

BOOK REVIEW

Leadership, Ideology and Crowds in the Roman Empire of the Fourth Century AD. Edited by ERIKA MANDERS AND DANIELLE SLOOTJES. Heidelberger Althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien 62. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020. Pp. 2020. Paperback. ISBN: 978-3-515-12404-1.

The eleven chapters of this study began life as conference papers presented at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen in 2015. That meeting, “Medial (re)presentations – various messages: leadership, ideology and crowds in the Roman empire of the fourth century AD,” like the volume it yielded, focused on “the functioning of leadership and ideology” in the pivotal century after the reforms of Constantine altered the administrative and social structures of the empire together with the public fortunes of Christianity. So it is that bishops join emperors and congregations form part of the crowd in the essays assembled here. Although the book’s chapters range across a wide swath of methodological and historical ground, their interests coalesce around a select body of themes, enumerated below. Collectively, however, these papers simultaneously highlight the 4th century’s distinct religious, social and political structures and underline its dependency on continuities that emanated from the cultural landscape of the early empire. One important lesson the papers of this volume suggest, therefore, is that for the educated elites of the later empire, ecclesiastical as well as secular, the Constantinian era was not an insurmountable divide; models of leadership—good and bad and as time worn as Tiberius and Trajan—remained serviceable even in the new age of Christian emperors and civic bishops.

The volume has no explicit subdivisions, but its chapters are cross-linked in multiple ways. Emperors, in action or perception, dominate the volume; only three essays foreground ecclesiastical leadership. Otherwise, reality and rhetoric are roughly balanced. Five chapters overtly tackle historical reconstruction: Gerda de Kleijn employs the social science criteria of transactional and transformational leadership and personal and positional power to assess the rule of Constantius II (337-61), finding that these heuristics yield results that harmonize with the criticism pagan writers levelled at Constantius’s failures in foreign

military campaigns and his cultivation of court intrigue; Meaghan McEvoy, in order to counter the image (ancient and modern) of the “imperial jellyfish” Arcadius (395-408) as a secluded and palace-bound emperor, catalogs the many ceremonial occasions that actually brought him into view before the populace of Constantinople; Carmen Angela Cvetković reads through the performance poetry of Paulinus of Nola to glimpse the ecclesiastical politics and theological dynamics that brought the Illyrian bishop Niceta of Remesiana to Rome and Nola in the opening years of the 5th century; Marianne Sághy turns to a range of sources, polemical and epigraphic, to evaluate the ways in which Rome’s mid-4th century bishop Damasus mobilized his supporters in order to secure control of his city’s ecclesiastical machinery, in part by resort to force and in part through his patronage of the Roman martyrs; and Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, in an essay that nicely complements Sághy’s, reads treatises and sermons against the grain to restore agency to North African crowds whose acts have typically been viewed through the lens of episcopal manipulation.

Five essays target strategies of messaging. Sometimes the media are material. Verena Jaeschke presents the architectural ensemble of the widely attested Tetrachic palace-circus complex as both a stage for imperial self-representation and a venue in which the urban populace expressed itself before the emperor, while Erika Manders reevaluates a series of civic coins minted during the reign of Maximinus Daia in order to undercut their familiar categorization as “persecution issues.” More often in this volume wordsmithing (in a wordy age) is the focus of attention. Adrastos Omissi examines imperial panegyric as a ritual “point of contact between ruler and ruled” where orators could praise those imperial qualities that subjects deemed desirable while also asserting their own and their communities hopes for more mundane rewards and benefits. Speeches also serve as the primary vehicle for Martijn Icks’s exploration of the trope of the sinister *princeps clausus*, well known to late antique writers from Pliny’s criticism of Domitian but still useful for encouraging the “visibility” of 4th-century emperors, while Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto dissects the moral and rhetorical strategies of Constantine’s social legislation in order to isolate the ways these laws aimed not only to guide behavior but also to affirm the emperor’s right to rule.

In their introduction Jan Willem Drijvers, Erika Manders and Daniëlle Slootjes single out the emphases implicit in the foregoing précis: the strategic interdependency of imperial and religious leadership, the vitality of bottom-up forces in the negotiation of authority and “systematic medium analysis.” But they also peg ideology and ideological messaging as fundamental components of both the

creation of consensus and authority in the 4th century and the volume's mode of inquiry (13). Yet, if it is relatively easy to track the first three themes across the volume's chapters, ideology mostly slips off stage after its premier in the introduction. Ever an elusive concept, "ideology" is faced head on only in an early footnote (13, n.13) that quotes John Thompson's definition in *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (1990) and typically it returns thereafter primarily as a cipher for social and political trends considered characteristic of late antique public life. This obliquity may not be entirely innocent. John Curran shrewdly observes, in an incisive chapter not yet mentioned, that ideology is perhaps the "most unclassical of notions" (94). It is a disconcerting remark in a book that nominally places great stock in the concept. Curran was concerned to contrast the late arrival of the idea of "Judaism" (which in the 16th century made it possible to hate "a state of being") with the late antique preference, evident in the preaching of John Chrysostom, to direct hostility and anxiety not at an ideology, Judaism (*iudaismos*), but at a people, Jews (*iudaioi*). Like several of the words in the title of Thompson's book, Curran's remark might give us pause.

Leadership, Ideology and Crowds is a stimulating book. Not all of its papers break new ground, but most offer thoughtful assessments. It validates the effort to reach out to the social sciences for fresh ideas (or at least reworked conceptual categories). It tactfully offers non-elites a role of their own. Rightfully and respectfully, it is dedicated to the memory of Marianne Sághy, whose leadership is truly missed.

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