


of fluid, extra-textual “canons” (93). Kreps points especially to Rabbinic tales that, similar to the *Gospel of Truth*, “blurred distinctions between teacher and text,” leading Kreps to conclude that “Valentinus’s ideas [about scripture] were not in tension with the ideas of his contemporaries” (93–94). The Conclusion, “The Iconic Book,” explores the varied modes of textuality and scriptural practice that characterized early Christian cultures, noting how the Valentinian model had surprising resonance with late antique practices (121).

The great strength of this book is its utter lack of respect for traditional disciplinary boundaries. Building on the work of Ismo Dunderberg, Kreps’s work analyzes Valentinian texts “in light of their Greco-Roman culture, without fetishizing their Gnostic features” (10). Kreps accomplishes this by juxtaposing Valentinian concepts and practices with a wide range of comparanda, including those typically classed under the labels Valentinian, Greco-Roman, Jewish, and “proto-orthodox” Christian. Kreps’s treatment effectively showcases how such labels obscure important overlaps, such as shared models of publication and scriptural practice. Some readers may object, however, to Kreps’s rather maximalist marshalling of parallels. Books and thinkers from a wide range of chronologies and cultural contexts are cited as providing comparable scriptural practices to Valentinian ideas, but relatively less attention is paid to the specifics of ancient intellectual exchange or the importance of local cultural contexts.

The book also provides an uneven treatment of the material dimensions of ancient textual practices. In Chapter 3, Kreps skillfully (if succinctly) explores how the textual ordering and content of the Jung Codex could be reflective of later iterations of the “fluid” textual revelation of Valentinian traditions (87–92). Chapter 1 also provides important contextualization of the *Gospel of Truth* amidst Roman publication and inscriptional practices. For the remainder of the book, however, textual materiality plays a relatively minor role; the book is much more focused on the metaphorical implications of books-as-people, rather than the material dimensions of people-as-books.

This should not detract from the larger accomplishment of *The Crucified Book*: it convincingly establishes that, when contextualized within parallel scriptural metaphors of the ancient Mediterranean, Valentinian concepts were neither “obscure” nor “deviant” (60). Some readers may demand more detail on the material or cultural dynamics that contributed to the wide-ranging scriptural overlaps between Valentinians and their neighbors; it is a great credit to the work of Kreps that we would think to ask the question.

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***Christian Emperors and Roman Elites in Late Antiquity.* By Rita Lizzi Testa. London: Routledge, 2022. xxxi + 279 pp. \$143.00 cloth.**

Our understanding of the role played by the Roman Senatorial aristocracy in the Late Empire has undergone a sea change in recent decades. It once seemed self-evident that the Senate lost influence when emperors no longer resided in the capital, and that its

influence was further diluted when emperors added administrators, military leaders, and Christians to its ranks. But newer scholarship has been chipping away at these rock-solid truths, and few have had a more prominent role to play in this revisionism than Rita Lizzi Testa. Her book brings to an English-reading audience the results of decades of research previously available only in Italian.

True to form, Lizzi Testa has even innovated on the format for such books. Instead of selecting a handful of previously published articles for translation, she has mapped out new chapters that incorporate studies by other scholars as well as her own. Each chapter is devoted to a specific theme, these ranging from the real purpose of Senatorial *otium* (ch. 3) to the continuing importance of omens (ch. 5, delightfully titled “The Brooms in Bloom”), and even the identity of St. Valentine (ch. 9). Along the way, the reader is treated to valuable discussions of how to make use of such sources as panegyrics (ch. 6) and saints’ lives (ch. 9). Each chapter is richly annotated and provided with an extensive bibliography.

The chapters proceed in roughly chronological order. Ch. 1 addresses the familiar narrative that Senatorial hostility drove the Christian Constantine from Rome to his new capital city of Constantinople, built on the site of the former Byzantium. Lizzi Testa traces this narrative to hostile pagan sources, and argues, “Having a different religious faith, especially at the beginning of Constantine’s reign, did not present a problem” (3). Ch. 2 elaborates on the hostile narrative with a study of Constantine’s nephew Julian, who renounced his Christian upbringing once he became emperor in 361. Pointing out that Julian’s opposition was not based solely on religion (he also blamed Constantine for disrupting local elites), she concludes that his hostility led Julian to misgauge the degree of Senatorial opposition to his uncle.

In Ch. 3, Lizzi Testa turns away from the grand narrative to reconsider the topic of Senatorial *otium*. Usually considered as a contrast to the active role of holding office, *otium* was not simply a time of enforced leisure: Senators used these breaks to oversee harvests on their various estates. This chapter also serves as an informative lesson on how to understand Late Antique literary style and genres.

Ch. 4 brings the story forward to Valentinian I, who became emperor shortly after Julian. Here Lizzi Testa critiques the model of the French and Russian revolutions that has been used to posit a decline in the Senatorial aristocracy. This did not happen, she argues, because the Roman aristocracy was far more resilient than those “rigid and inelastic entities” (58). Drawing on network analysis, she demonstrates that emperor and Senate were dependent on each other.

The next two chapters, on haruspicy and “magic” (ch. 5) and the methods of historians and panegyrists (ch. 6) lead into a study in ch. 7 of the most famous controversy of the latter half of the fourth century, a struggle to return the Augustan Altar of Victory to the Senate house. Lizzi Testa applies her talent for close reading of texts to the writings of the primary combatants—Symmachus for the Senate and Ambrose of Milan for a militant Christianity. Elsewhere, Lizzi Testa has called attention to the impact of Cold War thinking on scholarly perceptions of a pagan-Christian war to the death in this controversy (“The Famous ‘Altar of Victory Controversy’ in Rome: The Impact of Christianity at the End of the Fourth Century,” in *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman empire in the Fourth Century AD*, ed. J. Wienand, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015, 405–419, at p. 405), and she puts this insight to good effect here, skewering Ambrose for his distortion of the Senate’s request. Despite the bishop’s claim that Christian Senators would never agree to returning the Altar, Lizzi Testa argues that the conflict was really between old-line Senators, pagan

and Christian alike, and the more recently enrolled *nouveaux riches* crowd. This chapter is a must read for anyone who has followed the ups and downs of this question.

This fresh thinking is also on display in the penultimate chapter, where Lizzi Testa provides a detailed analysis of the politics leading up to Alaric's sack of Rome in 410. Where others have portrayed the Senate as little more than a municipal body at this point, she describes it as "a lively, multilingual, quarrelsome institutional body, deeply conservative but also prone to unscrupulous solutions" (189), and dismisses religion as a motivating factor in the Senate's eventual decision to oppose the court and throw its weight in with the usurper Attalus. The concluding chapter on St. Valentine demonstrates the range of Lizzi Testa's interests, but also testifies to the way her deep familiarity with the genealogy of the Senatorial aristocracy unites the various themes of this book. Combining hagiographical clues with information from the Codex-Calendar of 354, she identifies the patron saint of lovers as a member of the clan of the Symmachi and an early Christian convert who shared the broad-minded views espoused by Quintus Symmachus in his argument for return of the Altar of Victory.

Lizzi Testa's decision to build her chapter about new topics results in much more continuity than the typical translation of previously published work allows. It also allows for nice changes of pace in topics, but underlying all is the detailed understanding of the fourth-century Roman aristocracy that is her hallmark. Every chapter contains a discussion at the granular level that will be of primary interest to specialists. But the chapters are well signposted, and the variety of topics, along with the instruction Lizzi Testa provides on how to use a variety of sources and methodologies, make this book of interest to a wide variety of readers.

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***Ambrose, Augustine, and the Pursuit of Greatness.* By J. Warren Smith. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 350 pp. \$99.99 hardcover.**

J. Warren Smith has shared with us a wealth of reflection, information, and resources for further research. He has bridged the divide between Classical and Christian notions of the highest degree of virtue. For those who are unfamiliar with the discussions that surround this topic, the book is a thorough introduction. For those who are familiar with them, he has provided a nuanced and judicious assessment of the trajectory of thought from the Athenian reception of Homer to Augustine. He has given a fair presentation of diverging views among modern scholars on ancient questions concerning the end of virtue, suicide, and chastity. Smith traces an organic development in which the ideas of earlier thinkers form the basis for later developments. Under the pressure of historical circumstances and then with the rise of Christianity, Classical ideals were transformed into Christian ideals based on conscience (*conscientia*: the self-knowledge of a virtuous soul in the presence of God) and the abandonment of the honor-humiliation axis for the cultivation of humility, the essential condition for