

able: he cites and explains evidence ranging from narrative and normative literary excerpts to items of prestigious and popular material culture, to site- and city-plans and everything in between. Those chapters more closely engaged with social history, such as those covering household, community and urban life, are full of interesting detail and offer a good introduction to such material. However, more substantial discussions of changes (or not) in experiences of poverty, of sexuality, of ethnic identity, or of climate might have been made possible by a closer focus on socio-cultural subjects at the expense of the political. Although religion does not receive a chapter of its own, religious issues suffuse the book, consistent with B.'s scepticism about the concept's usefulness as a category in its own right (following B. Nongbri, *Before Religion* (2013)). This is a good example of B.'s support for and clear explanation of the most up-to-date historiographical approaches to Late Antiquity, representing a determined attempt to displace other paradigms. Ironically, and partly because of this focus on de-centring Christian narratives, the book ends up discussing Christians and Christian material at substantial length. This comes at the expense of traditional Greco-Roman religious perspectives after the third century, with the limited exception of Neoplatonic figures. Thus Libanius is mentioned only once, without reference to his religious views; Julian 'the Apostate' likewise receives a passing mention; while Ammianus and Symmachus do not appear at all. Jewish communities and sources, however, receive some interesting and well-integrated analysis.

In keeping with the target audience and the conventions of the textbook format, many historiographical debates are simplified or explained in rather basic terms, and on other issues B. offers his own interpretation stridently. The prose is clear and engaging, and B.'s style is lively and forceful, inviting his readers to compare late antique and modern practices, and how it might feel to be involved in contemporary events. B. can, however, be overly didactic in characterising issues; he sometimes simplifies issues of complex debate for the sake of narrative clarity, when it might be better to acknowledge the viability of a number of different academic perspectives. B. can also be rather patronising to his ancient subjects. For instance, Cosmas Indicopleustes, arguing for a flat earth, is said to have been 'stuck in an unimaginatively literalist Christian worldview, one which keeps its readers bound to Scripture' (237). In fact, this particular example of exegesis (*Christian Topography* 3.51) is based on an allegorical rather than a literalist reading of Exodus, with Cosmas inferring that the earth is flat because it reflects the shape of the Tabernacle.

Although individual academic readers will thus find judgements and arguments for which they would like more proof or with which they simply disagree, clear errors of fact are rare, the most substantial being the claim that Nestorius left for Persia to proselytise after the First Council of Ephesus (165). The book is well produced and edited with few typographical errors, though Greek nouns are inconsistently given with or without accents or in the original alphabet (e.g. 23, 102, 159). Nonetheless, the book overall offers a useful and well-conceived introduction for entry-level students to Late Antiquity, and a basic aid for academics teaching the subject.

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KRISTINA SESSA, *DAILY LIFE IN LATE ANTIQUITY*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 250, illus., maps. ISBN 9780521766104. £71.99.

In ch. 2 of *Daily Life in Late Antiquity*, Kristina Sessa notes that late antique cities 'shifted into a "new normal", where ruin, reuse and renewal co-existed within a single cityscape' (53). 'Reuse and renewal' is also an apt descriptor for this excellent and wide-ranging volume, for while much will be familiar to those with knowledge of Late Antiquity and its scholarship, S. refreshes these arguments through an engaging 'lived experience' approach. By considering how various phenomena impacted the daily experience of Late Antiquity, S. makes this complex period both vivid and accessible for her readers.

For S., these readers are not those previously acquainted with Late Antiquity, but ones with a general interest and/or undergraduate students (18). S. assumes no prior knowledge even of ancient history, and throughout there are clear explanations of various aspects of late antique life,

such as a primer on social relations and some of the main religions in this period (Introduction) and the organisation of the later Roman army (ch. 4). Topics are occasionally oversimplified as a result (e.g. riots in ch. 2), while conversely some ancient sources may be a little obscure for a general reader, and endnotes and references are deliberately sparse. These decisions are justifiable, however, in a volume designed as an introduction to the topic and intended to expose readers to new sources of evidence, such as papyri archives. They are additionally offset by helpful 'Further Reading' sections at the end of the six main chapters and Introduction, enticing the interested reader to delve further independently.

Indeed, there is much to discover in this book on its own, and for students starting out on their journey into this world they could hardly choose a better initiation. A valuable Introduction tackles the usual question of 'What is Late Antiquity?', furnishes an overview of the scholarship, provides definitions of 'East' and 'West' in this period (with a useful map), and offers guidance on 'how to use this book'; the lack of a timeline for the period is a significant omission, however.

Each of the main chapters then covers a wide range of topics impacting the daily lives of late antique people within the broader scopes of rural and urban life, the household, the state, body and mind, and religion. Ch. 1, 'Rural Life', for example, examines farming practices and *coloni*, alongside climate changes and four products — grains, olives, grapes and pigs — which the reader is invited to follow from chapter to chapter. This is an appealing and clever narrative device, which in practice is unfortunately not always easy to track in later chapters. Ch. 3, 'The Household', is similarly interested in exploring beyond the anticipated topics. Thus it not only provides good discussions of marriage, children and domestic space, but also emphasises the economic importance of households to state revenue and explores a late antique 'housing boom' (and bust). Ch. 5, 'Body and Mind', meanwhile covers a range of subjects that S. considers under the 'social body' (sex, education, dress), as well as the expected 'physical body' (161). S. furthermore provides a stark and timely reminder of the deadly dangers of living in a world without access to modern medicine, especially vaccines, and expertise. Ch. 6, 'Religion in Daily Life', likewise moves beyond the usual suspects — Christianity, Judaism, paganism — to include Manichaeism in its 'four main religious systems', underlining that 'lived religion' in Late Antiquity was both 'messy' and diverse, not only across but within these systems (199).

A brief appendix on Roman time and money and a comprehensive index round out the volume; additionally throughout there are a number of mostly clear images of material culture and archaeological sites to help the reader access late antique life. In ch. 4, 'The State in Everyday Life', for example, useful overviews of taxes, *annona*-provisioning and the law sit alongside a discussion of the *cursus publicus*, the latter of which is accompanied by an image of a later copy of the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. It would have been advantageous to have this and the images of mosaics from other chapters in colour, especially as one delight of the period is the dazzling colourfulness of late antique art. Yet this decision has likely kept down costs, and the book (in its paperback form) should be applauded for its general affordability.

As well as images, S. offers a 'way into' the daily world of Late Antiquity through evocative writing. Ch. 2, 'Urban Life', is particularly expert at creating a vivid picture of bustling city streets in which inhabitants participated in trade, industry and entertainment amongst the architectural carcasses of previous eras. It is here that S. articulates the 'reuse and renewal' of cities in Late Antiquity, and throughout the volume S. positions herself with scholars who view Late Antiquity as a period of transformation. She sounds a sensible note of caution about over-optimistic assessments, however, and one of the most striking and important themes that runs through the work is the different experience lived by those in the eastern and western parts of the empire.

Late antique daily life is also made tangible and accessible through well-chosen case studies beginning every main chapter. S. builds a plausible narrative around either a 'real person or persons who lived in Late Antiquity' (19), locations (Ephesus and Brixia, ch. 2) or material culture (an inscribed lead amulet, ch. 6) and skilfully draws out the themes of each chapter from these people, places and things. The case studies therefore function individually and within the work as a whole to serve as an excellent reminder that, for every late antique superstar studied, there are any number of Aurelii Sakaones (ch. 1) and Valeriae Verecundae (ch. 5), whose lives provide similarly compelling opportunities for understanding the struggles and joys of life in Late Antiquity.

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