

*Late Roman Spain and Its Cities.* By MICHAEL KULIKOWSKI. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. Pp. xxi + 489. Cloth, \$55.00. ISBN 0-8018-7978-7.

The title and cover picture of a book are inseparably connected; the cover, so to speak, depicts the words, illustrating the subject they name or referring to one of its parts. Michael Kulikowski's monograph does not meet this expectation. The cover picture shows the terrace sanctuary of Munigua or rather, to put it more precisely, its monumental retaining wall at its western side. It thus presents a view that appears after a walk of about 9 km—the starting point is the small town of Villanueva del Río y Minas—through the foothills of the Sierra Morena, through olive groves, woods of holm oaks and cork-oaks, along good-natured and lethargic bulls. As we know due to the long years of excavations by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Madrid, Munigua, located about 50 km northeast of Seville with an area of four hectares, was an extremely small *municipium* which began to be important under the Flavii. The prosperity of the town, with its *podium* temple, smaller sanctuaries, a two-storeyed hall, *forum*, thermal baths, *domus*, town wall and the gigantic terrace sanctuary, was based on ore mining—at first copper and later iron—in the immediate hinterland. But an earthquake made the inhabitants abandon Munigua as early as in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Choosing the only terrace sanctuary on the Iberian peninsula for a cover picture of a book on the cities of Spain in late antiquity thus requires an explanation.

Michael Kulikowski's explanation is divided into twelve chapters. On the basis of historiographic and epigraphic, and particularly material tradition he first offers a systematic discourse on different constituents of the "habitat" of a city during the imperial period (Chapters 1–6), followed by a chronological reconstruction of the events of late antiquity (Chapters 7–12). In K.'s opinion, the different types of cities founded in the course of the administrative re-organization of the Hispanic provinces under Augustus were decisive for the process of Romanization: only in this context was the indigenous elite able to accept the "Roman way of life." As early as during the period of the Flavii its members internalized the patterns of behavior that defined a citizen as such: they led an institutionally determined social life, and thus held municipal or rather provincial offices, fulfilled their obligations (e.g. as patrons) and used the medium of inscriptions to express their civil participation. The already proverbial "decline of the epigraphic habit," starting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century—of about 20,000 inscriptions we know from the Republican period to the Arab invasion, less than one-tenth date from the four and a half centuries after 250—is not regarded by K. as expressing a decline of the cities. In his opinion, this change instead only reflects an alteration in the local way of life, and is not at all a

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paradigm of the general “crisis of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century” postulated by research during the 1960s as a result of the so-called “invasions” first by the Mauri during the reign of Marcus Aurelius and later by the Franci. Nor, K. argues, is it possible to prove a general improvement of all city walls, or to identify destruction horizons or a rural exodus as a consequence. Much more, in his opinion the excavations during the past 25 years show that only 17 of the more than 40 city walls date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century; the *villae cum grano salis* show continued settlement from the turn of the millenium to the time of the Visigoths; and cities like Tarragona, Mérida, Córdoba, Itálica and Ampurias display a picture of unbroken continuity, particularly regarding their institutions. Only these, K. argues, are decisive criterion for the continued existence of the Empire: “Where people held imperial office there was an empire; where they did not, there was not” (p. 83; see pp. 152, 192). Thus, only for the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the murder of Maiorian made this type of political participation impossible, does K. recognize discontinuity. The history of the “disappearance” of Roman Spain, after all, is “the first narrative history” (p. 153) we could write, due to the fact that only now do the chronicles begin, and thus K. tells of the invasions by the Suebes, Vandals and Alans; of Rome trying in vain to resist with the help of the Visigoths; of the Visigoths successfully occupying the country once the balance of power had turned; and of Gothic magnates making “history” during a period with no efficient supra-local power. He also discusses the beginnings of Christendom on the Iberian peninsula; the martyrdoms during the period of persecution; and a Christian-influenced monumentalizing of cities like Mérida in the 5<sup>th</sup> century which tried to include the martyr’s basilicas, located *extra muros*, into their topographies. K. further describes the new political-religious local rule of the bishops, their supra-regional councils, and the Spanish church between heresy and orthodoxy, and he points for a final time to the unbroken significance of the “habitat” of the city itself in the “New World of the Sixth Century”: although in place of several hundred *civitates* during the imperial period there are only about 80 ones in the age of the bishops, the low quantity, K. suggests, does not affect their importance as centers of rule even in a “post-imperial world.”

K.’s conclusion comes as no surprise and—in contrast to the title and the cover picture of his book—requires no explanation. This is a profound and stimulating event history of the Iberian peninsula in late antiquity, and thus, after more than two decades, there is again an overview of the subject in the English language [[1]] whose level of research is reflected both in the extensive endnotes—increasing with the centuries—and the more than 50 pages of bibliography. This part of the book amounts to 150 pages, and it is difficult to see why the first 150 pages, literally starting with “The Creation of Roman Spain” and even employ-

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ing the Republic as a background, seemed a *conditio sine qua non* for those that follow. K.'s particular focus is on cities, and he provides an overview—somewhat fragmentary because it is scattered in various chapters that have varied interests—of these urban histories. K. does not explain the criteria for his choices: he discusses the history of the three Roman provincial capitals and of *conventus* main places like Zaragoza, but also of Ampurias and Munigua. The general impression is that the existence of source evidence and recent excavations, rather than criteria like the legal status of the area in question, have motivated his decision. On the other hand, no case is discussed *ex negativo*: no matter how convincing the source situation, it is considered evidence—now and then completed by analogical inference. Thus K. states that, according to the archaeological evidence, the *domus* east of the *forum* at Munigua were repaired and at the same time completed in such a way as to house more residents. He also states that apart from structures of residential buildings and possibly rows of shops along the streets towards the terrace sanctuary, the *neropolis* as well indicates an increase of population. This evidence hardly justifies speaking of a “dramatic example” (p. 21) of a city flourishing in late antiquity, in contrast to the imperial period. Conclusions like this require significant bases; and in this case, at least, K. does not offer them.

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[[1]] Until now, one was dependent on E.A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford, 1969); R. Collins, *Early Medieval Spain. Unity in Diversity, 400–1000* (London, 1983); or E. James, ed., *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford, 1980).

[[2]] This conclusion is only based on K.E. Meyer, C. Basas and F. Teichner, *Mulva IV* (Mainz, 2001) = *Madridener Beiträge* 27; the author did not take cognizance of the most recent publication by T.G. Schattner, *Munigua: Cuarenta Años de Investigaciones* (Madrid, 2003) = *Arqueología: Monografías*, who leads the actual excavations and does not dare this interpretation.