

the Council of Carthage in A.D. 411; ch. 13 ('Athletes of Death') investigates the necessary reappraisal of ideas of martyrdom in the landscape of Constantinian North Africa; chs 14 ('Bad Boys') and 15 ('Men of Blood') consider the identity and activities of Catholic and dissident enforcers of violence, primarily the controversial rôle taken by the Circumcellions; ch. 16 ('Divine Winds') discusses the practice of self-murder as a manifestation of dissident protest during the period, and the theological problems which suicide raised for commentators; ch. 17 ('So What?') serves as a conclusion by way of setting North African sectarianism of the fourth and fifth centuries in the context of events surrounding the demise of the Western Empire.

*Sacred Violence* is an enormous, humane work of monumental importance for which S. should rightly receive many accolades. It is written with a verve and alacrity which given its length, is a remarkable achievement. Among readers it is likely to divide opinion purely as a result of its organizational structure which is somewhat eccentric: it is hoped that future editions will include a revised introduction that — at the very least — will offer a summary of the contents of individual chapters.

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J. C. MAGALHÃES DE OLIVEIRA, *POTESTAS POPULI: PARTICIPATION POPULAIRE ET ACTION COLLECTIVE DANS LES VILLES DE L'AFRIQUE ROMAINE TARDIVE (VERS 300-430 APR. J.-C.)* (Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité tardive 24). Turnhout: Brepols, 2012. Pp. 375, illus. ISBN 97825035466469. €75.00.

É. REBILLARD, *CHRISTIANS AND THEIR MANY IDENTITIES IN LATE ANTIQUITY, NORTH AFRICA, 200-450 CE*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2012. Pp. ix + 134. ISBN 9780801451423. £30.95/US\$49.95.

Groups have always formed the building blocks for late antique history. The characteristics, motives and actions of social groups, often arranged as opposing pairs, remain the first resort for students of the period. Together, the two books under review — which both consider (predominantly Christian) group formation in late Roman Africa — act as a powerful reminder that the creation of such social collectives was no small matter. Neither the cohesion of these groups nor their hold on the everyday lives of the individuals who made up late antique society can be taken for granted.

In *Potestas populi*, Julio César Magalhães de Oliveira puts forward a convincing central thesis: that the urban *plebes* in the cities of late Roman Africa had greater social independence and political influence than has hitherto been appreciated. In contrast to studies which have characterized the urban masses as subordinate to, or controlled by, élite patrons (especially Christian bishops), M. argues that sub-élite individuals had their own socio-economic and political agency. Through collective action, the urban populace could make its voice heard.

Part I patiently lays out the foundations of this argument. Through discussions of ancient and modern theoretical models of sub-élite social composition (ch. 1), the archaeology of working environments (ch. 2) and low-status housing (ch. 3) in North African cities, and the places, occasions and institutions which provided opportunities for sub-élite sociability (ch. 4), M. demonstrates how horizontal ties of solidarity could have formed between members of the urban populace. In this context, his discussions of the proximity and quotidian professional interdependence of artisans in chs 2 and 3 are particularly persuasive. These social connections — often fostered in locations like the circus and the basilica which encouraged popular co-ordination and acclamation (139–55) — could then be mobilized for collective action.

M. then provides close readings of a series of individual episodes of mass mobilization. In Part II, he discusses popular involvement in a series of episcopal elections and priestly ordinations: Silvanus at Cirta (ch. 5); Augustine and Pinianus at Hippo Regius (ch. 6); Honorius at Caesarea and Augustine's nominated successor Eraclius at Hippo (ch. 7). He neatly analyses the dynamics of the crowds and the divergent (possible) motives of the various players: the back-and-forth between Augustine and his congregants as the latter sought the forcible ordination of the super-rich senatorial drop-out Pinianus is particularly well-handled (187–204). M. also nicely captures the dangerous moment where Augustine's congregation went too far in acclaiming Eraclius, modifying their chanting to demand that he should be made bishop immediately (220–2). Part III turns to

episodes of urban violence: the removal of a freshly re-gilded beard from a statue of Hercules at Carthage and popular opposition to the suspiciously opportunistic conversion of a civic notable in its aftermath, both dated to June 401 (ch. 8); the riots following civic festivities at Calama in June 408 (ch. 9); and the lynching of a corrupt official in Hippo Regius in 412 (ch. 10). M. repeatedly stresses that these were not the random actions of unruly mobs. Instead, he suggests, they were attempts to right wrongs and procure a form of justice when the authorities were unwilling to act and 'les mécanismes normaux de repression' were suspended (269). His overall picture of an urban populace attuned to contemporary means of legitimizing political action chimes with Leslie Dossey's recent work on the rural communities of late Roman Africa in her *Peasant and Empire* (2010). In *Potestas populi*, the urban masses become active participants in the political culture of Late Antiquity.

From M.'s book, the mobilization of a group emerges as a complicated process, requiring the basic scaffolding of social connections, proximate causes tied to specific events or motives, and a social and political climate favourable to collective action. In *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity*, Éric Rebillard goes much further in problematizing group formation in late Roman Africa. R. stridently critiques the widespread scholarly tendency to assume that 'Christians' (and, for that matter, 'pagans') represented an identifiable group in late Roman society. R. stresses that religious affiliation was only one facet of these individuals' identities and did not translate automatically into participation within the 'internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups' (2) generally presumed by historical analysis. The vast array of other rôles and affiliations Christians and pagans in Africa possessed both implicated them in normal patterns of social relations with one another (before and after Constantine's conversion) and meant that their 'Christianness' or 'paganness' was not always important to them, or to those with whom they interacted. In the light of extensive recent research on religious identity and particularly Christianity and paganism in Late Antiquity (not least Alan Cameron's monumental *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011)), these conclusions may not seem so startlingly new. The real value of R.'s book comes in his succinct summary of recent theoretical approaches to identity, ethnicity and groups. In his introduction, R. uses this work to develop a superlative and widely-applicable framework for the study of religious (and other) identities.

In chapters on the works of Tertullian (ch. 1) and Augustine (ch. 3), R. applies these theoretical approaches to African Christianity with an admirable consistency. R. systematically demonstrates the paucity of external markers which would identify someone as a Christian either c. A.D. 200 or c. A.D. 400 (12–20, 67–70). He then uses Tertullian and Augustine's refutations of defences of (supposedly) non-Christian practices from within their Christian communities to identify the alternative forms of social 'logic' which influenced individual Christians (20–31, 70–85). R. stresses their ability to justify their actions on Christian terms, in particular through appeals to Scripture ('scriptural legalism': 21–2, 70–1). Nonetheless, he rightly notes that this does not necessarily mean that they would have seen those actions as problematic and requiring justification, had they not been called upon by Tertullian or Augustine to do so. Both of these insights lead to a convincing overarching conclusion: despite the best efforts of their clerics, Christians in late Roman Africa rarely acted in society as a coherent group.

Both R. and M. seek commendably to avoid privileging the perspectives of élite authors like Christian bishops when describing social experiences. They do not always find sufficient support for this project. R.'s second chapter, on Christian identity during the 'persecutions' of the long third century, is a case in point. His conclusion — the threat to Christians and their cohesion as a group at this time should not be exaggerated (59–60) — is sound. Yet it does not seem to flow naturally from the analyses of various martyr *acta* which precede it. Even if debates over dates of composition are put to one side, R. still faces the problem that the relationship of these idealized descriptions of Christian individuals and groups to any third-century social reality or genuine alternative Christian responses to imperial religious decrees is extremely dubious. M. confronts similar difficulties in some of his attempts to avoid writing history *de haut en bas*. The ability of a wily rhetorical operator like Augustine to recast events for his own purposes is rather underplayed (e.g. in the discussion of the religiously 'pagan' character of the procession at Calama (254–61)). More fundamentally, the extent to which Augustine's later epistolary descriptions of crowds can be used as a guide to their actual composition and motives might be questioned. Both authors find safer ground when reading Augustine's sermons: in his homiletic 'dialogues with the crowd', they can more justifiably locate the voice of the people as it rings in his ears.

Such concerns should not detract from the achievement of both scholars. They succeed in writing histories which are theoretically engaged without becoming unworkably abstracted, and which

discuss cultural identities without neglecting their practical social implications. Future research might profitably explore the tensions between these complementary visions of collective action and individual diversity within Christian communities (compare *Christians*, 86–91 with *Potestas Populi*, 227–74). The dynamics of other groups in late antique society are also long overdue for similar treatment. These two thoughtful works should give scholars ample incentive to reconsider the wisdom of crowds.

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J. P. CONANT, *STAYING ROMAN. CONQUEST AND IDENTITY IN AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN, 439–700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 438, 5 figs, 5 maps. ISBN 9780521196970. £60.00.

As its title suggests, this fine book is a counterpoint of sorts to Greg Woolf's study *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (2000). Where Woolf examined the means by which a shared sense of 'Romanness' spread through the Western provinces, Jonathan Conant turns his attention to the end of the Western Empire, and the different means by which groups and individuals shaped their identities in response to a world that was changing around them. C.'s focus upon Africa is significant: as he notes, the area underwent multiple political and social convulsions in the centuries after Augustine's death. Equally the unique, varied (and under-utilized) source-base for fifth-, sixth- and seventh-century North Africa provides a platform for a compelling study of 'Roman' identity in its final, Western guises.

The first chapter, 'The Legitimation of Vandal Power', offers a stimulating overview of the century or so of Vandal rule within North Africa, and the means by which this group established its position in the eyes of the outside world. This was no merely cosmetic exercise; as a tiny military aristocracy in a rich and well-functioning province, the Vandals had much to lose if they failed to position themselves appropriately at the head of their African kingdom. Equally important, however, was the alacrity with which the Vandals within Africa assumed the cultural trappings of the local élites, from their taste for hunting and aristocratic dress to cultural patronage in both poetry and architecture. C. is more confident than some recent commentators that 'Vandal' and 'Roman' identities remained separate in this period, and markers of distinction certainly existed, most obviously in naming patterns, but the chapter represents an important contribution to developing scholarship on the Vandals.

Chs 2 and 3, 'Flight and Communications' and 'The Old Ruling Class under the Vandals', deal in different ways with the experiences of the existing inhabitants of coastal North Africa, and their interactions both with the Vandal aristocracy, and with the wider world. This is approached in a number of ways. A discussion of anecdotal evidence for travel from and around North Africa suggests that the region was well-connected with the wider Mediterranean throughout this period. Equally illuminating, is C.'s study of the onomastic evidence, culled from the epigraphy, literary texts and the published prosopographies of the period. This is a challenging approach, given the difficulties of the source base, but C.'s identification of a recognizable North African namestock allows him to state with some confidence that the aristocracy of the region remained distinctly 'African', even as they maintained their cultural and material connections with the wider world. C. also discusses the ways in which these Romano-Africans interacted with the Vandals, examining in particular the religious tensions between *Homoian* and *Homoousian* Christians, which emerged one or two generations after the initial settlement around Carthage: this is a particular highlight of the study.

C. turns to the Byzantine occupation of North Africa in chs 4 'New Rome, New Romans' and 6 'The Dilemma of Dissent'. One of the problems faced in dealing with Byzantine Africa is the uneven nature of the evidence. Nevertheless, C. demonstrates that, while prominent military and administrative positions tend to have been dominated by outsiders, lower posts remained open, and regional aristocracies proved open to engagement with the new hierarchy: C. cautiously suggests that the distinct rise in Greek personal names in Africa from the middle of the sixth century may have reflected local tastes, as much as a population influx. Rather more important is his demolition of the long-standing view of Africa as an essentially parochial region during the Byzantine occupation. In ch. 6, C. demonstrates that the primary concern of the African hierarchy