16). The first chapter turns to the cult's development in Late Antiquity (17–41), which together with the gazetteer (101–27) makes clear that there is far more evidence for the worship of Mithras into the fifth century than many are perhaps aware. It also demonstrates a perceptible shift in the nature of our evidence. Whilst the use of certain types of monumental dedication by Mithraic worshippers — in particular epigraphic and sculptural — fell in the fourth century, W. turns our attention towards changing ritual habits that counter a correlative reading of decline (30–3, 38–9). The dedication of small-denomination coins found in Mithraic contexts is particularly notable.

The second and third chapters deal with the evidence for decline (42–55) and explanations for it (56–65). Drawing on sociological studies of community cohesion, W. observes three broad factors: wider population decline, the changing nature of frontier communities in places that formerly possessed strong Mithraic communities, and changes in ritual practice that failed to bind communities as strongly as those of the past. Finally, W. deals with the fate of 'mithraea' (Mithraic cult buildings), emphasising the regional variations in the demise of the cult and complicating narratives of a straightforward conflict with Christian communities.

W. is to be praised for assembling the evidence in what will no doubt be a useful resource for Mithraic scholars and students of late antique religion in years to come. W. also takes on the daunting task of being the first to offer an assessment of this evidence, but it is here that some

fundamental issues arise, in particular assumptions of unity and a somewhat myopic take on the subject more generally.

Mithraic scholarship in the past fifteen years has tended to avoid overarching narratives, and has instead concentrated on local and regional, or object- and evidence-specific case studies (with few exceptions, e.g. A. Mastrocinque, *The Mysteries of Mithras* (2017)). This is a result of the widely held view that diversity in religious practice and belief was common between groups of worshippers, and that we should be extremely cautious of imposing a straightforward unity, for example through the use of ‘Mithra-ism’ to describe Mithraic cult. W. assiduously avoids the term ‘Mithraism’, and yet the picture of Mithras-worship offered in the Introduction (4–12) draws uncritically on the work of Manfred Clauss and Roger Beck, both of whom commonly referred to ‘Mithraism’ or unified cult, and in Beck’s case to a religion of Mithras.

A direct consequence of this is W.’s framing of ritual diversity amongst Mithraic communities as a peculiarly late antique phenomenon. In contrast to later sections where aspects of cult are subdivided (e.g. ‘Mithraic Architecture’, ‘Mithraic Iconography’, ‘Ritual Practice’ including ‘Initiation Rituals’), the introduction deals with them in a continuous narrative. Initiation before c. 270 is summarily presented as both uniform and identifiable for Mithraic cult (10), seamlessly combined with interpretations of iconography and architecture to present a coherent cult package. In discussions of developments in Late Antiquity (30–1), this presentation is confirmed, for example where W. refers to the so-called ‘Mithras Liturgy’ papyri from fourth-century Egypt as evidence for continuing initiation rituals, later suggesting that ‘a script had to be followed in Mithraic initiations’ (62).

Unfortunately, the ‘Mithras Liturgy’, which W. acknowledges might not even be ‘Mithraic’ (without citing important contributions, e.g. H. D. Betz, *The ‘Mithras Liturgy’* (2003)), does not substantiate claims of an initiatory script. Accounts of uniform Mithraic grades and initiation rely heavily on evidence from Rome and Ostia that cannot be easily extended to other parts of our corpus. It is thus far from clear to what extent initiation rituals were either ubiquitous or uniform. W.’s argument that ritual change was a factor in the cult’s demise remains interesting, but needs rethinking in light of this. Indeed, the suggestion that coin-offerings came to replace initiation rituals (32–3) remains speculative, as there is no firm evidence to suggest an equivalency between these varied acts. Consideration of the phenomena more broadly, outside Mithras-worship, would have been welcome.

This interpretation reflects the somewhat limited approach taken to the relationship between Mithras-worship and other religious phenomena. Christianity – in all its complexity – is at times the elephant in the room; despite W.’s critique of decline being the product of Mithraic-Christian conflict, there is no substantial attempt to rethink this relationship. The sociological perspectives that W. introduces are welcome, but fall short of convincing when applied to overly abstracted situations.

Early in the work, W. introduces a fictional late antique Mithraic adherent who travels across the Roman world between places of worship. This traveller goes from Syria to North Africa via Rome and Gaul (39–41), but encounters nothing but *mithraea* on their travels. Could they have reflected on Mithras-worship without a view on where they were and what else was around them? In a work on Mithras, this focus is perhaps to be expected, but one has to question what the purpose of this fictional character is if not to encourage us to reflect on a lived experience. There remains much to be done on the worship of Mithras in Late Antiquity, but despite the work’s shortcomings, W. has made a valuable contribution to this collective scholarly endeavour.

Worcester College, Oxford
dominic.dalGLISH@worc.ox.ac.uk
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DOMINIC DALGLISH

JENS-OLAF LINDERMANN, EBERHARD KNOBLOCH and COSIMA MÖLLER (EDS),
HYGINUS GROMATICUS. DAS FELDMESSERBUCH: EIN MEISTERWERK DER SPÄTANTIKEN BUCHKUNST. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2018.
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A few years ago, the technical writings of the Roman land surveyors (*Agrimensores*) were obscure objects of study. More recently there has been a steady stream of books, articles, conferences and