may only survive in much later exemplars of the chronicle tradition, e.g. the ninth-century Theophanes or the twelfth-century Michael the Syrian. This detective work does not produce new evidence, but may contribute to some greater precision for certain events in the second quarter of the fourth century, e.g. the first siege of Nisibis (337 or 338). Particular attention is paid to the vexed dating of the Persian martyrdoms in the 340s, for which B.'s arguments (pp. 244–68; plus an appendix by Raymond Mercier, pp. 286–303) will now prove central, even if not conclusive.

B. is not entirely consistent about the authority of his new text: sometimes the author has to be trusted because he could not make an error about a major contemporary event (e.g. p. 137), but he is also wrong about the Council of Nicaea. B.'s argument that the author favoured homoousian theology (pp. 126–7) is inconclusive: Constantine is presented positively, but he was appropriated by both sides in the debate (for the non-homoousian view, compare Eusebius himself). The fact that the author was laconic about Nicaea and omitted the return of Athanasius of Alexandria in 346 while mentioning Constantine's baptism by the neo-Arian Eusebius of Nicomedia (often evaded in Nicene texts) suggests to me that he was in the neo-Arian camp, like his precursor Eusebius of Caesarea.

B. presents his discovery as 'one of the most valuable sources we possess for the secular and religious history of the east between 325 and 350' (p. 147), a considerable exaggeration for a text whose constituent parts were already known and which ignores major doctrinal discussions, episcopal squabbling, or imperial rivalries, and has little about warfare beyond the sieges of Nisibis. But this belief underpins B.'s dream to have put a new text into scholarly debate (p. 9), and we must be grateful that he has undertaken this labour: it might be more than four centuries before someome chooses to follow in the footsteps of Scaliger and B.

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R. MacMullen: *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*. Pp. vi + 282. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. Cased, £21. ISBN: 0-300-07148-5

With *Christianity and Paganism* MacM. returns to the themes of *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven, 1981) and *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven, 1984), and takes the narrative of those volumes forward into the early Middle Ages. The treatment, as we have come to expect, is discursive, wide ranging, packed with incident, and entertaining to boot. MacM. has an uncommonly sharp eye for telling detail, and to read this book is to be taken on an exhilarating and insightful tour of the flash-points of religious conflict in the late antique Mediterranean world.

The author's approach is shamelessly partisan, as even a glance at the table of contents will show. The first two chapters—'Persecution' and 'The Cost to the Persecuted'—present a harrowing account of the suppression of paganism and what MacM. sees as the consequent sense of dislocation felt by a majority robbed of the familiar framework for negotiating their place in the cosmos. The third chapter traces the rise of 'superstition': for MacM., the rise of Christianity was accompanied by something of a 'dumbing down' of classical culture. There is much here with which Gibbon could have agreed: indeed, by p. 97 we get, in mid-sentence, 'Decline' with a capital D! Chapter IV is much the strongest (and, indeed, most entertaining) in the book. MacM. argues that paganism had the last laugh as practices common in pagan religiosity were assimilated by Christianity, usually in the face of voluble protests by bishops. The book concludes with a summary that restates MacM.'s central thesis that 'the triumph of the church was not one of obliteration but of widening embrace and assimilation' (p. 159).

Like many of MacM.'s works, this is—to adapt a soccer metaphor—a book of two halves: 159 pages of densely written, and printed, text are supplemented by eighty-four pages of (even more) densely written, and printed, notes. MacM. is unapologetic about his extensive annotation: 'Nothing said about the mentalities, behavior, norms, or proclivities of millions of people can be taken seriously without proofs proportionate to the sample . . . So in the notes that follow, I have tried to supply enough material to match my broad themes and interpretations' (p. 161). The notes are indeed extremely important, often referring the reader to texts and incidents not alluded to in the main body of the text. But I could not help feeling that there was something wrong with this division of the book. Why was so much evidence excluded from the text? Why were the notes not printed at the bottom of the page, where the crucial data they include could be more readily

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consulted than by flicking through pages at the back of the book? If specious reasons of 'style' were responsible for this, then they must be regretted.

There are further resemblances here to MacM.'s earlier oeuvre. Sympathy for the Empire's oppressed underclasses—the hallmark of some of MacM.'s best work, such as *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven, 1974)—is here transferred to disadvantaged pagans having to endure the harsh measures of overbearing, privileged Christians. The description in Chapter I of Christian persecutions of pagans is chillingly evocative of the ideological witch-hunts of MacCarthyite America, themselves inspiration for another of MacM.'s studies of oppression, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge, MA, 1966, repr. 1992). Now no one should doubt that the 'triumph' of Christianity in the Mediterranean world was facilitated by occasional bouts of appalling brutality, much of it condoned (at least) by Church leaders. Yet I suspect that MacM.'s partisan sympathies for the pagan 'oppressed' against the Christian 'oppressor' have led him to misrepresent the dynamics of religious conflict in late antiquity. Conflict between paganism and Christianity was frequently played out on the ideological plane, and it is the literary residue of this battle that forms MacM.'s most important category of evidence. Such texts were deliberately propagandist, demanding that we treat them with the utmost caution. I was repeatedly surprised, therefore, to see how much of this material MacM. accepted at face value, paying little or no attention to the agendas that shaped it. He draws attention, for example, to the explicit anti-intellectualism of the Christians Lactantius and Augustine (pp. 85–8, 205 nn. 23 and 25), but provides no explanation for the curious paradox that both were well-read, highly educated men. Indeed, there is little effort expended on engaging with the mind of the oppressor. So villainous are MacM.'s Christians that, having read this book, the reader could be forgiven for thinking that Christian leaders were moved primarily by the desire for greater worldly power. Little wonder: there is no real attempt here to understand the spiritual passions that motivated the strenuous—and often brutal—efforts by the Christian establishment to secure the salvation of so many souls.

More significantly, the theme of the book is surely too narrow. Religious conflict and interaction in this period cannot simply be reduced to pagans vs. Christians. Other important areas of contest are worryingly absent: tensions with Judaism hardly feature, those with Islam (important for the end of the period) not at all; meanwhile, heresy appears (in the main text) only as a distraction that diverted emperors from their otherwise sustained attack on paganism (e.g. pp. 24, 27). In effect, MacM. has divorced the Christian interface with paganism from its broader context of religious competition. This singularity of focus has ramifications not least for MacM.'s picture of late paganism. The simple reality is that our evidence for pagan practice between the fourth and eighth centuries is pitifully meagre, and much of what we have comes from prejudiced Christian sources. MacM. accepts this problem, rightly highlighting that our view of Christianity's social dominance after A.D. 400, drawn as it is from Christian sources, cannot be controlled by recourse to a broadly based, rival pagan perspective: the pagan sources that survive are simply too few to counteract the overwhelming weight of the Christian evidence for the period (pp. 3–6). A more tacit—and potentially misleading—admission of this scarcity of sources comes when MacM., describing what was lost with the extirpation of paganism, is forced to fall back on early imperial evidence (e.g. pp. 48–51). There are dangers here, not only of anachronism, but also—by moving from a period of rich documentation to one of extreme paucity—of making paganism's demise seem all the more precipitous. In sum, while there is much here that is useful and thought-provoking, I could not help feeling that a more expansive, circumspect view was both possible and desirable. A synthesis of late antique religious change is badly needed; for all its manifold virtues, however, this book does not provide it.

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FEDERICO BORCA: *Terra mari cincta. Insularità e cultura romana.* Pp. 217. Rome: Carocci Editore, 2000. Paper, L. 27,000. ISBN: 88-430-1500-1.

How many different things could one associate with the word island/insula/isola? This book is likely to add a few possibilities to a long list even for readers who have given serious thought to this question. Borca's study of attitudes, opinions, metaphors, and symbolism involving islands in Roman literature points out various ways of dealing with a very special geographical feature. As the author points out, the importance of islands for Greek identity has long been

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