

FESTSCHRIFT MATTHEWS

MCGILL (S.), SOGNO (C.), WATTS (E.) (edd.) *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians. Later Roman History and Culture, 284–450 C.E.* (Yale Classical Studies 34.) Pp. x + 321, ill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Cased. £55, US\$95. ISBN: 978-0-521-89821-8. doi:10.1017/S0009840X11001661

This impressive volume has been assembled as a tribute to John Matthews, Professor of History and Classics at Yale, and even a title as broad as it bears can do scant justice to the range and depth of his contribution to the study of Roman history. Yet the Editors have sought to ensure that this volume offers ‘an integrated collection of essays’, and the result is a set of studies which pay due tribute to the Matthewsian inheritance while remaining both significant and interesting in themselves. A collection of thirteen essays plus introduction, it is divided into three parts which correspond to aspects of that inheritance. Part 1, ‘Politics, Law, and Society’, takes its cue from the close, even Symeian studies of western aristocracies and the imperial court for which Matthews may still be best known, here characterised as ‘political life and élite experience in late antiquity’ (p. 7). Part 2, ‘Biography and Panegyrics’, focusses on more unusual or marginal texts, and captures the consistent awareness in Matthews’ work of the importance of local cultural contexts in refining or undermining our understanding of classical culture; and Part 3, ‘Faces of Theodosius I’, offers a reminder of the value of looking at a single subject – in this case an emperor very conscious of his image and reputation – from a variety of angles, in order to build up a three-dimensional picture.

All these approaches may be recognised in the work of Matthews himself, and they are perfectly captured in the title of his work of 1989, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*. Here, as in the later volumes on the Theodosian Code and the journey

of Theophanes, an exploration of social and political history is mediated through the close analysis of a single, complex text. How to bridge the gap between them is a difficulty confronted not only by Matthews and the contributors here, but arguably by all modern historians of late antiquity, and by recent scholars of Ammianus in particular. This makes it all the more surprising that there is no chapter specifically on Ammianus. It is true that he appears as a source in some of the contributions; and indeed Matthews is extravagantly (but permissibly in this context) compared to him in the Introduction. Nevertheless, the question how to make use of Ammianus as a guide to historical reality is reduced to a few sentences and a footnote in the Introduction. This is a shame, because these are issues on which much might still be said; and Matthews has been prominent in addressing them.

All the same, what we are given is plenty. Part 1 begins with D. Potter's wide-ranging account of attitudes to Roman imperial rule, starting with the Republic and taking the story down to Diocletian with only a brief glance beyond. The aim here is to trace the rise of a localism in the empire which finally undermined central authority in favour of bureaucrats and regional administrations, although this 'decline of imperial power' (p. 31) risks being overstated if we accept too easily the anti-bureaucratic prejudices of Ammianus and others. All the same, the important relationship between local elites and central government is well brought out, and it is built upon by P. Garnsey in his subsequent essay on the continuing importance of traditional patronage in negotiating that relationship. Garnsey's essay is an outstandingly sane and thorough investigation of the nature and significance of patronage under the empire; and it expertly deals both with broad questions of definition and with the need for detailed close readings of complex sources.

C. Sogno follows Garnsey with her more focussed study of Roman matchmaking as it can be witnessed in letter collections, and shows the same 'sympathetic intelligence' (p. 48) which Garnsey claims as characteristic of Matthews himself. There are then two essays on legal questions: J. Harries provides a careful and convincing account of the general characteristics of the Emperor Constantine as a lawmaker, exploiting his legislation on wills in particular to show that he need not be seen as quite the radical Christian lawgiver that Eusebius of Caesarea sought to make him. S. Connolly's essay then points up some of the complications of using this material: her attempted reconstruction of the actual ceremony recorded in *CTh* 7.20.2, in which Constantine is shown making public concessions to his discontented veterans, is an immensely delicate exercise, and relies on some awkward claims about the accuracy of the transcriptions and the tone of the exchange. Once again, the general difficulty here is of bridging the gap between the text and the historical event or relationship it records or purports to record, while paying due attention to the scope for rhetoric and artifice at every level.

Part 2, on biography and panegyric, begins with the invocation of a historian even greater than Matthews, Edward Gibbon, whose contemptuous dismissal of Christian ascetics provides the starting-point for a discussion of Christian philosophical biography. For E. Watts this is rightly so called: he sets out to show that Christian biographies of holy men – including Augustine's *Confessions* – shared a structure and a purpose with non-Christian philosophical biographies, and in effect offered 'new, more expansive definitions of philosophy' (p. 117). This seems right enough, although it is of course to emphasise the 'philosophy' at the expense of the 'new', and the novelty of Christian biography is not to be underrated. Indeed, the novelty of Augustine's 'antiphilosophical biography' (p. 131) in particular

resurfaces in the very next paper, in which J. Osgood identifies the *Confessions* as influencing Paulinus of Pella's ambivalent attitude towards his own traditional, but interrupted, education. Paulinus was inevitably receptive to the idea that true learning was more than a matter of rhetorical expertise; but his casting of his own life in Virgilian hexameters was another demonstration of the continuity of classical forms even in a critique of the classical tradition. Two further fantasias on familiar modes complete this section of the volume. S. McGill's study of Phocas' verse *Life of Virgil* emphasises the poet's reshaping of his presumed source (Suetonius via Aelius Donatus), but also his embellishment of Virgil's life with marvels and wonders to create a kind of 'imaginary biography'. Similarly, S. Elm has Gregory of Nazianzus creating a new genre in his hostile commentaries on the life of the Emperor Julian, seeing his orations not as invective but as a deliberative interpretation of the judgement of God. Julian's calamitous reign became a teaching opportunity, a chance for Gregory to define the new rules of engagement with Roman imperial politics which would allow Christianity to take up its proper place.

The four essays which make up the final section are explicitly connected by their common focus on the early years of Theodosius I in Constantinople, during the 380s A.D. Notably, the first three accounts combine to suggest that Theodosius presented himself in this period as a politician more than as a general. As B. Croke notes, in describing the emperor's contribution to the monumental and ceremonial life of Constantinople, Theodosius was a rare long-term resident of that city, and by the time of his departure in 387/8 'had already resided longer in the city than even Constantine' (p. 263). A political emphasis had been largely forced upon the emperor by his conspicuous lack of military success, in particular against the Goths: and it is in this context that P. Heather places the rhetorical shift on show in Themistius' oration to the Senate of Constantinople in 381. Yet Theodosius remained in control of his own policy, and did not allow himself to be easily recruited to any local agenda. Even in religious matters he remained a rather more ambiguous and evasive figure than he is usually portrayed; he disappointed among others Gregory of Nazianzus, who is again called as a witness in N. McLynn's account of the notably guarded evocation of the emperor in his *De uita sua*. These compatible synoptic studies are supplemented by M. Vessey's final flourish, which takes as its subject the various endings of Latin histories in the 390s A.D. and the new beginning signalled under Theodosius in the form of Jerome's Eusebian chronicle. This, in Vessey's careful analysis, owes as much to Suetonius as to Eusebius, and re-imagines chronography as literary history; and the way is cleared for the city of Rome itself to take second place to those who immortalised her in writing.

John Matthews is not the least of these, and the quality and diversity of these papers is the most appropriate tribute to his eminence as a scholar of the ancient world. Indeed, this volume would serve as a companion to late antiquity as effective as anything explicitly sold under that name; and arguably its greatest merit is that it had me going back once more to the works of Matthews. A Festschrift can scarcely hope for much more: it does great credit to all involved.

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