OF BISHOPS AND BRATS

R. W. MATHISEN: *People, Personal Expression and Social Relations in Late Antiquity, Volume I. With Translated Texts from Gaul and Western Europe*. Pp. xviii + 298. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. Cased, US$55/£34.50. ISBN: 0-472-11245-7.

R. W. MATHISEN: *People, Personal Expression and Social Relations in Late Antiquity, Volume II. Selected Latin Texts from Gaul and Western Europe*. Pp. xvi + 248. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. Cased, US$55/£34.50. ISBN: 0-472-11246-5.

This is a (two-volume) sourcebook about 'people', especially people in Late Roman Gaul, with special emphasis on the fifth and sixth centuries and not much at all about the third or fourth, despite nominal adherence to the conventional span of 250–750 allocated to late antiquity. The second volume provides the Latin texts for specialists, with brief learned textual notes. These can generate gems of ancient orthography, or lack of it; for example, a legal 'form letter' (formula) from the mid-sixth century is printed in its original, incomprehensible, version, followed by a more conventional rewrite, with textual commentary (II.87–90). Students of late Latin will find much in this second volume to ponder; the use of historical, epistolary, epigraphic, poetic, and legal texts supply a bewildering range of styles and stylistic conventions, a reminder that all Late Romans were not the same.

The non-Latinist student of late antiquity is in the happy position of having increasing access to documents and authors of the period in translation, thanks to the Translated Texts for Historians series (Liverpool University Press) and many other enterprises. Professor Mathisen aims to 'use the texts to show something'. This he hopes to achieve by presenting, rather than little snippets of texts, long extracts providing 'in-depth insight into the people of Late Antiquity by focusing on their human sides' (pp. x–xi). The format consists of a set of thematic chapters on aristocrats; the less privileged; social turmoil; Christianity; élite women; and inappropriate activities (a general theme, not confined to this last chapter). There is a connecting 'narrative' and thorough bibliography, but the main bulk of the book consists of (usually) numbered translations, many offered in English for the first time.

M. aspires to produce a work of scholarship—and few are better qualified to do so—on Late Roman Gaul. However, he concedes that his approach, through his selection of sources, must be anecdotal. Considerations of length limit both the amount and depth of analysis provided and the geographical range of sources used. M. tends to exclude material from Italy (aside from imperial laws and the occasional letter), Spain, and Britain, although Saint Patrick's Letter to Coroticus is included. It would have been interesting to compare the Gallic pigs of Ruricius of Limoges with their Italian counterparts, as described by Paulinus of Nola; or Symmachus' correspondence with that of Sidonius and his successors. Chronicles are also sidelined, perhaps because they do not count as 'personal expression'.

Despite the often turgid style of his authors and documents, M. has a rich sense of the comic aspects of his subjects. We have Avitus of Vienne fulminating for two pages on the subject of his having committed (or not) a 'barbarism' (he lengthened the middle syllable of *potitur*); the issue mattered, because real aristocrats do not make mistakes like that (I.31–4). There is Ruricius of Limoges, a favourite of M.'s, agitating over 'The Case of the Pilfered Pigs' (I.58–60). Women have a hard time of it:

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Aunegunda 'changes her mind' over her marriage and is immortalized in the Burgundian Law Code (I.100–2). One Amanda wins praise because she 'shoulders the load' leaving her husband free for saintly pursuits (I.171), while Susanna, the Mrs Proudie of sixth-century Trier, 'loses her cool'(I.188–9). The cumulative effect of this chatty presentation and the often subversive activities highlighted in the texts is of a society of oddballs; of rebellious women coexisting with the impossibly saintly; of irate bishops struggling vainly to control each other, their clergy, their enterprising laity, and their political and military masters; and of a theoretically hierarchical system under constant attack from dissidents and eccentrics.

But the imposing of twenty-first-century perspectives has its downside. The Gallo-Roman nobility are labelled as 'pompous and prating' (I.27), and the young soldier Martin of Tours as an 'army brat' (I.75). This is not the way to encourage readers to appreciate the 'otherness' of Late Roman society. The discourse of aristocratic self-representation or hagiography may at times be uncongenial to us, but it requires of the historian sympathetic understanding in its own terms. The values and style of Sidonius or Ruricius, both of whom are extensively represented, were what was expected of noblemen and bishops; their literary self-laudation does not mean that they were actually 'conceited' (I.38), or that they were perceived as such by contemporaries.

The same caveats apply to the imposing of modern values in other ways. Did the 'people' of late antiquity share the individualistic assumptions implied in 'personal expression' of the title? What was meant by 'family' (or 'household'), and how far were the 'personal', social, and economic interests of the individual subordinated to it? M. is ultimately subverted by his own texts. The fixed hierarchical order assumed by the contrast of 'the aristocratic elite' (Chapter 1) with the 'socially less privileged' (Chapter 2), including the decurionate from which many bishops were drawn, does not stand up to scrutiny in the light of the sources. With charm and style, M. provides his readers with the material to make their own judgements, but little of the historical framework to help them to do it.

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DAMNATIO AND REHABILITATION

C. W. HEDRICK, JR: *History and Silence. Purge and the Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity*. Pp. xxviii + 338, ills. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. Cased, US$37.50. ISBN: 0-292-73121-3.

In A.D. 431 a statue of the senator Virius Nicomachus Flavianus was erected in Trajan's Forum at Rome. On its base was inscribed an imperial letter that rehabilitated Flavianus' reputation (*CIL* 6.1783). Flavianus had committed suicide after the usurper Eugenius, whose revolt he had supported, was defeated in 394. In the aftermath, Flavianus was subject to *damnatio memoriae* for his part in the rebellion. This disgrace and subsequent rehabilitation form the theme of H.'s study, which has at its heart a study of the inscription on the statue base. Over 300 pages might seem excessive for such an undertaking, but H. has so much to say along the way about, for example, various manifestations of late Roman élite culture and historiographical method, that this study must rank as one of the most imaginative and stimulating books on late antiquity of recent years. Moreover, H. seeks to reopen a debate of central importance. Herbert Bloch's thesis of a senatorial 'pagan revival'

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