

Augustine has no (platonic) sense of the creation pre-existing as 'form' in the mind of the creator: this is to ignore entirely his account of all things existing in the divine Wisdom (or the Word) and especially his insistence on the structuring role of number finding its source in the divine Wisdom (184 ff.). Similarly, there is an odd statement that Augustine sees the created order as 'ontological plenitude' (190).

The book then is well worth reading by anyone interested in Augustine's early dialogues: I came away with many new questions and perspectives. I kept wishing for a fuller treatment of points raised and a fuller engagement with more traditional scholarship on Augustine's early theology and philosophy (much of which would have aided her argument), but those familiar with this material would be ill advised to ignore C.'s treatment.

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G. W. BOWERSOCK, *MOSAICS AS HISTORY: THE NEAR EAST FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO ISLAM*. Cambridge MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. x + 146, 50 illus. ISBN 978-0-674-02292-8. £14.95.

Over recent years there has been a welcome increase in studies treating mosaics as primary historical documents, in turn highlighting their value as sources for understanding ancient society, culture, and religion. This book adds to the growing corpus. It is based on a series of lectures given at the Collège de France (Paris) in March 1997 under the title of 'Le Mystère de Grégoria: Mosaïques du Proche-Orient dans l'Antiquité Tardive'. The aim is to provide a 'more comprehensive examination of this rich new evidence [mosaics] for life and belief in the pullulating late-antique Near East'. The title of the lecture series hints at another thread: finding a solution to the enigmatic name of Gregoria on the Hippolytus mosaic from Madaba, which is one example of how this type of approach can be used to shed light on now-obscure iconography.

There are four thematic chapters, entitled 'Maps', 'Myths', 'Cities' and 'Iconoclasm', and a conclusion, called 'Contexts'. Each one contains discussions of the material which both challenge traditional interpretations and provide new analytical solutions. The Madaba Map mosaic is viewed as reflecting a lively interest in the contemporary world and the inhabitants' relationship to it. Myths appear not just for their own sake and nor do they just signal a continued interest in pagan mythology, but are, also, representations relating to mime theatre which real people watched, partook in, and displayed on their floors.

The chapter on cities further nuances the section on maps. Careful analysis of the choice, position, and iconography of the cities depicted can enhance our understanding of the limits and direction of the world view of the 'mosaicists'. A vivid picture of local identities emerges which is positioned within the larger framework of the geography of the region and Empire. In 'Iconoclasm', Bowersock cites the work of Schick to show that the destruction in Christian churches was limited in time and space and, probably, undertaken by the worshippers themselves. B. proposes a similar process for the synagogues too. He argues for a slightly later date of A.D. 723 for the Edict of Yazid, while also suggesting that active engagement by Muslims in Christian edifices might be a possible reason for its implementation. The conclusion brings together the results, namely that the mosaics document the Near East's change from a Rome-governed set of provinces to a cohesive territory administered from first Constantinople and then Damascus. During this period there was a diversity of religions and ethnicities with a shared Hellenic inheritance. The mosaics stress a culturally sophisticated society with a distinct urban and regional consciousness where there was peace, cohabitation, and a shared enjoyment of the theatre.

B. calls the Near East an 'unusual laboratory' for this type of study, and so it proves. One might, however, question the breadth of material covered, which for the most part focuses on three mosaics: the Madaba map, the Hippolytus Room, and the Church of St Stephen at Umm er-Rasas. The narrow range of evidence seems at odds with B.'s warning in the introduction about the need for the correct apportioning of prominence to the material. Furthermore with regards to the mystery of Gregoria, B. rightly complains that 'speculation has often been cited as if it were fact' yet his own identification (Gregoria = Antioch) relies on circumstantial evidence which does not constitute conclusive proof. B. reiterates his interpretation on separate occasions in the book as if it is an uncontested solution. It is also worth pointing out that the interpretation of the personification of Roma as the new Rome, Constantinople, has been proposed before, see Avner-Levy in *Liber Annuus* 46 (1996). There are other interpretations that some will find contentious. For example, the Dionysus mosaic from Nea Paphos is given a philosophical interpretation when

in fact the appearance in the Cassiopeia panel of a token being placed into a golden vase by a naked boy, perhaps the personification of *Kleros*, and the wreaths behind might fit better with his proposed theatrical context.

B. speaks of the makers of these mosaics as responsible for the design and it would have been interesting to know his thoughts on the relationship between artist and patron during the commissioning process and, therefore, the way images were chosen. Along the same lines, I wonder to what extent B. considered the possibility of travel within this interconnected world by both artists and patrons and the effects this had on the representation of the cities and region in which they lived. These points aside, this is an excellent book which will have a broad appeal. Above all it shows how such a study, with mosaics at its heart, can create a convincing social and historical picture of the ancient world.

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