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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recognized, but at first sight this seems a less obvious question to ask about the literally down-to-earth Romans; but in fact, a people that called the Mediterranean its own could not avoid encountering islands and thinking about them, a process that left traces in Roman literature.

B. starts with the basic definition of islands, which includes ancient etymology. 'Insulae dictae quod in salo sint' (Isid. *Orig*. 14.6.1) is the epigraph for the first chapter, and the image dominates much of the book. The second chapter explores boundaries of islands, namely different meanings of an island's coastline, but also more abstract matters of definition, such as the ill-defined difference between island and peninsula. The idea that islands, unlike continents, have clearly defined boundaries leads on to the next chapters that consider islands within descriptions of the wider world and the mythical geography of 'the blessed islands'. Thoughts on the formation of islands are at the centre of B.'s next chapter: again he leads the reader from ancient (and modern) observations of natural phenomena to more abstract interpretation, such as thoughts on the life cycle of islands.

The study proceeds with three important aspects of the ancient island image that will inform the rest of the book: the island as stronghold, refuge, and hide-out, and, a rather disparate group that culminates in a parallel between islands and ships, vagrant islands. The next chapters explore islands as places of imprisonment, with a special focus on Corsica, where Seneca was exiled. The book ends with Christian attitudes towards islands: places of refuge and desert islands only fit for prisoners become places of grace where monastic communities or eremites settle. Christian writers exploited the symbolic value of islands, and B. shows how in their texts a long tradition of insular symbolism mingles with new ideas which are influenced by the new Christian use of islands as well as thoughts derived from the biblical tradition.

This book is enjoyable and B. is not only able to make his reader follow the ancient authors through a wealth of sometimes conflicting ideas, he also opens up many avenues for further thought. After the chapters in which islands had mainly been dealt with as in the sea, it came as a surprise that later chapters were often focusing on 'inland' islands—floating islands in lakes, fortresses in rivers, and the like. This illustrates the difficulties with the definition of the term island; the question remains: what is an island, what is insular, and what invites comparisons with islands?

One aspect of insularity that remains in the background is the fact that islands were in fact often hubs of communication—just the opposite of the inaccessible places so prominent in B.'s study. Is this due to the ancient sources or did widely held scholarly views (see P. Horden, N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* [Oxford, 2000]) influence the choice of themes discussed? As it is, the story of the exile on Cercina who has his stake in the trade between Africa and Italy (p. 146, Tac. *Ann*. 4.13.3) seems strangely out of place. The rôle of islands as, and within, provinces may also have deserved further study: the thought appears in the introduction but is never followed up. The greatest weakness of this book is its poor presentation, especially where quotes in foreign languages (mostly Latin and French) are inserted in the text without anything to set them apart. B. also leaves us without a bibliography: all references are given in full in the notes following each chapter. There is an index of modern authors' names: this makes the lack of a 'proper' index even more obvious and it is definitely not sufficient as a bibliography.

All these points, however, should not diminish the merit of this work: B.'s study offers an interesting and refreshing way of looking at Roman literature, and the range of texts it includes is impressive. It is noteworthy that B. continues where many studies would stop: his treatment of Christian texts illustrates continuity and change in an interesting way, especially because he can show connections with much of the material discussed before. In this way he presents a pleasantly rounded picture of what some Romans thought of islands.

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L. Di Paola: *Viaggi, trasporti e istituzioni. Studi sul cursus publicus.* Pp. 163. Messina: Di. Sc. A. M., 1999. Paper, L. 48,000. ISBN: 88-8268-099-1.

This short work studies particular issues helpful for understanding the relation between the *cursus publicus* and power (pp. 19f.). A full outline of the history and organization of the *cursus publicus* is not intended. D. defines (p. 15) the *cursus publicus* as a state system for land transport (although several sources show the use of ships), which combines postal and transport services. This reflects a traditional view of the *cursus publicus*, recently revised as the Roman state's

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