

emergence of Christian elements. K. shows that despite a development towards the 'imperator Christianissimus', emperors after Constantine retain elements of divinity in their ideology and court ceremonial. Traditional and Christian imperial ideology are to some extent compatible: Theodosius' epithet 'divus', for example, can be interpreted by Christians as merely implying an exalted position of the emperor. K. insists, however (against, for example, N. McLynn), that some bishops like Ambrose do take exception to the sacral elements of late Roman imperial ideology and actively attempt to change them.

Overall, K.'s study gives an interesting and detailed descriptive account of the development of late Roman imperial ideology, but—due to its survey character—provides relatively little analytical discussion of the political, social, or economic motivations of continuity and change in the image of the emperor.

*Wolfson College, Cambridge*

HARTMUT ZICHE

### A COMPACT CONSTANTINE

A. MARCONE: *Costantino il Grande*. (Biblioteca Essenziale Laterza 30.) Pp. viii + 142. Rome and Bari: Editori Laterza, 2000. Paper, €8.26. ISBN: 88-420-5966-8.

Arnaldo Marcone deserves considerable praise. To write a readable, concise, and sensible biography of the emperor Constantine in comfortably under 30,000 words is itself a signal achievement. It deserves both praise and admiration. And like M.'s account, his Constantine is clear-thinking, reasonable, and straightforward.

M. steers a careful and nicely judged historiographical course. There is an ever-present risk that a 'no nonsense' Constantine will veer towards either the knowingly cynical politician of Hal Drake (*Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* [Baltimore, 2000]) or the slightly bewildered but basically well intentioned monarch of A. H. M. Jones (*Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* [London, 1972]). M. skilfully avoids both these Constantines. His is more charmingly pragmatic. An emperor who moves steadily and assuredly towards the re-unification of the Roman Empire, towards Christianity, and through the major events of his reign (the Donatist dispute, the war against Licinius, the Council of Nicaea, the foundation of Constantinople). Here is a hard-working military man always on the look out for the workable compromise, but one also capable of genuine religious sentiment.

M.'s Constantine also shies away from extremes. Hostile accounts are to be handled with care. The claim of the late fifth-century historian and pagan sympathizer Zosimus (2.29.3) that Constantine converted to Christianity in an attempt to clear his conscience after ordering the death of his son Crispus and wife Fausta (who were alleged to be lovers) is dismissed as 'un'invenzione maligna' (p. 88). Nor is Constantine to be seen as an emperor peculiarly susceptible to divine visions: either of Apollo or of Christ. Such accounts are to be put firmly in their literary and ideological contexts. 'Tanto le visioni quanto i segni celesti sono peraltro del tutto compatibili con lo spirito del tempo, che richiedeva un imperatore protetto e ispirato dall'alto' (p. 42). The ecstatic, Damascene vision of a cross in the sky (as brilliantly narrated in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* 1.28–32) is replaced by a more decorous and—perhaps to modern readers—more attractive expression of belief. 'Costantino aveva una sua sensibilità religiosa che si nutriva di presagi e di emozioni' (p. 42).

And this is undoubtedly and attractively reasonable. But for all M.'s muting of the

more strident of Christian triumphalist strains, much of Eusebius' Constantine still remains. It is Eusebius whose courtly panegyrics are presented as giving ideological voice to Constantine's religious revolution: 'Abbandonato completamente il sistema tetrarchico del "restauratore" Diocleziano, il "rivoluzionario" Costantino poneva il suo governo sotto il segno del Dio dei cristiani' (p. 82). This proclamation of such a significant break sits rather uncomfortably with M.'s wider aim to emphasize Constantine's firm grounding in the tetrarchy. (Significantly, one-third of M.'s book deals with Constantine before 312.) It is perhaps unsurprising that the bibliography (p. 117) recommends one of the the most recent enthusiasts for a Constantinian revolution, T. G. Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (Scranton, 1996), reviewed in *CR* 49 (1999), 492–4, rather than J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979), esp. pp. 235–44, with his brilliantly provocative argument for a close relationship between Diocletian's and Constantine's religious ideologies.

Certainly, Eusebius is difficult to shake off. Like the *Life of Constantine*, the latter part of M.'s *Costantino* is dominated by religion. Substantial extracts from Eusebius are neatly integrated into M.'s own account. As in the *Life of Constantine* (4.1–4), other reforms—fiscal, administrative, economic—are passed over in a couple of pages (pp. 97–8). Of course, this may be a correct reflection of Constantine's own priorities. But it also underlines a pressing dilemma: to what extent a modern account of Constantine is condemned—by the simple and laudable virtue of a close reliance on contemporary sources—to follow the concerns and contours of Eusebius' *Life*? M. has perhaps most successfully broken free in the detail: he is always careful to avoid Eusebius' more extravagant claims. His Constantine remains a reasonable man with a prudently moderate attitude towards Christianity. Even so, the choice of material, and indeed the very shape and emphases of M.'s elegantly compact narrative, are in danger of making his *Life of Constantine* seem at times closer than he might have wished to being read as a nearly new Eusebius.

*Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*

CHRISTOPHER KELLY

## THE EMPEROR VALENS

N. LENSKI: *Failure of Empire. Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century A.D.* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 34.) Pp. xix + 454, maps, ills. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002. Cased, US\$75/£52. ISBN: 0-520-23332-8.

It is easy to dismiss Valens as the butt of a foolhardy witticism (Amm. 26.4.1), and, as L. admits, impossible to write a book about him without saying much about Valentinian and something about Gratian too. This he duly does, and his contribution will be of great value to all who study the period.

After a brief survey of the sources, L. deals with family background (bringing out well the differences between the brothers) and their accession to the purple. On the question of power-sharing, he underestimates Valentinian's control over his troops, but is sensible on the appointment of Valens as Augustus, not Caesar, and points out that the division of territory gave Valentinian twice as much as his brother. The treatment of the propaganda of concord and fraternal equality is good, with apt use of coins and

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