

influence which he was able to achieve for himself through his oratory. This biography narrates the highs and lows of Cicero's life through his writings, and there is excellent analysis of his speeches, letters, and other published works. This book is equally strong both as a literary and as a historical biography. It constitutes essential background reading to the study of a text of Cicero. It can also be read as a history of the fall of the Republic, viewed through the prism of the life and career of one of the principal political actors. The author expresses concern that she might have been too sympathetic to her subject (p. 210). But partisan bias is not a problem in this book: it is always balanced and fair in its analysis of Cicero's motives and actions, it studiously avoids any definitive final verdict on his personality and his success or failure in public life, and it is consistently nuanced in its readings of the ancient sources. It is a first-rate biography, fully attuned to the potential pitfalls of the genre, and it certainly succeeds in its aim of offering an accessible introduction to Cicero the man, politician, and author.

R. Price & M. Whitby (eds) *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400-700*. Translated Texts for Historians, Contexts 1. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009 [Paperback edn 2011]. Pp. viii, 205. ISBN 978-1-84631-648-7. €29.00.

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When we are told that the Irish saved civilisation -- albeit in collaboration with the monks and scholars of medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Islamic world -- what is taken to constitute "civilisation" is the classical literature they copied and preserved. But the chief interest for the vast majority of the Christians involved in this salvage operation was not in classical culture but in the early Christian church, and not

least in recording and preserving the debates and decisions of the great ecumenical councils. Modern scholarship has tended to find these acts of the councils rather dull, and certainly not worth the effort of unpicking an unusually complicated manuscript tradition. Thus despite the work of Eduard Schwartz and others in editing and compiling the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, such records have in general been left to historically-minded theologians, or to those historians whose primary concern is the development of the doctrines and structures of the early church.

But ancient and medieval historians are constantly hungry for new material, and it has begun to be recognised that these acts -- essentially, the minutes of various general synods -- have plenty to tell us which often has little to do with their ostensible purpose. As Thomas Graumann points out in his contribution here, it is therefore significant that the first English translation of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, held in AD 451, should have appeared in a series aimed explicitly at historians of late antiquity, Byzantium and the early middle ages. That translation, by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, was published in 2005 as *Translated Texts for Historians 45. Chalcedon in Context* is a companion volume: it also inaugurates the expansion of this series into *Contexts* as well as *Texts*. The product of a conference in Oxford, it offers 11 different ways of looking at the Council of Chalcedon: a guide, perhaps, for perplexed historians as to how to make use of such apparently unpromising material.

In common with some other recent works on church councils -- those by Fergus Millar and Ramsay Macmullen are most frequently cited here -- the emphasis is most frequently on the complex negotiations and political manoeuvring which lie behind superficially consensual outcomes. For all the expressions of unity and orthodoxy, we should not imagine these councils as exclusively polite and pious affairs. Careers and even lives were at stake: not only of those bishops

accused of heresy or malpractice, but of those who were perceived to have supported or betrayed them. An extreme example is Proterius of Alexandria: installed as bishop in place of Dioscorus, who had been condemned at Chalcedon for his actions at a previous council, Proterius was murdered six years later by a local mob who held him responsible for Dioscorus' fall. In the circumstances the delegates took their responsibilities seriously; and it is hardly surprising that councils often resemble peace talks between all but implacable enemies, in which matters of precedence and procedure can be as controversial as the ostensible issues. It is not for nothing, as noted by G.E.M. de Ste Croix (and recalled here by Richard Price), that the Council of Chalcedon was presided over by the *magister militum* Anatolius, fresh from negotiations with Attila the Hun.

The presence of Anatolius reveals that it was not only bishops who had an interest in the satisfactory outcome of an ecumenical council, but the emperor too: something especially true of Chalcedon, which was prompted by the threat of a schism between the eastern and western emperors. Debate and discussion would therefore be allowed to proceed only so far, before the emperor or his agents intervened to prompt a definite resolution; but of course at the same time there were other players working hard to promote their agenda or simply to assert their authority. Behind the bland statements of universal consent lay factions loyal to particular doctrines or practices, or merely to their patriarchs, neighbours or friends. At Chalcedon we are privy to more of this politicking than is usually preserved in the acts of a council -- and Michael Whitby here suggests that this impression may have been deliberate, to emphasise both the disarray into which the church had been thrown and the secular government's effective restoration of order. But it is clear that similar manoeuvring was characteristic of all such councils, whether during the sessions themselves or in the later writing-up and

repackaging of the proceedings. It is this management, construction and reception of church councils which emerges as the major theme of this collection.

Following an introduction by Averil Cameron, three of the eleven chapters are by Richard Price, who as one of the authors of the recent translation here provides a narrative of the Council of Chalcedon and an account of its reception under the Emperor Justinian in AD 553 (at the Second Council of Constantinople). His other contribution takes on the question of ‘truth, omission, and fiction’ at Chalcedon, and although his conclusion is that the first two predominate, it is clear that in acts of councils in general we are dealing with an edited document produced for a particular purpose. The point is emphasised in the chapters by Thomas Graumann and Fergus Millar, who show how even the taking of minutes can be misleading, and how the gathering and ordering of material in turn help control the way in which events are understood and remembered. Other chapters take on the rhetoric of the councils: thus David Gwynn shows how the language of tradition had to be reconciled with the fact of new and unexpected interpretations, while Catherine Cubitt and Judith Herrin show how later councils looked back to Chalcedon in trying to appropriate for themselves a contested universal and ecumenical authority. The acts of the councils are thus far from the neutral records they purport to be: historians would be well advised to treat them with the same scepticism they already apply to the acts of the saints.

Two other papers give more specialised perspectives: Andrew Louth suggests a theologian’s approach in giving more weight to the precise content of the doctrinal formulas than to the circumstances of their affirmation and promotion; while Charlotte Roueché provides a brief but comprehensive account of the rhetoric of acclamations, and their value in confirming the validity of the council’s decisions. Michael Whitby then rounds off proceedings with a neat demonstration

of the value of close reading of the acts, picking out the attempts of council delegates to define and defend their own positions without overstepping the mark -- but also without always resorting to a craven submission to either the majority or the imperial will. The educated and opinionated Diogenes of Cyzicus is thus offered by Whitby as an example of the nature of many of these negotiations. As it became clear that the general mood of the council was contrary to his own position, he met the concluding acclamation, 'This is a pious proposal. This is according to the canons', with his own rather grudging assent: 'It is better than the others.' If not perhaps the enthusiasm with which the church and emperor would have liked their decisions to be greeted, no doubt it was often as much as could be hoped for. Along with the heresiarchs and the champions of orthodoxy, or those who were cast or cast themselves in those roles, these acts are most valuable in showing us the likes of Diogenes: bishops who were neither fanatics nor conformists, but individuals with their own concerns and willing to make their own decisions.

E. WILSON, **Seneca: Six Tragedies**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xxxvi + 240. ISBN 9780192807069. STG £9.99 (Pb).

The discipline of Classics has in recent years, come to stress the importance of Reception Studies, the ways in which Greek and Roman material is appropriated by later eras right up to the present day. In the case of Seneca's tragedies, such appropriation and the lack of it serves to illustrate the vicissitudes of literary reputation, how an author's reputation may climb very high and then fall down again. The dramatists of Elizabethan and Jacobean England - who had little or no knowledge of Greek tragedy - saw Seneca as the outstanding author of tragic drama. Hence T.S Eliot: 'No author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or