

regnal years etc. (pp. 357–364) and by an appendix explaining Roman personal names (pp. 365 f.). After a bibliography presenting the most important classical sources and providing a selection of scholarly literature, titles in languages other than English being conspicuously absent (pp. 367–384), the book ends with a general index (pp. 385–395).

Written for a general audience, the narrative contains no references to primary sources and modern scholarship. It does provide a good selection of illustrations. At the beginning of the book, there are seven maps, and there is an insert of plates in the middle of the book containing altogether 49 black and white photos along with substantial and informative captions. This section of the book constitutes an entirety of its own, a "slide-show" illustrating various aspects of Roman civilization since nowhere in the body of the text are any references to these illustrations.

Any one-volume effort by a single author covering more than a millennium's worth of history, in this particular case a history marked by very complex and dynamic processes, inevitably raises at least some initial doubts as to its prospects to be a successful one. The pertinent primary sources, together with the multitude of relevant works of modern scholarship – even within the limited scope of this particular enterprise – constitute an immensely vast material. However, the present reviewer can only note that the author has taken great pains to do a careful job; even if his book cannot be considered particularly significant or innovative, it does constitute an adequate attempt at representing the evolution of Roman history, within the specified frames, in a highly readable form.

*Kaj Sandberg*

*Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana.* A cura di SERENA ENSOLI ed EUGENIO LA ROCCA. Catalogo della mostra (Roma, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 22 dicembre 2000 – 20 aprile 2001). "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, Roma 2000. ISBN 88-8265-126-6. 711 pp., ill., piante. EUR 209.

Chi all'epoca visitò la splendida mostra romana del Palazzo delle Esposizioni potrà testimoniare che essa fu accompagnata da un altrettanto splendido volume che non solo ne costituì un valido catalogo ma tuttora fornisce al lettore una ricca raccolta di discussioni e studi approfonditi sulla Roma tardoantica e sui tanti fenomeni culturali, storici e sociali che ne sono caratteristici. Oltre al catalogo proprio (pp. 425–663) con 378 schede, presentate da quasi 90 autori e corredate da immagini di ottima qualità, il contenuto del volume si compone di cinque sezioni dedicate ciascuna a una tematica autonoma: (I) Spazio pubblico e spazio privato; (II) Le forme di autorappresentazione; (III) La vita nell'Urbe; (IV) Vecchie immagini e nuovi significati. L'alternativa in bilico; (V) L'invenzione nella tradizione: dalle immagini pagane alla visione di Dio. Tali sezioni sono composte da brevi saggi scritti da una cinquantina di autori, in cui si discutono una grande varietà di aspetti della vita urbana. Attraverso la lettura dei testi, e visionando le immagini della mostra, al lettore è consentito ripercorrere le tracce di una trasformazione affascinante, quella della *aurea Roma*, del vero *caput mundi*, in una città imbevuta di nuove mentalità che cominciavano a esprimersi in nuove e diversissime maniere, anche declinanti e, purtroppo, tendenti all'abbandono del proprio passato. Tuttavia, come è possibile ricavare dalle immagini di vari oggetti della mostra, scritti, dipinti o scolpiti, il

ricordo della grande Roma, leggendario o storico che fosse, non venne mai sepolto, anzi esso continuò a essere frequentemente sentito e anche risuscitato per poi manifestarsi sotto forme e tipologie sempre nuove.

I curatori del volume possono giustamente congratularsi con se stessi per l'esito altamente positivo dell'impresa. Tutti gli oggetti scelti per la mostra servono ottimamente a documentare gli elementi salienti della trasformazione storica della città pagana in quella cristiana. Il prezzo del libro è piuttosto alto ma acquistarlo mi pare un buon investimento a lungo termine.

*Mika Kajava*

EDWARD CHAMPLIN: *Nero*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2003. ISBN 0-674-01192-9. 346 pp. EUR 39,50.

Controversial even in his lifetime, Nero's image has evolved over the generations but generally towards the worse. There has been little effort, or even desire, among scholars to reinterpret the sources handed down to us. In this book, the effort is made. Champlin, in his own words, is not out to justify Nero's actions or rehabilitate his character. He is, however, offering an explanation, a context, for some of Nero's alleged crimes and tries to make some sense of the peculiar and hideous acts of the emperor.

The main sources for Neronian history are Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio. All of them are generally considered to be extremely hostile towards the emperor. The historian Tacitus once argued that to know politics is to know those who have the power. By this he meant the Caesars. In his *Annals* Tacitus claimed to have known the true Nero. The great scholar Ronald Syme accepted Tacitus's view. In his *Tacitus* (1958), he decided to trust the picture of the main sources and said that the portrayal of Nero corresponds in large measure with the facts. Many scholars before and after him have repeated this evaluation. Though research concerning Neronian history has suffered tremendously from the lack of sources positive to the emperor, there were such accounts, as Champlin reminds us. The need for this kind of re-evaluation of Nero is therefore obvious but the task is not an easy one. In fact, some say it is impossible.

Champlin admits that it is difficult to get behind the sources. He avoids the problem by accepting much of the information concerning Nero's crimes. Then, scene by scene, he tries to create a more rational context, a more understandable background to Nero's often odd decisions. Champlin's aim is to explain rather than judge and, for that purpose, he has assumed that Nero's deeds were controlled, at least to some extent, by sense and rationality. Now this is a rather different approach to the emperor who is said to have been a total lunatic without greater vision. Yet for Champlin Nero's controlled deeds are just another justified perspective on Nero and quite rightly. The truth lies usually somewhere between various explanations when it comes to controversial historical figures and Neronian reality is more complex than the sources would have us believe.

The book starts with Nero's death AD 68. The first chapter is one of the most interesting ones in the book for it deals with Nero's popular image among later