

Finally, Wilhelm Gräß underscores the distinctiveness of Augustine. His prototypically modern concern with self-awareness construes the individual as a conscious being that flourishes in the context of the transcendent.

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R. DONCIU, *L'EMPEREUR MAXENCE* (Munera. Studi storici sulla tarda antichità 34). Bari: Edipuglia, 2012. Pp. 264, illus. ISBN 9788872286623. €40.00.

C. PANELLA (ED.), *I SEGNI DEL POTERE. REALTÀ E IMMAGINARIO DELLA SOVRANITÀ NELLA ROMA IMPERIALE* (Bibliotheca archaeologica 24). Bari: Edipuglia, 2011. Pp. 300, illus. ISBN 9788872886166. €60.00.

'L'histoire a laissé le règne de Maxence dans l'ombre de celui de Constantin'. So says Ramiro Donciu (10), a point obvious to anyone observing the torrent of Constantiniana pouring across the scholarly landscape in the last decade of repeated seventeen-hundred-year anniversaries from the accession (2006) to the 'Edict of Milan' (2013), justifying exhibitions, conferences, monographs, companions and catalogues. Other rulers of the period are left trampled in the dust of history, or at best drowning in a Rubens tapestry. While understandable given the long-term consequences of Constantine's reign, there is virtue in trying to see the other princes on their own terms without too much hindsight. There is, in fact, some recent Maxentian bibliography. Aside from books on his iconic surviving buildings in Rome, there is a short monograph in English (M. Cullhed, *Conservator Urbis Suae* (1994)), a beautifully illustrated, but also scholarly, coffee-table book (H. Leppin and H. Ziemsen, *Maxentius. Der letzte Kaiser in Rom* (2007)), plus a superb new book on his coinage (V. Drost, *Le monnayage de Maxence* (2013)). D., however, in turning a concentrated focus upon Maxentius, has produced by far the most detailed account of Maxentius' life and reign, in this revised version of his 2010 University of Bucharest doctoral thesis. Despite the fact that the evidence for the politics of this period remains heavily dependent upon limited literary material, much of it branded by Constantine's victory, and almost universally hostile to Maxentius, D. believes that a reassessment of Maxentius and his place in the tetrarchic era is possible. The book is divided into eight chapters: an introduction (1), a survey of sources (2), the early life (3), the usurpation (4), relations with the tetrarchs (5), his government (6), his fall (7), Constantine's engagement with his legacy (8).

This unexceptional structure looks a reasonable means to examine the key issues in any study of Maxentius: the light his position casts on the rôle of heredity within Diocletian's tetrarchic system; the problems he faced as a ruler of contested legitimacy based in Rome. Given the foundering of the tetrarchic experiment upon the frustrated ambitions of sidelined dynasts, and Rome's eclipse as a functioning capital (*pace* some revived significance in the dying decades of the western empire), these are important matters. But in fact everything becomes coloured throughout by a crucial interpretation relating to the third major issue of the age: the Christian revolution. For D. argues that Maxentius' exclusion from the succession in 305 was the result of his Christianity, demonstrated by his refusal to perform *adoratio* to his hostile father-in-law, Galerius (54–6). D. is not the first scholar to see Maxentius as Christian (his most emphatic predecessor is D. de Decker, *Byzantion* 38 (1968), 472–572), but this is the most sustained attempt to weave it through his entire life and reign. Scholars generally accept Maxentius' lack of hostility to Christianity, sufficient alone to alienate Galerius. But his explicit Christianity rests upon highly contested evidence, which D. always reads unsubtly to its utmost in support of his argument, discounting for anti-Maxentian prejudice whenever it suits. Thus the key passage in which the partisan Eusebius talks of Maxentius initially feigning Christianity (*HE* 8.14.1) is read as clear evidence of genuine adherence (54–5). Further, Maxentius' Christianity is portrayed as hereditary (56), deriving from his mother, the Syrian Eutropia, considered Christian by origin on the basis of her later activity under Constantine as reported via Eusebius (*VC* 3.52). However, given the carnage of her family and her own public humiliation at the hands of Constantine, Eutropia's Christianity seems rather a sensible refuge and survival strategy — a consequence of Constantine's conversion, rather than a mirror of Helena. Further, D. presumes by a bold over-reading of Lactantius (*De*

*Mort. Pers.* 15.1) the Christianity of Prisca and Valeria (Diocletian's wife and daughter). While the importance of imperial women to the developing relations with the Church should not be under-estimated (for example, J. Harries in C. Harrison, C. Humfress and I. Sandwell (eds), *Being Christian in Late Antiquity* (2014), 197–214), excessive retrojection is unwarranted, turning a literary trope into a mirage in which every imperial woman is in the vanguard of Christian advance.

D.'s Christian Maxentius, therefore, runs through the remainder of the book, rendering much judgement and analysis untenable for anyone not invested in the basic premise. For instance, Rome, despite reeling from persecution and apostasy, is Maxentius' ideal capital because of its Christian past and present (55, 94). Spain is assigned to Maxentius, so that it is under his aegis that the Council of Elvira is held, later resulting in the flight of Hosius of Corduba to the territory of Constantine (69–71). The urban prefect is replaced in April 308, because he was too close to the recently deposed pope, rather than the recently flown Maximian (147). The location of the Maxentian complex on the Via Appia is chosen because of its proximity to Christian cult sites (138). Finally, the addition of the Christogram (so D.) to the shields of Constantine's soldiers before the Milvian Bridge is a symbol addressed not to his own army, but to Maxentius' Christian forces (179–80).

Although anti-Maxentian distortions are inevitable in the written sources, D.'s relentless reading against the grain becomes wearily polemical. Further, the main text often elides contentious matters by relegating discussion to overburdened footnotes. Thus too much is not sufficiently addressed, especially where there is feedback reverberating between contentious interpretations of Constantine and uncertain interpretations of Maxentius. For instance, D. presumes that the 'Edict of Milan' was an empire-wide measure (195–6), responding to Maxentius' pro-Christian acts. This fails to penetrate the myth of the edict or to engage with its nature and the complexities of uneven toleration and restitution over the preceding years, to which T. D. Barnes has rightly drawn attention (*Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire* (2011), 93–7). Although D. wants to reread Maxentius, this requires a more subtle unpicking of Constantine in order to convince. However, while this is not a book to introduce the uninitiated to the minefield of the tetrarchic period, it should serve to stimulate the more experienced to revisit, even if not ultimately revise, any over-comfortable assumptions.

One significant recent find, which is properly discussed by D., if with a dash of novelistic fantasy (App. A3), is the imperial regalia, discovered as a set of badly corroded metal items and several solid glass spheres in 2005 on the north-eastern edge of the Palatine in Rome, just on the south side of the Via Sacra, close to the Arch of Constantine. The items have appeared in various exhibitions, including the recent one commemorating the 'Edict of Milan' at Milan and in the Colosseum (2013), but they are otherwise now on permanent display in the Palazzo Massimo in Rome. These are the subject of *I segni del potere*, a fine, well-illustrated volume, edited by Clementina Panella, which gives the most comprehensive and authoritative account of the items, their discovery, restoration and interpretation, although those in haste can go straight to the catalogue descriptions and helpful artist's reconstructions (177–98, 205–14). The finds divide into two types. One part consists of eight ornate iron lance tips, some with orichalc or traces of silk, key accoutrements for the ceremonial parade gear of the emperor's guard carrying lances gleaming golden or bearing silk pennants. The spheres form the other part, being constituent elements for three sceptres: a sphere of green glass nestling in a crown of iron and orichalc petals, which would have slotted onto a haft to make the 'little sceptre'; two gold-flecked glass spheres serving as terminals for a lost sceptre rod; and a chalcedony globe, itself perhaps topped by an eagle (although no trace was found), which would have surmounted a third sceptre. Although surviving parallels are rare (for example, the Taranto sceptre in the British Museum (37–8)), the reconstruction and interpretation above rely upon numerous suggestive depictions on coins, cameos, ivory diptychs and paintings, which help the plausible identification of form and function of both sceptres and lances (47–62, 77–122, 251–75). Thus derives the conclusion that here indeed are the only known antique Roman imperial insignia (62–72). It is noted, however, that Roman regalia were never a fixed assemblage of items, nor was their possession or transfer a prerequisite of legitimacy, even if ceremonial and costume had become more elaborate by the fourth century and anything associated with an emperor had become more numinous (13–24). The most iconic item, in fact, was the purple robe, not a sceptre, nor (yet) a diadem. The items were buried in a pit dug through an early third-century floor, but covered in debris (a worn Diocletianic coin, ARS type D) suggesting an early fourth-century deposition (125–73), so leading to the other main conclusion, that the historical context for such concealment was the need for hasty burial by supporters of the

dead Maxentius at the end of October 312, even as Constantine entered the city (72–6). Identifying archaeological finds with historical events is both seductive and hazardous. Yet, while hardly as convincing as the recent case of the bronze ship-rams from the Battle of the Aegades Islands (241 B.C.; S. Tusa and J. Royal, *JRA* 25 (2012), 7–48), I would agree with the view of the volume that Maxentius is the best candidate and his fall the best context for explaining this ceremonial apparatus and the manner of its concealment. These insignia then bring us tantalizingly close to a key turning point in Roman history.

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M. A. McEVOY, *CHILD EMPEROR RULE IN THE LATE ROMAN WEST, AD 367–455* (Oxford Classical Monographs). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 367, illus. ISBN 9780199664818. £75.00.

In this revised version of her Oxford doctoral thesis, Meaghan McEvoy presents an analysis of the phenomenon of child emperors as it manifested itself in the western half of the Roman Empire during the later fourth century and first half of the fifth century — a period during which Gratian, Valentinian II, Honorius and Valentinian III were successively proclaimed Augustus at the ages of, respectively, eight, four, ten and six. There had been child emperors previously, but never such a concentration. The timing of the trend is surprising: why did it become acceptable to have emperors who were minors in an era when active military leadership had become a desideratum of imperial rank, and how did they manage to remain in office for increasingly lengthy periods at the same time as the Western Empire became increasingly prone to upheaval? When the subject is presented in these terms, as M. does, its inherent interest quickly becomes obvious, so it is puzzling that it has previously received only limited attention. Perhaps the perceived passivity of these child emperors has not made them seem an attractive subject for research, or indeed to require much explanation. M.'s study shows otherwise.

Largely eschewing comparanda from other societies or periods of history, M. embeds her analysis in a detailed narrative of the reigns of the relevant emperors, invoking the complexities of the period and the often intractable nature of its source material. This is very much in the style of an earlier important study of political life during (most of) the same period: John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364–425* (1975), to which M. pays homage in the opening line of her Preface when she promises, as Matthews did in his, 'to set [its subject] in its full context', as also perhaps in the title of one chapter ('The Regime of Stilicho'). Not that this influence should occasion surprise: in addition to the impressive model of scholarship provided by Matthews' book, M. was supervised by Peter Heather, originally a student of Matthews, while Matthews himself examined M.'s thesis.

Among the highlights of M.'s study is its careful investigation of how the image of the emperor, as projected above all through panegyric, was modified to accommodate the constraints imposed by under-age incumbents, with the theme of youthful promise emerging as a central refrain. Increasing emphasis was also given to the emperor's ceremonial and religious rôles, both of which were less age-dependent. The relationships of these emperors with powerful generals is an essential aspect of this subject, and M. also offers valuable analysis of this dimension, especially in her treatment of the régimes of Stilicho and Aetius. In particular, she draws out significant commonalities and variations in their situations, such as Aetius not facing a hostile eastern court (unlike Stilicho) but also lacking the advantages arising from Stilicho having been able to ensure Honorius' successive marriages to his daughters. In explaining this run of boy-emperors, M. is particularly concerned to show that it involved 'far more ... than blind dynastic loyalty' (226). She emphasizes the specific circumstances surrounding each accession and the rôle of contingency, alongside its value as a strategy for reducing factional conflict at court and the likelihood of civil war.

M. is generally a sure-footed guide through the treacherous intricacies of political life in this period. In accounting for Stilicho's dominance, however, there did seem to me a significant omission. While Aetius' control of independent military forces is rightly stressed as a crucial factor in his rise to power (245–6), I missed any equivalent recognition of the way in which his centralization of military forces in the West, as detailed in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, underpinned Stilicho's power (cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (1964), I, 174–5). I also