

discuss cultural identities without neglecting their practical social implications. Future research might profitably explore the tensions between these complementary visions of collective action and individual diversity within Christian communities (compare *Christians*, 86–91 with *Potestas Populi*, 227–74). The dynamics of other groups in late antique society are also long overdue for similar treatment. These two thoughtful works should give scholars ample incentive to reconsider the wisdom of crowds.

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J. P. CONANT, *STAYING ROMAN. CONQUEST AND IDENTITY IN AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN, 439–700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 438, 5 figs, 5 maps. ISBN 9780521196970. £60.00.

As its title suggests, this fine book is a counterpoint of sorts to Greg Woolf's study *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (2000). Where Woolf examined the means by which a shared sense of 'Romanness' spread through the Western provinces, Jonathan Conant turns his attention to the end of the Western Empire, and the different means by which groups and individuals shaped their identities in response to a world that was changing around them. C.'s focus upon Africa is significant: as he notes, the area underwent multiple political and social convulsions in the centuries after Augustine's death. Equally the unique, varied (and under-utilized) source-base for fifth-, sixth- and seventh-century North Africa provides a platform for a compelling study of 'Roman' identity in its final, Western guises.

The first chapter, 'The Legitimation of Vandal Power', offers a stimulating overview of the century or so of Vandal rule within North Africa, and the means by which this group established its position in the eyes of the outside world. This was no merely cosmetic exercise; as a tiny military aristocracy in a rich and well-functioning province, the Vandals had much to lose if they failed to position themselves appropriately at the head of their African kingdom. Equally important, however, was the alacrity with which the Vandals within Africa assumed the cultural trappings of the local élites, from their taste for hunting and aristocratic dress to cultural patronage in both poetry and architecture. C. is more confident than some recent commentators that 'Vandal' and 'Roman' identities remained separate in this period, and markers of distinction certainly existed, most obviously in naming patterns, but the chapter represents an important contribution to developing scholarship on the Vandals.

Chs 2 and 3, 'Flight and Communications' and 'The Old Ruling Class under the Vandals', deal in different ways with the experiences of the existing inhabitants of coastal North Africa, and their interactions both with the Vandal aristocracy, and with the wider world. This is approached in a number of ways. A discussion of anecdotal evidence for travel from and around North Africa suggests that the region was well-connected with the wider Mediterranean throughout this period. Equally illuminating, is C.'s study of the onomastic evidence, culled from the epigraphy, literary texts and the published prosopographies of the period. This is a challenging approach, given the difficulties of the source base, but C.'s identification of a recognizable North African namestock allows him to state with some confidence that the aristocracy of the region remained distinctly 'African', even as they maintained their cultural and material connections with the wider world. C. also discusses the ways in which these Romano-Africans interacted with the Vandals, examining in particular the religious tensions between *Homoian* and *Homoousian* Christians, which emerged one or two generations after the initial settlement around Carthage: this is a particular highlight of the study.

C. turns to the Byzantine occupation of North Africa in chs 4 'New Rome, New Romans' and 6 'The Dilemma of Dissent'. One of the problems faced in dealing with Byzantine Africa is the uneven nature of the evidence. Nevertheless, C. demonstrates that, while prominent military and administrative positions tend to have been dominated by outsiders, lower posts remained open, and regional aristocracies proved open to engagement with the new hierarchy: C. cautiously suggests that the distinct rise in Greek personal names in Africa from the middle of the sixth century may have reflected local tastes, as much as a population influx. Rather more important is his demolition of the long-standing view of Africa as an essentially parochial region during the Byzantine occupation. In ch. 6, C. demonstrates that the primary concern of the African hierarchy

in the Three Chapters dispute was not the protection of local practice, but rather an absolute deference to the authority of the Council of Chalcedon; if anything, the bishops of the African church were motivated by their concern to be active members of a universal church.

Ch. 5 'The Moorish Alternative' is a difficult outlier, but the territory is navigated with confidence. Once proud and unambiguous *Romani*, many of the inhabitants of the Mauretian provinces, Numidia and inland Tripolitania found themselves viewed with disdain as barbaric *Mauri* by the time of the Byzantine conquest. But if the *Mauri* of Corippus and Procopius do frequently sound like barbarians, they acted in ways that would not have been completely alien to the aristocrats of Carthage. Spectacular as the Djedar tumuli near Tiaret may seem, they were adorned with Latin inscriptions. Other well-known inscriptions, such as those of Masgiven at Altava and Masties in the Aurès mountains, also reveal a firm desire to articulate authority in a familiar 'Roman' mode. In part, of course, this is simply a reflection of the nature of our sources, and forms of identity display (and political organization) which were not inscribed in Latin on prominent stones are invisible to us. But what survives remains important. C. provides a tremendously helpful summary of this material, and a series of important observations about its interpretation.

In many ways, the specific title of C.'s book belies its true value. While important observations are certainly offered here about the changing nature of 'Roman' (and other) identities in Late Antiquity, these are based upon exceptionally firm foundations. As a starting point for Vandal and Moorish history in this period — still better as a thorough overview of the *status quaestionis* on the murky world of Byzantine Africa — C.'s book is to be warmly recommended.

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L. DOSSEY, *PEASANT AND EMPIRE IN CHRISTIAN NORTH AFRICA* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 47). Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. Pp. xix + 376, illus. ISBN 9780520254398. £47.95.

C. GREY, *CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITIES IN THE LATE ROMAN COUNTRYSIDE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. 284. ISBN 9781107011625. £66.00.

In the fourth century, the countryside of Numidia was a dangerous place. According to Optatus, the Bishop of Milev (Mila in north-eastern Algeria), property-owners regularly were attacked by peasant terrorists: 'No one was permitted to be secure on their estates; the signatures of debtors lost their value; no creditor at that time had freedom to exact payment; all were terrified by those who claimed that they were the generals of the saints' (*Contra Parmenianum Donatistam* 3.4, ed. C. Ziwsa, CSEL 26). Modern scholars have rightly pointed to the rhetorical nature of such denunciations of rural rebellion. By fashioning their opponents as social revolutionaries, men such as Optatus hoped to convince imperial officials to intervene in local conflicts. And yet, as Leslie Dossey points out in her outstanding history of the North African peasantry, in earlier centuries such accusations had not formed part of the rhetorical armoury of petitioners seeking imperial support. Why did the rural population in Late Antiquity suddenly become the object of élite anxiety? Against conventional views that the standing of the rural population deteriorated in Late Antiquity, D. provocatively argues the fourth and fifth centuries witnessed an unprecedented reassertion of peasant power. Her book triangulates the socio-cultural shape of the North African peasantry from three angles: economic, political and ideological.

Part One deals with the economy. Combining a highly innovative reinterpretation of ceramic distributions with revealing side-glimpses of the literary and visual evidence, D. makes a compelling case that, in Late Antiquity, North African peasants became not poorer, but wealthier than before. In the first three centuries A.D., Roman élites deliberately designed fiscal systems and commodity markets in such ways as to exclude peasants from access to cities and the consumer goods sold there. By contrast, the fourth and fifth centuries witnessed what D. aptly calls a 'late-antique consumer revolution' (62). For the first time, high-quality ceramics, glass and other consumer goods penetrated the North African countryside. Even that ultimate symbol of urban lifestyle — the bathhouse — was now widely found in North African villages. The shabbily dressed and unwashed peasant of the early Empire had transformed into a sophisticated and self-assured rural consumer.