

Review Article

CONSTANTINE, CHRISTIANITY, AND ROME

John Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital: Rome in the Fourth Century*.
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John Curran's impressive book on fourth century Rome is an important contribution to a fertile area of research. In recent years, the study of the fate of the classical city has been particularly fruitful: articles, chapters, and conference proceedings on the topic have abounded; monographs on specific examples and broader samples have multiplied.¹ As the largest single metropolis in the ancient world, Rome deserves

¹ Important recent collections include: J. Rich (ed.), *The City in Late Antiquity* (London, 1992); N. Christie and S. T. Loseby (eds.), *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1996); C. Lepelley (ed.), *Le fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale. De la fin du IIIe siècle à l'avènement de Charlemagne* (Bari, 1996); G. P. Brogiolo and B. Ward-Perkins (eds.), *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1999); T. S. Burns and J. W. Eadie (eds.) *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (East Lansing, MI, 2001); and L. Lavan (ed.), *Recent Research in Late Antique Urbanism* (*JRA* Suppl. 42: Portsmouth, RI, 2001), including a useful bibliographical essay by the editor (pp. 9-26). For studies of individual sites: C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine, and Turkish City* (Cambridge, 1979); C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (*JRS* Monograph 5: London, 1989); S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille: A Late Antique Success Story', *JRS* 82 (1992), 161-85; and T. W. Potter, *Towns in Late Antiquity: Iol Caesarea and Its Context* (Sheffield, 1995). Useful synoptic

special consideration, and lately, indeed, it has been accorded just that. A number of recent analyses have considered various aspects of the city's late antique and early medieval transformation from the centre of the Roman Empire to the heart of Western Christendom.² An important impulse for this reassessment of the Eternal City's metamorphosis has come from a wealth of new archaeological material, much yielded from excavations in the very heart of the city, such as at Crypta Balbi or in

studies include: F. A. Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike. Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz, 1996); B. Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Urban Public Building in Northern and Central Italy AD 300-850* (Oxford, 1984); id., 'The cities', in Averil Cameron and P. Garnsey (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History 13 The Late Empire, AD 337-425* (Cambridge, 1998), 371-410; and, important for its vast geographical and chronological horizons, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001). The works listed above provide useful entry points into the subject of late antique urbanism. They do not, of course, constitute a comprehensive list.

² Two useful collections of conference papers are: W. V. Harris (ed.), *The Transformation of Urbs Roma in Late Antiquity* (JRA Suppl. 33: Portsmouth, RI, 1999); and J. M. H. Smith (ed.), *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald Bullough* (Leiden, 2000). A forthcoming volume of *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* will publish papers delivered at a conference on 'Rome, AD 300-800' held at the Norwegian Institute in Rome, 7 - 9 November 2001. An important series of studies on late antique Rome appeared in A. Schiavone (ed.) *Storia di Roma* 3. 2 (Turin, 1993). In addition to Curran's book, other synthetic accounts of Rome's late antique metamorphosis are offered by A. Fraschetti, *La Conversione. Da Roma pagana a Roma cristiana* (Rome and Bari, 1999), and, aimed at the non-specialist, B. Lançon, *Rome dans l'Antiquité tardive 312-604 après J.-C.* (Paris, 1995), now available in a revised and expanded English translation as *Rome in Late Antiquity: Everyday Life and Urban Change, AD 312-609* (Edinburgh, 2000).

the imperial fora.³ The recent *Aurea Roma* exhibition (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, December 2000 - April 2001) showed just how impressive is the material evidence now at the historian's disposal.⁴ Gone are the days when excavators operated with the sense of priorities that led to the almost complete destruction of the tetrarchic rostra in front of the temple of Divus Julius in the Forum simply because it was thought to be medieval.⁵

Moreover, the city of Rome's fate in late antiquity is inextricably bound up with questions about the study of this period generally. In methodological terms, it was, allegedly, while he 'sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol' that Edward Gibbon first contemplated writing his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁶ Similarly, from an ideological perspective, Rome's progress from imperial

³ On the material from Crypta Balbi and its implications, see D. Manacorda, *Crypta Balbi. Archeologia e storia di un paesaggio urbano* (Milan, 2001). A good general survey of the archaeological evidence may be found in N. Christie, 'Lost Glories? Rome at the end of Empire', in J. Coulston and H. Dodge (eds.), *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City* (Oxford, 2000), 306-31. Similarly for Athens, it is such new archaeological evidence that has led to a re-evaluation of the city's development in late antiquity: A. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora 24 Late Antiquity AD 267-700* (Princeton, 1988), vii.

⁴ For the exhibition catalogue, prefaced by a useful series of essays on the archaeology of late antique Rome, see S. Ensoli and E. La Rocca (eds.), *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana* (Rome, 2000).

⁵ Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal* (cited n. 1), 31.

⁶ E. Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. Lord Sheffield (London, 1814), 1. 198. For discussion of this and other aspects of Gibbon's attitude to Rome's ancient wreckage, see D. Womersley, *The Transformation of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 1988), 42, 226-7, 289-97.

to papal *caput mundi* provides a neat epitome of Europe's conversion from paganism to Christianity. We have moved on considerably, of course, from Gibbon's gloomy view of a civilization in protracted and terminal decline. Since the work of Peter Brown especially, our view of late antiquity is altogether more upbeat, while its geographical focus is less centred on the West than it used to be. To be sure, the period saw the disappearance of the Roman Empire in Western Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, but it also witnessed the emergence of new forms of state, society, religion, and culture characteristic of medieval Christendom and Islam.⁷

When it comes to assessing the place occupied by cities in a process that mixes disappearance, transformation, and innovation, it seems to me that a crucial methodological statement of the debate was issued ten years ago by Wolfgang Liebeschuetz. He remarked on the patent reality that many modern cities exist on the sites of flourishing classical urban centres, and deduced from this that 'the ancient city can be said to have come to an end in only a special sense, [with] the disappearance of those characteristics which distinguished the Graeco-Roman city

⁷ P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971) effectively redefined the subject for modern scholars. For the current *l'état du question*, see G. Bowersock, P. Brown, and O. Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), vii-xiii. In recent years, however, and within the study of late antique urbanism, the concept of decline has provoked considerable debate, perhaps signalling its return to scholarly vogue. A key contribution is Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall* (cited n. 1), esp. 400-16. A debate on the utility of 'decline' as a term to describe late antique developments, with contributions by Liebeschuetz and others, is contained in Lavan, *Recent Research* (cited n. 1) 233-45. A further, book-length contribution, suggesting fall followed by decline rather than decline and then fall, is in preparation by Bryan Ward-Perkins (pers. comm.).

from others.’⁸ Meanwhile, the social and cultural changes once described uncritically as ‘Christianization’ have been subjected to careful scrutiny by Robert Markus. In his analysis, the engagement of the Church with Roman imperial society did not simply involve a one-way process of change, from paganism to Christianity. Rather, Christianity was itself transformed by its interface with the new realities of the late Roman world in the aftermath of Constantine’s conversion.⁹ John Curran’s study locates itself squarely at the heart of these debates and the new approaches they have fostered. While he admits that much of the material he uses has long been known (and there, perhaps, lies the key to some of the book’s strengths and weaknesses), he asserts that his intention to set topographical and social changes side by side will permit a more nuanced picture of what ‘Christianization’ might have meant in concrete terms (pp. vi-ix). This sets the agenda for the book, which forms a matched pair of discussions analysing, on the one hand, topographical change (chs. 1-4), and, on the other, social transformation (chs. 5-7).

The topographical section opens with a chapter that makes the scope of the book broader in fact than its title would imply. Curran does not begin, as others have done, with Constantine’s entry to Rome on 29 October 312 as the Christian victor of

⁸ W. Liebeschuetz, ‘The end of the ancient city’, in Rich, *City* (cited n. 1), 1-49, at p. 1. Liebeschuetz has amplified his discussion in *Decline and Fall* (cited n. 1).

⁹ R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), arguing particularly against R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire AD 100-400* (New Haven, 1984). The role of the imperial élite, including the senatorial aristocracy, in this process is examined in detail by M. R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy. Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 200-19.

the battle of the Milvian Bridge.¹⁰ He argues, rather, that the first Christian emperor's architectural interventions cannot be understood in isolation, but must be seen as part of a continuous process of building projects stretching back through the third century. Indeed, Curran does not even begin so late as the tetrarchic building projects that followed the great fire of AD 283 that destroyed large areas of Rome's monumental heart, but goes back to the reign of Septimius Severus, under whom there was a systematic transformation of the topography of the western end of the Forum Romanum (of which the emperor's triumphal arch is the most ostentatious remaining artefact). Through this project, Septimius, who had seized power in a civil war, 'founded his legitimacy upon a sustained appeal to military success, the expression of dynastic ambitions and the self-conscious occupation of the central space of the Forum Romanum' (p. 8). Curran's survey of the third century also shows that religious innovations were often a central part of architectural projects initiated by emperors. Caracalla built a temple to Egyptian Isis and Serapis on the Quirinal; Elagabalus seems to have constructed on the Palatine itself a temple of the Syrian sun god from whom he took his nickname; and Aurelian erected a temple in honour of the deity Sol Invictus to whom he attributed his victory over Zenobia of Palmyra (pp. 8-17).

Already, Constantine's architectural patronage of Christianity begins to look less revolutionary and more like the continuation of a trend. Moreover, as Curran

¹⁰ The importance of 312 is explicit in the titles of Lançon, *Rome* (cited n. 2) and R. Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City 312-1308* (Princeton, 1980). In fact, both Lançon and Krautheimer turn back from Constantine's entry into Rome in 312 to survey third century (especially Aurelianic) and tetrarchic developments.

argues, Constantine's support for the Church in Rome needs to be set in a broader context. To focus solely on Constantine's programme of church construction might give the unbalanced impression that the emperor's architectural interventions in Rome's topography were limited to peripheral areas of the city, such as at the Lateran and Vatican basilicas, or in regions beyond its walls, like those along the Via Appia.¹¹ Curran emphasizes instead how Constantine's architectural programme was altogether more pervasive, and that support for Christianity was not the only factor that motivated it. Constantine had seized Rome from Maxentius, a figure often dismissed simply as a usurper. Yet Maxentius had ruled Rome for nearly six years as *bona fide* Augustus, and buttressed his claims to legitimacy by means of an extensive building programme throughout and around the city (pp. 54-63). After the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Constantine was concerned to expunge Maxentius' memory from the city: on Constantine's triumphal arch, the emperor was denigrated as a *tyrannus*;¹² meanwhile, to the north of the Via Sacra, the enormous basilica begun by Maxentius was dedicated in Constantine's name (pp. 76-90). Curran argues, however, that Constantine's 'political' and 'ecclesiastical' building projects should not be seen as discrete and isolated phenomena. That the two overlapped is well demonstrated by the way in which the new church of S. Giovanni in Laterano was built over the camp of the *equites singulares* who had served as Maxentius' bodyguard (pp. 93-6). Even more forcefully, construction of Constantine's new basilica on the Via Labicana (SS. Pietro e Marcellino) required the systematic destruction of the same troops' cemetery

¹¹ Cf. Curran p. 71 and n. 2 for examples of this opinion.

¹² *CIL* 6. 1139 (= *ILS* 694).

— a cemetery, moreover, which Maxentius had renovated (pp. 99-102).¹³ In sum, then, Curran provides a useful warning that while ‘[t]he temptation to identify the extraordinary personality of Constantine with a new beginning in Roman history is strong and understandable ... the disconcerting remains of his monumental presence in Rome prevent such a sweeping view’ (p. 114).

This subtle interpretation of church building under Constantine paves the way for an analysis of ecclesiastical construction through the rest of the fourth century that is sensitive to the ambitions and vulnerabilities of Rome’s Christian leaders. A number of striking features emerges from Curran’s analysis. In the first place, the architectural presence of the Church within Rome’s walls was well advanced already by the middle of the fourth century, although the absence of extensive archaeological evidence for these buildings does not allow us to understand how monumental was their impact (pp. 117-27). Secondly, Curran provides a salutary reminder that it is no longer possible to view ‘Christianization’ as a simple, linear progression, to which non-Christians presented the only obstacles. In particular, the Roman Church of the second half of the fourth century was destabilized by a series of internal conflicts, some of them extremely violent, which were in many respects the legacy of the emperor Constantius II’s intervention in western ecclesiastical affairs in the 350s (pp. 129-42).¹⁴ For Curran, as for other scholars, Damasus I is still the most important

¹³ Cf. M. P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar. The Roman Emperors’ Horse Guard* (London, 1994), 152-7.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed. Social Environment and Religious Change in Northern Italy AD 200-400* (Oxford, 1999), 115-19, 154-7, for the wide-ranging impact of Constantius’ policies on many aspects of Church life in northern Italy and the western Balkans.

Roman bishop of the fourth century.¹⁵ In Curran's analysis, however, this bishop's famous interventions in Rome's topography were directed less against the city's remaining pagans than towards those elements within the Christian community who entertained doubts as to the legitimacy of Damasus' pontificate.¹⁶ In other words, by constructing churches in key locations within the city's walls and reorganising the cult of martyrs in its suburbs, Damasus was seeking to buttress his primacy in a congregation that had recently been deeply split (pp. 142-55).

Curran's account of Damasus' church building programme and patronage of the suburban martyr cult concludes the formal topographical section of the book. Part Two, 'Society', opens with a study of 'The Legal Standing of the Ancient Cults of Rome' (ch. 5), where Curran is compelled to work above all with the *Theodosian Code*. This presents serious problems, as Curran is well aware — his preface to the book as a whole opens, after all, with David Hunt's cautionary words about the use of the *Code* as a source for 'Christianization'.¹⁷ Recent work has amplified the extent to which a complete history of late Roman law simply cannot be written from the

¹⁵ The most important contribution hitherto is undoubtedly that of C. Pietri, *Roma Christiana. Recherches sur l'église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311-440)* (Rome, 1976), 461-573, esp. 461-8 (on intramural *tituli*), 529-46 (on cemeteries).

¹⁶ Contra R. Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals. Topography and Politics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1983), 104, who saw Damasus' efforts 'as a counterstroke against the increasing strength of the pagan revival of the [380s] in Rome.'

¹⁷ Curran p. vi. quotes the opening lines of D. Hunt, 'Christianising the Roman Empire: the evidence of the Code' in J. Harries and I. Wood (eds.), *The Theodosian Code* (London, 1993), 143-58.

Code.¹⁸ The picture Curran's analysis yields is in some respects much what one might have expected: a clamp down on paganism did not occur immediately after 312, and the reigns of Gratian and Theodosius I remain decisive.¹⁹ Perhaps more useful here is Curran's emphasis on the inconsistency of imperial attitudes towards the ancient cults. The pagan Julian, of course, stands out. But not even the Christian emperors followed a coherent line: Constantine's attitude to paganism was hesitant;²⁰ his sons Constans and Constantius II were altogether more vigorously anti-pagan; and Jovian and Valentinian I seem to have preferred toleration to confrontation. Most interesting, I thought, was the common cause Curran identifies in the attitudes of both pagan and Christian emperors towards magic (pp. 172-4, 195, 200-3): all seem to have agreed that secretive forms of divination could pose a serious threat to the well being of the state. It might be regretted that Curran does not make more of certain specifically Roman evidence. Symmachus' famous third *Relatio* receives only a limited discussion (pp. 206-8). More importantly, there is no discussion of the

¹⁸ In addition to the works cited by Curran at pp. 161-9, see esp. now J. F. Matthews, *Laying Down the Law. A Study of the Theodosian Code* (New Haven, 2000), together with the important review discussion in T. D. Barnes, 'Foregrounding the Theodosian Code', *JRA* 14 (2001), 671-85.

¹⁹ For the importance of Gratian's actions, see now V. Messina, *La politica religiosa di Graziano* (SEIA 3: Rome, 1998), arguing for a general hardening in the emperor's attitudes towards paganism as a result of his dealings with Ambrose of Milan.

²⁰ In this respect Curran's analysis argues cogently against the view of T. D. Barnes that Constantine 'believed sincerely that God had given him a special mission to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity': *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 275. The tenor of Curran's picture is almost everywhere at odds with the unremitting bleakness of A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (Oxford, 1948, repr. 1998).

physical evidence of post-Constantinian restorations of pagan cult buildings, such as the temples of Saturn and Concordia, together with the Porticus Deorum Consentium, all situated on the Clivus Capitolinus.²¹ Yet the temples remained important fixtures in Rome's urban landscape, and as such they were protected long after Constantine's time by pronouncements of the emperor Majorian in 458 and the Ostrogothic king Theoderic in 510/11.²²

Curran turns his attention next to consider entertainments in the Circus Maximus in the fourth century. The status of the games, in the circus and elsewhere, and their continuity through late antiquity, has been an important focus of research that has sought to trace the progress of 'Christianization' in society.²³ Circuses and hippodromes seem to have become increasingly important in the late Empire: they were venues not only for public entertainments, but also for important imperial celebrations, such as those marking emperors' victories.²⁴ Curran asserts the

²¹ On Symmachus' *Relatio*, B. Croke and J. Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Rome* (Sydney, 1982), ch. 2, remains the best introduction. For the restoration of pagan buildings around the Clivus Capitolinus, see Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal* (cited n. 1), 26-9.

²² Majorian, *Novella* 4; Theoderic, ap. Cassiodorus, *Var.* 3. 31. Discussion in Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (cited n. 1), 89-90.

²³ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity* (cited n. 9), 107-24, whose approach underpins Curran's analysis. For another recent survey of the phenomenon at Rome: R. Lim, 'People as power: games, munificence and contested topography', in Harris, *Transformation* (cited n. 2), 265-81.

²⁴ M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 59-60, 91-100, arguing that the phenomenon is largely post-395. Even so, most imperial palaces built in the tetrarchic period and later were situated close to circuses or hippodromes: J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses. Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London, 1986), 579-638.

importance of games in the Circus Maximus in the festal calendar of fourth century Rome (pp. 221-36), and examines in great detail the pagan religious significance of the venue, mainly on the basis of mosaic depictions (pp. 236-51). He argues that the Circus Maximus was no 'neutral' environment, and that the Christian emperors' patronage of spectacles there thus 'bears eloquent testimony to the ambivalence [in emperors' attitudes] which was so vital to the continuity of Roman life in the fourth century' (p. 259).

Curran's final chapter addresses yet another controversial topic: Christianity and the Roman aristocracy.²⁵ He takes as his focus the well-documented, and well-studied, cases of ascetic piety among the Roman aristocratic circles connected with Jerome. For Curran, the Christian ascetic tendencies of Roman aristocrats were not so revolutionary as might be thought: he presents a social élite amongst whom religious and philosophical speculation was established behaviour by the fourth century (pp. 264-8). By breaking down the customary polarity between pagans and Christians, Curran is able to provide a more nuanced picture of Christianity among the Roman

²⁵ P. Brown, 'Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman Aristocracy', *JRS* 51 (1961), 1-11 (repr. id., *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine* (London, 1972), 161-82) was a seminal study. Among recent investigations, T. D. Barnes, 'Statistics and the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy', *JRS* 85 (1995), 135-47, has argued for the swift progress of Christianity among the Roman aristocracy. A more cautious analysis (taking issue with Barnes on many counts) is provided by Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy* (cited n. 9). Somewhat predictably, given the fashions of modern scholarship, the role played by women in the process has received considerable attention. In addition to the various works cited by Curran at p. 264, n. 15, see K. Cooper, 'The martyr, the *matrona* and the bishop: the matron Lucina and the politics of martyr cult in fifth- and sixth-century Rome', *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999), 297-317.

aristocracy. Divisions did not occur only according to religious lines: the extreme asceticism of senatorial women like Paula and Eustochium provoked criticism, Curran reminds us, from their Christian peers rather than from pagans (pp. 268-98).

Moreover, not all Christians were so eager to renounce the world. Sextus Petronius Probus, leading light of the distinguished Anician *gens*, provides an instructive example of the complexity of senatorial attitudes and their intersections with Christianity. For that jaundiced observer of fourth-century Roman *mores* Ammianus Marcellinus, Petronius Probus was both greedy for money and ambitious for administrative office: as such, he would appear to represent the diametric opposite of those members of the Roman élite who pledged themselves and their resources to Christ. But Petronius Probus was a pious man nonetheless, and was buried in no less distinguished a spot than beside Constantine's great basilica of St Peter on the Vatican hill. The inscription on his tomb mentioned his piety, but it also enumerated the honours he had achieved in a distinguished career of imperial service.²⁶ Petronius Probus' mixture of Christian piety, earthly acquisitiveness, and political ambition neatly encapsulates the paradoxes of the Roman aristocracy in the fourth century. The weight of family tradition, Curran argues (pp. 311-19), remained important for members of the Roman élite, and religious allegiance, whether pagan or Christian, did little to undermine it. Indeed, even among ascetic extremists, this senatorial heritage still mattered: when Paula died at Bethlehem in 404, Jerome himself commemorated her with an epitaph that recorded not only her ostentatious piety but

²⁶ Probus' greed and ambition: Amm. Marc. 27. 11, esp. 3. Burial on the Vatican: *CIL* 6. 1756. For detailed analysis of his career: *PLRE* 1. 736-40 (Probus 5).

also listed her distinguished ancestry (p. 318). Curran's analysis of the behaviour of the Roman aristocracy provides a neat summation of the trends he discerns in fourth-century Rome as a whole. The process of 'Christianization' was not at all sweeping. It was characterized by hesitant advances, tempered by debilitating divisions within the Christian community as much as by opposition from pagans. In terms of both topography and society, Rome's evolution in the fourth century presents a 'complex and surprising history' (p. 322). Curran has proved himself throughout to be an able and instructive guide to these twists and turns.

The book is completed by 32 line drawings and plans, a bibliography, and an index (this last, at a mere five pages, rather too brief for such a detailed book). It would be petty-minded, I think, to carp about deficiencies in a work that boasts so many virtues. After all, no book, unless it is to become completely unwieldy, can cover everything. What follows, therefore, is perhaps best considered as a series of suggested addenda to a fine study. My particular concerns are the configuration of late antique religious dynamics; the economic background to Rome's transformation; and the city as a showcase for senatorial and imperial ambitions. In each case, I hope to show that the narrative of Rome's metamorphosis in late antiquity was not simply a product of pagan and Christian interaction.

Curran's analysis, as his title makes explicit, is largely concerned with the interface between paganism and Christianity. Now no one would deny that the shift from a pagan establishment to a Christian one is the most striking aspect of the transformation between antiquity and the middle ages. Even if Curran is at pains to stress the divisions existing within Christianity at any rate, the story of religious interaction and confrontation in the fourth century (and late antiquity as a whole)

cannot, I think, be reduced to the broadly defined camps of paganism and Christianity. Other religious groups existed beside Rome's pagans and Christians. There were cells of Manichaeans, much like the ones with whom the young Augustine associated in the mid-380s.²⁷ More importantly, there was also a sizeable Jewish community, whose archaeological detritus (largely in the form of epitaphs) provides an instructive example of religions at the interface in late antiquity.²⁸ If we are to rid ourselves of an image of late antiquity that is dominated by a narrative of pagan collapse and Christian triumph, then perhaps one way in which to do that is to incorporate more fully into our appraisal the role played by Judaism and Manichaeism.

While religious change has traditionally received most attention in the late antique transformation of the Roman world, more recent studies are beginning to appreciate the importance of other processes. In particular, researches into the economic history of late antiquity are suggesting that shifting patterns of production, exchange, and consumption also did much to effect change.²⁹ Curran considers the

²⁷ Aug., *Conf.* 5. 10. 18; for this group at Rome: S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*² (Tübingen, 1992), 173, 204-7.

²⁸ For the inscriptions, see D. Noy, *The Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe 2 The City of Rome* (Cambridge, 1995). For a 'cultural history' of the material, see L. V. Rutgers, *The Jews of Late Ancient Rome: Evidence for Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora* (Leiden, 1995). I have tried to suggest that an understanding of the place of Judaism is significant to understanding late Roman religious dynamics: *Communities of the Blessed* (cited n. 14), 207-15. More work on this topic is plainly needed.

²⁹ On the socio-economic history of Rome between late antiquity and the early middle ages, see L. Paroli and P. Delogu (eds.), *La storia economica di Roma nell'alto medioevo alla luce dei recenti*

impact of ascetic behaviour by senators and their womenfolk on aristocratic resources, but he does not set these against broader economic changes. Recent work suggests, for example, that the fourth and fifth centuries may have seen a demographic crisis in Rome, and that as a result members of the senate found themselves competing for an ever-dwindling supply of *clientes*. Such a decline may have had a severe impact on the economic well being of the élite, as the number of rents in the city diminished.³⁰ From the early fifth century onwards, barbarian invasions caused further blows to the wealth of Rome's aristocracy, not only through such attacks on the city itself such as those mounted by the Goths in 410 or the Vandals in 455, but also through the alienation of the aristocracy's estates in territories taken over by the barbarians in North Africa, Sicily, and even, from the mid-sixth century, Italy itself.³¹ Clearly, then, asceticism was not the only threat to aristocratic patrimonies during this period. Moreover, economic factors may have had an impact on the city's religious history. The Church of Rome, for all its successes in the fourth century, was poor when compared with the wealth commanded by some *scavi* (Biblioteca di Archeologia Medievale 10: Florence, 1993). For economic factors in urban change generally through late antiquity, see Ward-Perkins, 'The cities' (cited n. 1), esp. 403-9. Of course, religious and economic forces were by no means independent: S. R. Holman, ' "You speculate on the misery of the poor": Usury as civic injustice in Basil of Caesarea's second homily on Psalm 14', in K. Hopwood (ed.), *Organised Crime in Antiquity* (London, 1998), 207-28.

³⁰ N. Purcell, 'The populace of Rome in late antiquity: problems of classification and historical description', in Harris, *Transformation* (cited n. 2), 135-61, esp. 144-56.

³¹ Lançon, *Rome* (cited n. 2), 89-91 (= Eng. trans. pp. 64-5); cf. M. Humphries, 'Italy, AD 425-605', in Averil Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History 14 Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors AD 425-600* (Cambridge, 2000), 525-51, at 538-40.

contemporary senators. Only later, in the fifth century, did an increased control of resources allow the Church to exercise greater social clout.³²

Staying with the concerns of the élite, it is clear that much more may now be said about them than a focus on their religious allegiance allows. As Curran stresses, the traditional desire of senatorial aristocrats for status and influence did not suddenly evaporate in the religious ferment of the fourth century. Investigation of other aspects of élite lifestyles has reinforced this point. Archaeological excavations in Rome and its hinterland have begun to reveal a considerable number of late antique élite dwellings. Their impressive architectural and decorative schemes support Ammianus Marcellinus' description of senatorial houses boasting elaborate colonnades and walls decked with marbles and semi-precious stones.³³ Such splendour indicates that late Roman aristocrats saw their houses as important indicators of their social status and influence, much as their Republican and early imperial predecessors had done.³⁴ This social power was also demonstrated by acts of patronage. Much work on late antique

³² F. Marazzi, 'Rome in transition: economic and political change in the fourth and fifth centuries', in Smith, *Early Medieval Rome* (cited n. 2), 21-41.

³³ Amm. Marc. 28. 4. 12. For the archaeology: F. Guidobaldi, 'Le *domus* tardoantiche di Roma come "sensori" delle trasformazioni culturali e sociali', in Harris, *Transformation* (cited n. 2), 53-68; cf. the contributions, lavishly illustrated, by Guidobaldi and others in Ensoli and La Rocca, *Aurea Roma* (cited n. 4), 134-67.

³⁴ T. P. Wiseman, '*Conspicui postes tectaque digna deo*: the Public Image of Aristocratic and Imperial Houses in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome', in *L'Urbs: espace urbain et histoire* (Rome, 1987), 395-413. For late antiquity, cf. S. P. Ellis, 'Power, Architecture, and Decor: How a Late Roman Aristocrat Appeared to His Guests', in E. K. Gazda (ed.), *Roman Art in the Private Sphere* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 117-34.

Rome has sought, naturally enough, to identify this patronage in terms of Christian building, but it persisted in secular projects too.³⁵ For example, Gabinius Vettius Probianus, a senator serving as *praefectus urbi* in either 377 or 416, re-erected along the northern façade of the Basilica Julia a series of statues that been toppled over at some stage — perhaps, if the later date for his prefecture is preferred, during the Gothic sack of the city in 410.³⁶ As numerous fourth and fifth century inscriptions from the city testify, these traditional secular honours were still worth having and boasting about for their own sake.³⁷

Rome, of course, was not just a city of the aristocracy; above all, since the time of Augustus, it had been a place where the emperors showcased their achievements.³⁸ This remained so in late antiquity, even after the removal of the emperors from the city, and the foundation of the city that gradually displaced Rome as capital of the Empire, Constantinople. Curran draws attention to ceremonial and

³⁵ Note, e.g., the first two parts of Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (cited n. 1), juxtaposing ‘The Decline of Secular Munificence’ (1-48) with ‘The Rise of Christian Patronage’ (49-154). Nevertheless, Ward-Perkins argues that church building ‘satisfied not only spiritual but also secular needs, and provided a satisfactory alternative for the moribund traditions of classical secular patronage’ (p. 50).

³⁶ *CIL* 6. 1658 a-e, 3864 a-c (= 31883-5). For a review of possible dates: Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal* (cited n. 1), 29-30. *PLRE* 1. 734 (Probianus 4) and 2. 908 (Probianus 1) are more equivocal than Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (cited n. 1), 43, acknowledges.

³⁷ H. Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique. Senatorische Selbstdarstellung im spätantiken Rom im Spiegel der epigraphischen Denkmäler* (HABES 34: Stuttgart, 2000).

³⁸ N. Purcell, ‘Rome and Italy’, in A. K. Bowman, P. Garnsey, and D. Rathbone (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*² 11 *The High Empire AD 70-192* (Cambridge, 2000), 405-43, at 405-12.

architectural aspects of imperial *praesentia* which served to demonstrate that ‘emperors were, in fact, less distant from the city than scholars such as [Michael] McCormick think’ (p. 221). Even so, Curran could have said much more here. His analysis of imperial building projects includes an impressive analysis of Severan interventions at the western end of the Forum Romanum. Yet he passes quickly over the extensive rebuilding in the same area following the fire of AD 283. As recent work has shown, the work conducted there by the tetrarchs completely reshaped the ceremonial space of the late Forum.³⁹ Likewise Curran’s analysis of the Circus Maximus might have gone further along these lines. Constantius II’s obelisk is discussed because of its religious significance (pp. 247-9). Omitted, however, is discussion of the inscription on the plinth that supported the obelisk, together with dedications set up to other absent emperors, such as Valentinian I and Gratian, that show the Circus to have been one of the foremost locations for advertising imperial victory.⁴⁰ Imperial benefaction extended to other parts of the city. Curran notes the porticoes in the Campus Martius and the Arch of Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius (p. 292), but says little about their context. Indeed, the interventions at Rome in the name of Valentinian I and his immediate successors get scant attention,

³⁹ F. Coarelli, ‘L’edilizia pubblica a Roma in età tetrarchica’, in Harris, *Transformation* (cited n. 2), 23-33. Indeed, the western end of the Forum remained an important focus for imperial monuments throughout the fourth century and beyond: M. Humphries, ‘Roman senators and absent emperors in late antiquity’, *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* (forthcoming).

⁴⁰ Constantius II: *CIL* 6. 6. 1163 (= *ILS* 736). Valentinian I and Gratian: *CIL* 6. 1180 (= *ILS* 765), 1181.

even though under this dynasty there seems to have been considerable work along the Tiber banks.⁴¹

As I stated at the outset, the study of Rome's transformation in late antiquity is currently very vigorous indeed, as old certainties are thrown into doubt by the discovery of new evidence, the advance of new methodologies, and the asking of new questions. Any author venturing into this field, then, needs to be brave and talented; Curran, we may be grateful, is both. By his own admission he chooses not to make much of the new evidence, and some readers may deem this a cause for regret. Nevertheless, I felt that through his application of new methods, Curran's analysis has yielded impressive results. In his view, the city was no backwater: even if emperors generally resided elsewhere, they still took a lively interest in its affairs, and their presence was still felt by its inhabitants. Likewise, the senatorial aristocracy still vigorously pursued many of its traditional concerns. Rome was not, therefore, waiting supinely for its transformation into a Christian city to begin. Federico Marazzi argued recently that scholarship has tended for too long to treat Rome's pagan/classical and Christian aspects 'as separate issues, as if they could be separate histories. But the time has come to produce a model for late antique Rome that goes beyond the divisive confrontation between two polarities, the classical and the

⁴¹ *Eph.Ep.* 4. 800 (= *ILS* 769); *CIL* 6. 1175-6 (= *ILS* 771-2). Cf. M. Bertinetti, 'Il Ponte di Valentiniano', in Ensoli and La Rocca, *Aurea Roma* (cited n. 4), 55-7. On the arch: C. Lega, 'Arcus Gratiani, Valentiniani et Theodosii', in E. M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* 1 (Rome, 1993), 95-6. For the Tiber banks in late antiquity: Ward-Perkins, *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (cited n. 1), 187.

Christian.’⁴² By integrating what have long been seen as two distinct narratives, and by showing that the traditional concerns of Rome’s emperors and aristocrats continued to be exerted throughout the fourth century instead of giving way to the new demands of prelates and ascetics, Curran provides the sort of model that Marazzi seemed to envisage. Much clearly remains to be done on Rome’s passage from antiquity to the middle ages, particularly in the light of the vast amount of archaeological material now available. The continuities that Curran points out for the fourth century suggest, perhaps, that the really important period for Rome’s late antique transformation is to be found in the fifth and sixth (or even seventh) centuries.⁴³ For all that, Curran’s book, in terms of its methodological sophistication, will provide important guidance for all those working in this field. Others will surely take up the important questions he has asked and apply them to a broader range of evidence. In so doing, they will surely concur with him that the history of late antique Rome is ‘complex and surprising’, defying easy efforts at generalization. Sensitivity to the ever-changing contexts presented by the city is the key; and that sensitivity is demonstrated abundantly by Curran.

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⁴² Marazzi, ‘Rome in transition’ (cited n. 32), esp. 40-1.

⁴³ Cf. M. Ghilardi, ‘Le catacombe di Roma tra la tarda antichità e l’alto medioevo’, *Augustinianum* 42 (2002), 205-36, tracing the gradual decline of papal renovations of the catacombs between the fourth century and the ninth.