

from a traditional story of conflict and triumph, with the work of Alan Cameron and Neil McLynn informing this account. This is followed by a chapter on the cities of Rome and Constantinople, exploring their physical, administrative and social changes, including discussing the contentious issue of the ‘paganism’ of Roman senators.

Part II, on ‘The long fifth century’, opens with three chapters that are split on the same thematic lines as in Part I. Ch. 5 looks at political events in the West up to A.D. 455, followed by the East in the same decades before repeating this geographical division for the rest of the century. The next chapter looks at the ‘barbarians’ across the same period, including assessing the argument between Walter Goffart and Guy Halsall over the mechanisms of barbarian settlement. This pair of chapters does suffer a little from the book’s thematic division, since readers completely unfamiliar with the period may have difficulty understanding the political narrative until they have read the subsequent discussion of interactions between barbarians and Romans. In contrast, ch. 8, on Anastasius, provides an integrated account of all aspects of his reign within a clear chronological framework. The last chapter of this part of the book is a thematically-organized exploration of the western successor states, largely stressing continuity but also highlighting variations between the different kingdoms. Britain is, however, a notable absence here, as it also is from the regional survey that appears in the (otherwise excellent) subsequent chapter on cities across Late Antiquity. Ch. 11 on the economy also provides a very clear and useful introduction to this topic, with salutary advice on approaches and methodology to accompany the presentation and analysis of material, which incorporates recent re-evaluations of issues such as *coloni* and *agri deserti*. The final part of the book, on Justinian, returns to the thematic structure, although ch. 12 covers ‘secular’ policies up to the capture of Ravenna in A.D. 540, while ch. 13 deals with religious matters across his reign. This sets the stage for a final chapter that deals with the last twenty-five years of Justinian’s life, emphasizing his military problems, but giving a relatively positive assessment of his reign as a whole. This chapter also deals with the idea of the end of antiquity, not only by providing a brief account of events leading up to the Arab conquests, but also by reflecting on the new eastern, Greek-speaking, Christian conception of Roman identity that had developed.

Although its focus is mostly on political, military and religious history, this volume provides the reader with some insight into other aspects of late antique culture, as well as a survey of economic matters across this period. More importantly, it gives significant attention to the fifth-century East. Narrative histories often pay less attention to eastern affairs after the death of Theodosius I, seeing the collapse of the West as the more important story, with eastern emperors reduced to minor rôles in this drama, at least until the appearance of Justinian. In contrast, L., despite being seriously concerned with many aspects of ‘traditional’ narrative history, does not tell a simple story of ‘decline and fall’, but instead provides an account of the whole Roman world during this period. This book, like the rest of the series in which it appears, can be regarded as striving to occupy a space between brief introductions to Roman history and more detailed, multi-volume works, such as the Cambridge Ancient History. L. has certainly been successful in this endeavour, producing a very useful book that will undoubtedly find a prominent place on many university reading lists.

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doi:10.1017/S007543581400094X

B. D. SHAW, *SACRED VIOLENCE. AFRICAN CHRISTIANS AND SECTARIAN HATRED IN THE AGE OF AUGUSTINE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xx + 910, illus. ISBN 9780521196055 (bound); 9780521127257 (paper). £100.00 (bound); £40.00 (paper).

At just over nine hundred pages, Brent Shaw’s study offers a compelling and meticulous history of violence for late Roman North Africa, with a focus on the ‘sanctified violence’ of the fourth and fifth centuries. S. defines such violence as the ‘direct result of commitments and quarrels of a religious nature’ (773), and, in view of the period under discussion, the study’s inevitable cynosure is the sectarian struggle between Catholic and dissident — rightly preferred by S. to the ‘othering’ label ‘Donatist’ — Christians, which came to be the defining struggle for generations of African Christians of the time, including Augustine of Hippo. As S. makes clear from the beginning, the

rôle of Augustine and his ideas in the study have been intentionally diminished at the expense of investigating 'the specific hatreds of Augustine's own generation' (3): while commendable and in places edifying, S.'s ambition to keep Augustine's 'self-promotion' out of the controversy is only partially successful (was it ever really possible to do so?) and appears to have been all but forgotten by the end of the study: for example, ch. 16, with its focus on suicide as an example of sacred violence during the Catholic-dissident struggle, measures the meaning of self-killing in the struggle against Augustine's own moral and theological objections, and presents the crystallization of these objections in Augustine's *De civitate dei* as a philosophical bequest to Western moral thinking. This teleological approach is largely out of step with the rest of the study which in the main offers rigorous and unprecedented contextualization of the minutiae of late antique Christian sectarianism.

Sacred Violence is a big, complex book, which makes few concessions to those unfamiliar with the period and the issues under discussion. The study disavows a linear, narrativizing of North African sectarian relations, and pursues instead the reconstructive task of understanding the emergence of specific instances of violence in a range of civic settings. As a consequence perhaps of the absence of conventional signposts in the study (e.g. recapitulative introductions and conclusions to chapters are largely absent throughout), the impression given is of a series of investigative exercises into localized instances of violence in environments where both perpetrators and victims nevertheless share common ideals and experiences. Prominent themes connecting the chapters are nonetheless in evidence throughout the work. As S. indicates on a number of occasions, the performance of violence in the period is only half the story: the justification for the threat or use of violence was also central to the activities of both Catholic and dissident Christians. Therefore, much of S.'s analysis is dedicated to understanding the emergence of rhetorical cultures of violence and the rôle of social and cultural memory in honing justifications for violence, including some brilliant discussion of the rôle of rhetorical discourse in shaping sectarian boundaries (chs 5–7), and the conscious, sectarian imitation of the language and activities of potent interventions perpetrated by the imperial state (*passim*). All of this is offset by the moral markers prominent in many of the sources consulted which wrestle with advocating or condoning violence, whilst also conceding that its effectiveness was finite — limited as it was to localized rivalries. One detects that S. is intimating throughout a moral critique of sectarian violence, revealed perhaps by the use of comparative instances of episodes in modern, sectarian conflict (for example, Northern Ireland), and by highlighting the broader, violent context for ecclesiastical sectarianism in the activities of the Roman Empire, and the Vandal invasion of North Africa in the fifth century. As S. opines in ch. 17: 'There is enough evidence to show that nothing internal to the identity politics engaged in by either side shifted the ground on which the battles were fought as much as did the sudden and unforeseen intervention of a tidal wave of large-scale violence: the Vandal incursions into Africa' (802).

The study comprises an introduction, seventeen chapters, eight appendices (including Appendix F which offers a valuable reappraisal of scholarly assumptions about the feared Circumcellions), a detailed bibliography listing primary and secondary sources consulted by S. and a general index. In light of the study's length, the publication sensibly utilizes footnotes. In brief, some themes arising from individual chapters: ch. 1 ('This Terrible Custom') presents a survey of violent episodes in late antique North Africa in an effort to cleave apart micro from macro instances of violence, and introduce taxonomies into the study of sectarian conflict; ch. 2 ('Church of the Traitors') introduces the theme of betrayal as the central ideology shaping Catholic and dissident relations during the fourth and fifth centuries; ch. 3 ('A Poisonous Brood of Vipers') considers the historical realization of accusations of betrayal during these periods; ch. 4 ('Archives of Memory') discusses the rôle of historical memory in shaping the reception of archetypal events from the early 300s into the later decades of the fourth century; chs 5 ('The City of Denial'), 6 ('Ravens Feeding on Death') and 7 ('Little Foxes, Evil Women') consider the uses to which state and ecclesiastical intervention against pagans, Jews and heretics (principally in North Africa being Manichaean Christians) during the period, supplied both the language and apparatus for managing sectarian conflict in Africa; ch. 8 ('Guardians of the People') analyses the changes in both Catholic and dissident enacting of the episcopal office during the period; chs 9 ('In the House of Discipline') and 10 ('Sing a New Song') provide highly valuable analyses of the rôle that homilies, pamphlets and hymns played in inciting aggressive behaviour among hearers and readers (cf. 436); ch. 11 ('Kings of this World') looks at bishops as lobbyists at the imperial court; ch. 12 ('We Choose to Stand') presents a stimulating reading of Catholic and dissident rivalries during

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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doi:10.1017/S0075435814000951

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