

In conclusion, D. offers a balanced, accessible, and integrated account of the Greek and Roman historians, and the volume as a whole achieves a great deal in a remarkably compact format. It should certainly serve to stimulate productive discussion amongst students who are relatively new to the genre of ancient historiography.

University College London

RHIANNON ASH

LATE-ANTIQUÉ HUMOUR

G. HALSALL (ed.): *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Pp. xiv + 208. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cased, £37.50/US\$50. ISBN: 0-521-81116-3.

In 1977, Keith Thomas still found it necessary to defend the proposition that the study of humour and laughter was an appropriate theme for historical enquiry. Nowadays, most researchers in this field no longer feel the need for apologies. This collection of eight essays, edited by medievalist Guy Halsall of Birkbeck College, London, forms a notable exception in this. In his introduction, H. notices the scarcity of studies on humour for the late antique and early medieval periods in Europe. As one of the main reasons for this scantiness, he refers once more to a supposed disdain for such an unserious subject. His second reason seems a better one. In contrast with the eastern part of the Roman empire, there is no abundance of humour in the literary remains of the west. As Jacques Le Goff put it: 'from the fourth to the tenth century the monastic model prevails, a period of repressed and stifled laughter'. Indeed, the author of the first essay, Danuta Shanzer, had to do her utmost to discover some possible attempts at humour in the early medieval texts. Even regarding these few discoveries, she cannot be absolutely sure that they were meant to raise laughter. She rightly states that the well-known *Ioca Monachorum* might be no more than a collection of monastic games instead of jokes. The word *ludus*, indeed, was not popular any more after the abolition of the Games by emperor Theodosius the Great, and was usually replaced by the term *iocus*, as Andrea Nuti explains in an elaborate study on these words. Shanzer's discussion of possibly humorous passages in hagiographical writings provides the reader with some interesting material, but on the whole the article is no more than a quick survey of literary passages in which she tries to establish a few continuities and many discontinuities with ancient Roman humour.

More closely related to the present discourse on humour and laughter is the essay of John Haldon on Byzantium. Reflecting on the functions that are usually ascribed to humour, such as promoting social cohesion and intimacy, or procuring an outlet for negative emotions, he recognizes these in the humour of the Byzantines. Notwithstanding the tendency of the Church to suppress spiritual levity, he observes a certain continuity of the many forms that existed in antiquity. Deformity, for instance, was still a regular cause for laughter, as was the presumed greed and incompetence of doctors. His description of the often very aggressive character of Christian laughter recalls the remarks of Tertullian and Lactantius about the final joy that good Christians will have at the Last Judgement looking at the sufferings of sinners. Haldon is a little repetitive by emphasizing too often the obvious statement that social values embedded and reflected in particular forms of Byzantine behaviour can be revealed by looking at the humour of that period, but all in all, it is an interesting essay.

Mark Humphries writes about jokes on inebriety in connection with attacks on

undeserved leadership in the late Roman world. Any emperor who showed loss of self-restraint was considered to be deficient in imperial virtues, so Humphries describes various attacks of Christian authors on enemies of Constantine who are accused of lack of decorum, while someone like Julian, on the contrary, blames Constantine himself for exceeding the just measures. Informative and readable as the article may be, it does not throw much light on the possible differences between humour, ridicule, and vituperation. High rank had a particularly comic value in the Ancient World. Julian might have exploited this in a comic approach, while that is harder to believe of Lactantius.

H.'s essay, on late antiquity as well, deals with the comic device of incongruity applied to images of barbarians versus those of civilized people. He realizes, of course, that description of incongruity is not always done with comic intent, so he looks for helpful cues. He convincingly argues about the intentionally funny remarks of Sidonius, but is less sure in the case of Ammianus, and he presents an interesting discussion from the same point of view of the work of Procopius, arguing against the serious interpretation of Averil Cameron. He concludes that in the late Roman period there is a lot of comic playing with accepted stereotypes of, and attitudes towards, barbarians. To him, these jokes originated from insecurity in a fast-changing world and were meant to enhance the teller's own cultural identity.

Cues for humour are central too in the article of Ross Balzaretto, about the tenth-century author Liutprand of Cremona. Liutprand, obviously, was an exception at the Ottonian court being so crudely and intentionally humorous.

The last three essays, by Matthew Innes, Martha Bayless, and Paul Kershaw, deal with humour in the Carolingian world. They seem to confirm its scarcity. The extensive and interesting discussion of the riddles of Alcuin by Bayless does not give any certainty to humorous intent, any more than the riddles of the *ioca monachorum* do. The ninth-century author Notker the Stammerer is one of the very few contemporaries who seems to appreciate the central relationship between humour and humanity, but he too praises the self-restraint of Louis the Pious, who never laughed—not even at the occasion of special feasts. Innes rightly analyses this attitude in the light of contemporary cultural codes. Kershaw considers Notker a counterpoint and a variation on the more solemn themes of other Carolingian authors.

The articles are preceded by a good and clear introduction by H. Although the book, or some of the articles, does not offer very much at a theoretical level, at a documentary level it is a very interesting and worthy contribution to the study of the history of humour.

Erasmus University

PAUL SCHULTEN

AUERBACH'S *MIMESIS* FIFTY YEARS ON

E. AUERBACH: *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Fiftieth Anniversary edition. Translated by W. R. Trask. With a new introduction by E. W. Said. Pp. xxxii + 579. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003 (first published in German 1946; first English edition 1953). Paper, £12.95. ISBN: 0-691-11336-X.

The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, the subtitle of Auerbach's *Mimesis* (first published in German in 1946, and translated into English in 1953),

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