

JUSTINIAN AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

BELL (P.N.) *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian. Its Nature, Management, and Mediation*. Pp. xviii + 393, ills, maps. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Cased, £80, US\$150. ISBN: 978-0-19-956733-1.

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As B. notes, the work he has produced 'is not a conventional Oxford monograph' (p. vi), and this is undoubtedly a source of numerous strengths. B., a retired senior civil servant with extensive experience of the Northern Ireland peace process, brings to bear many insights gained from his career, not just in Ireland, as well as a reasoned use of various models from the social sciences. Having defended the legitimacy of drawing comparisons between Late Antiquity and the present (pp. 21–6) and exploiting personal experiences (pp. 26–7), B. deploys interesting and relevant anecdotes on numerous occasions, often on Northern Ireland (e.g. pp. 106–7, 149, 298), but also concerning his service in Ghana (e.g. p. 236). A reference to B.'s efforts to implement change in the Northern Ireland Office in the early 1980s and the opposition they provoked (p. 286) hints at some sympathy for Justinian's much vilified praetorian prefect John the Cappadocian. Few academic works, moreover, at least in the field of ancient history, allude to conversations with the Prime Minister of the day, in this case (p. 192 n. 306) Tony Blair, revealed here remarkably to be conversant with the history of church councils.

The first two chapters, covering some fifty pages, plead for the pragmatic use of modern theories in order to overcome the difficulty of using frequently biased sources, most notably Procopius. Chapter 2 in particular, 'The Analytical Framework', brings to bear a panoply of modern theories in order to come to grips with social conflict, the theme of the book. To his credit, B. never loses sight of his topic when dealing with theory; in this case, having discussed Marx and Durkheim, he compares what their models reveal in the case of late antique Antioch (pp. 36–8). Distinctions are drawn between 'social integration' and 'system integration' (p. 39), as also between class and status (pp. 40–7), but B. wisely acknowledges the need to integrate both the last two in his discussion.

Chapter 3, 'Social Conflict in Countryside and Town', emphasises the underlying poverty of the mass of the population, even in regions and periods that appear initially prosperous. B. provides a stimulating discussion of the *coloni* in the sixth century, rightly refusing to take the legal evidence at face value (pp. 68–77). He paints a vivid picture of the exploitation of the *coloni*, the slaves and the poor more generally, while emperors tended to legislate in favour of landowners. Following the work of scholars such as P. Sarris, he detects a squeeze of the poor and a concentration of wealth in the hands of the very rich, facilitated by the wide circulation of gold in the sixth century (pp. 87–93). B. argues for widespread disorder in much of Justinian's empire, provoked not only by rapacious landlords, whose activities the emperor sought to curb, but also by Justinian's own officials. Chapter 4, 'Two Empire-wide Conflicts: the Factions and the Christians', draws out the numerous similarities between these two groups, the latter being divided chiefly between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites. Both were spread throughout the empire, both took on a new importance in this period, and both cut across divisions of class and status. B. exploits social psychology on group behaviour to account for the extreme actions, on occasion, of the partisans. He rightly recognises the useful role that circus games played in defusing tensions and in legitimising imperial rule (pp. 156–8). In his discussion of the doctrinal divisions that Justinian strove to overcome, he stresses the problems caused by the hardening Miaphysite identity, which scuppered compromise on more than one

occasion. He considers Justinian consistently to have sought a solution to the divisions (p. 192) while remaining a pragmatist, much the same line as is taken by H. Leppin in *Justinian. Das christliche Experiment* (2011), a work not cited by B.

Chapter 5, 'Ideological Conflict in the Reign of Justinian', addresses systemic issues involving the empire, drawing out the struggle between paganism and Christianity in the sixth century and arguing strongly that pagans remained a potent force (pp. 238–46). As Christianity grew more strident, so the unifying force of the old *paideia* diminished, B. proposes. Justinian, as a parvenu, felt vulnerable in the face of the cultured elite and thus harnessed the force of a harder-line Christianity, leading to the periodic pogroms against pagans. B. sees authors such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the compiler of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, and Malalas as emblematic of this new Christian ideology (pp. 252–62); the hierarchical structure emphasised in the first in particular served to legitimise imperial rule.

Chapter 6, 'Constructing Legitimacy', assesses the various means by which Justinian shored up his position – for example through energetic legislation, insisting on his concern for the poor. B. again insists on Justinian's vulnerability as an 'outsider' (p. 279) on account of his humble origins; he therefore reached out to other groups, he argues, such as the factions (especially the Blues), as also to lawyers, who benefited from his reforms, and to the church, involving the ecclesiastical authorities ever more in the administration of empire. It is not clear, however, whether Justinian was any more of a parvenu than (say) Zeno or Anastasius or even whether he really was so detested by the senatorial aristocracy: B. refers to 'many senators' taking part in the Nika riot (pp. 278, 324), but in fact only eighteen were exiled in the aftermath (Theophanes, pp. 185–6). Anastasius, moreover, not only faced Vitalian's uprising in the latter part of his reign but also exiled several high-ranking aristocrats, such as Apion. As befits a book that is frequently informed by recent British political history, the chapter concludes by underlining the importance attached by Justinian in his legislation to 'spin' and presentation, portraying himself both as a Roman conqueror and as God's agent.

Chapter 7, 'Hagia Sophia: Ideology in Stone – a Case Study', emphasises how the construction of this church after the Nika riots allowed the emperor to surpass Anicia Juliana's achievement in her recently built church of St Polyeuktos. He stresses the vast resources poured into the enterprise, again in an effort to impress upon all who visited it the link between the emperor and God, a connection strengthened by the emperor's role in the liturgy. The conclusion draws these threads together, offering a downbeat assessment of the position of the empire in the sixth century, though acknowledging that it had sufficient strength to survive for centuries longer. The new Christian autocracy had thus succeeded in putting into place a new, unifying ideology that held the empire together.

It is difficult to do justice to such a multifaceted book. Perhaps what emerges most clearly from it is the depth of B.'s thinking on, and enthusiasm for, the subject: it is clearly the product of lengthy reflection and interaction with students. There are occasional slips (e.g. p. 120, for Photius read Phocas) and, more seriously, odd gaps in its bibliography: in the case of primary sources, B. cites the now long superseded Bonn edition of Malalas and the equally superannuated *FHG* edition of John of Antioch; he is also apparently unaware of the new Budé edition of John the Lydian's *De Magistratibus*. Among secondary works, it is surprising to find no reference to T.E. Gregory, *Vox Populi* (1979), to G. Dagron, *L'hippodrome de Constantinople* (2011) or to P. Blaudeau, *Alexandrie et Constantinople* (2006), an important recent discussion of Evagrius and of ecclesiastical politics; recent books by E. Watts on Alexandria deserve mention, likewise the two biographies of the Emperor Anastasius (by F. Haarer [2006] and M. Meier [2009]). Important

discussions on relations between the emperor and the elite by G. Cecconi (in *AnTard* 13 [2005], 281–305) and H. Börm (‘Herrscher und Eliten in der Spätantike’ in idem and J. Wiesehöfer [edd.], *Commutatio et Contentio* [2010], pp. 159–98) would also have been relevant. One misses reference to D. Misiou’s wide-ranging article on the Blues and Justinian (in C. Maltezos [ed.], *Η καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο* [1989], pp. 43–73), which links together many of the themes treated by B. – factions, the church, Justinianic ideology and Hagia Sophia – and to the work of A. Chekalova on the factions. For all this, however, the book boasts a wealth of bibliographical references to valuable works of theory, not to mention to philosophers such as Hume and Wittgenstein, and is informed by a breadth of vision and clarity of thought that will ensure an enduring popularity.

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THE CULTURE OF LATE ANTIQUITY

BRASSE (D.), DELIYANNIS (D.), WATTS (E.) (edd.) *Shifting Cultural Frontiers in Late Antiquity*. Pp. xii + 286, ills, map. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Cased, £65. ISBN: 978-1-4094-4149-6.

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The fairly recent boom of interest in Late Antiquity shows no sign of abating, and this volume sheds light on both the fluidity and the rich complexity of the culture of that period. Such works are needed both to satisfy the needs of historians studying society and culture in their own right, and to inform the more clearly delineated political and dynastic histories. This collection is based upon papers delivered at the eighth biennial conference of the same name held in Bloomington, Indiana in April 2009. Readers will encounter much material which will not be comfortably familiar, and some which is examined from a different perspective. The work is a handsomely bound hardcover, well supported by illustrations and maps, but sadly, constructed with a glued binding. The editing is generally well done, although the discontinuity between references to the ‘Caucasus Mountains’ in the text and maps, and ‘Causasus Mountains’ in the table of contents, chapter title and page header is rather distracting. The volume is divided into five sections containing twenty chapters related to the frontiers of language, social class, literature, material and popular culture, and geography.

The first four chapters explore the idea of the East as a ‘Shared Intellectual Space’. D. Michelson explores the cultural and linguistic boundaries of Greek and Syriac, focusing on Philoxenus of Mabbug’s ambivalence towards translation as an effort to assimilate Syriac readers into a Greek thought-world. In Chapter 2, the hymns of Ephrem of Nisibius are examined through the lens of feminist ‘abjection’ theory by E. Muehlberger. K. Gibbons argues for an atypically nuanced use of cultural and ethnic stereotypes in the hands of the Christian writer Bardasian of Edessa (A.D. 154–222). Last, A. Kreps discusses the ‘earth people’ of Israel in the differing perspectives of Jews and Romans, arguing for a convergence of meaning with the term ‘pagan’ following the Christianisation of the Empire.

The next part, ‘High and Low Culture Negotiation’, comprises four chapters looking at social issues and class interactions. H. Drake examines the legend of the finding of the