

of the impossibility of neatly sorting the theologians of the period into categories such as ‘Origenist’, ‘anti-Origenist’, ‘Arian’, ‘Nicene’ or ‘Eusebian’, despite the tendencies of contemporary heresiological discourse. Ch. 14 then concludes the volume by considering Eusebius’ positive view of the relationship between empire and Christianity under Constantine, while also exploring the varying perspectives of the Melitians, Donatists, Athanasius, Palladas and Firmicus Maternus.

Throughout this useful volume, the repeated appearances of some of the same themes, issues and authors — and, on occasion, the same texts — in multiple chapters cumulatively invite the reader to appreciate the interconnectedness of diverse forms of literature and practice, and thus to ask whether the designation of them as ‘diverse’ would have been as obvious to readers and authors at the time. Perhaps more importantly, E. also warns against letting superficial similarities between texts become the basis for simple, reductionist statements about the ‘religious identity’ of authors, or seeking to neatly pigeonhole their works within clear intellectual genealogies. This detailed and thoughtful account is a useful introduction to a wide selection of early fourth-century writings and provides a fascinating insight into the innovation, experimentation and complexity of the age.

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B. COLOT, *LACTANCE: PENSER LA CONVERSION DE ROME AU TEMPS DE CONSTANTIN* (Biblioteca della Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa. Studi 31). Florence: Leo S. Olschki editore, 2016. Pp. xvii + 356. ISBN 9788822264121. €48.00.

Professor of Latin rhetoric at the court of Diocletian in Nicomedia, author of the first comprehensive defence of Christianity in the Latin language and tutor to Constantine’s son Crispus, Lactantius is a crucial witness to the political and intellectual history of the Roman Empire under the Tetrarchy and Constantine. In this book, Blandine Colot aims to restore this oft-neglected author to his rightful place in the development of Christian thought, by presenting a multi-faceted portrait of Lactantius as ‘rhéteur *et* philosophe chrétien, théologien politique *et* théologien de l’histoire’ (viii). C.’s study is divided into two three-chapter parts. The first part examines Lactantius’ attempts to win over pagan readers and encourage hesitant Christians in his seven-book apologetic *magnum opus*, *Divinae institutiones*, the second, his original contributions to Roman and Christian thought. Each chapter focuses on a theme drawn from *Divine Institutes*: 1: Lactantius’ response to pagan exaltation of Roman religion; 2: the rôle of *iustitia* in Lactantius’ defence of Christians from pagan persecution; 3: Lactantius’ engagement with Cicero’s views on *pietas* and *iustitia*; 4: Lactantius’ political theology; 5: his history of religions; and 6: his Christian redefinition of *religio* and *superstitio* in *Div. inst.* 4.28.

The choice of subjects is sound, but C.’s analysis, written in heavy prose, tends to meander without a clear argumentative thread; tellingly, the key theses of each chapter are typically given succinct statement only at the outset of the *following* chapter. Despite her desire to prove Lactantius’ wide-ranging importance (an aim that suggests an audience of non-specialists), C. assumes throughout that her readers are deeply familiar with his work and with the minutiae of Lactantian scholarship, on which she frequently digresses. The introduction is a case in point: following two pages on Lactantius’ biography and the *Divine Institutes*, C. devotes most of the next twenty-five to detailed discussion of recent work on Lactantius and Christian-pagan interaction, before finally listing the author’s works and when he wrote them (xxxvii–xxxix). The sketch is hardly detailed enough for readers unfamiliar with Lactantius, who must wait until ch. 2 to receive a basic outline of *Divine Institutes* (75–80).

A similarly disproportionate focus on secondary literature dogs the rest of the book. C. rightly aims to put Lactantius in historical context, but her arguments do not engage closely enough with the fourth-century sources. A particularly striking example is offered by ch. 1, which takes as its theme Lactantius’ response to ‘*Romideologie*’, the fundamental pagan conviction that Rome owed its dominion to its people’s worship of the gods. Lactantius himself amply illustrates early fourth-century pagan piety, yet C. frames her discussion not with direct analysis of his portrayal of contemporary civic religion, or of the Tetrarchic legislation that he and Eusebius preserve, but with an abstracted view of late imperial paganism drawn from recent Francophone scholarship. Most of the chapter is actually devoted to Lactantius’ approach to theological topics and matters of authorial self-presentation that are (though important) loosely related to paganism. Only at the

end does C. even touch — for one page — on Lactantius' complicated attitude towards Rome and its earthly dominion. More extensive engagement with Lactantius' attacks on Roman gods and historical figures such as Caesar and Scipio Africanus in *Div. inst.* 1, as well as with Rome's rôle in his eschatology, would have produced a sharper picture of his response to contemporary paganism.

Nevertheless, C. grants clear recognition to important features of Lactantius' thought that recent scholarship has sometimes overlooked. Above all, she is right to emphasize Lactantius' pervasive engagement with Cicero, which modern speculation has often downplayed, reading *Divine Institutes* instead as a response to Porphyry of Tyre, who bears little resemblance to the unnamed philosopher attacked in *Div. inst.* 5.2. Ch. 3, the strongest and most unified of the first three, contrasts Lactantius' presentation of *iustitia* (a key concept in *Divine Institutes*, especially Books 5 and 6) with Cicero's own. As in ch. 5 (the best of the second half), C. is at her strongest when engaging closely with Lactantius' text, and it is regrettable that she did not examine Lactantius' many Ciceronian quotations and allusions as closely: what C. provides, ultimately, is a modern reading of Cicero set alongside a modern reading of Lactantius, rather than an analysis of Lactantius' own transformation of Ciceronian thought.

Other points in the study will be of interest to specialists. In a close discussion of Lactantius' vocabulary for the Church in ch. 2, C. observes that Lactantius' tendency to downplay the sacramental and mystical aspects of the Church parallels (and so helps to explain) the near-total absence of the Holy Spirit from his theology, which has been an enduring problem of Lactantian scholarship. Similarly, C.'s comparison of Lactantius' and Eusebius' views on Rome in ch. 4 deserves (as C. herself notes in her conclusion, 323) to be developed at greater length, though again in closer dialogue with the text of Eusebius' orations.

C. is right: late antique historians and Patristics scholars still need an analysis that shows what Lactantius contributed to Roman and Christian thought at a pivotal point in the history of both Church and Empire. In the end, though C. has useful observations on individual points, her arguments are too diffuse, and their historical frame too vaguely drawn, to succeed in restoring Lactantius to what C. thinks (and this reviewer agrees) is his rightful place in the canon of late imperial literature.

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D. N. ANGELOVA, *SACRED FOUNDERS: WOMEN, MEN, AND GODS IN THE DISCOURSE OF IMPERIAL FOUNDING, ROME THROUGH EARLY BYZANTIUM*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015. Pp. xxiv + 434, illus. ISBN 9780520284012. £52.00/US \$70.00.

Diliana Angelova's *Sacred Founders* is an original contribution to the study of Roman discourses about imperial power. Its main argument is that, from the time of Augustus onwards, Roman emperors and their wives were thought of (and presented themselves) as sacred founders, and that this concept played a key rôle in the way emperorship was understood and legitimized. 'Founder', here, refers both to concrete acts of benefactions, from building a bath to establishing a city, and to the frequent association of rulers with deities like Apollo, Venus, and later Christ and the Virgin Mary. The notion of founding underwent important changes from the time of Constantine and Helena onwards, as Christian principles gained prominence in imperial discourse. Although this central argument is not always convincing, the book deserves great praise for showing that empresses played an active and largely autonomous rôle in the public sphere, occupying a central place in Roman conceptions about imperial rule.

The book is divided into three parts, with a short introduction and a conclusion. Part One presents the central argument of the book, examining also its Hellenistic antecedents. The discussion is focused on the figures of Augustus and Livia, and how they were identified as founding figures through their monuments, benefactions and association with deities like Apollo, Romulus and Venus. A.'s sophisticated approach shows that the imperial image was a product of a constant dialogue between local communities and central authorities. As a result, our picture of Livia (and of imperial women) should be greatly reconsidered. Part Two explores how these ideas were redefined in Late Antiquity, focusing on the reign of Constantine and the rôle played by his mother Helena in it. Constantine was the founder of a new empire, whose