

kollektiver Heiligenerinnerung in Rom des Bischofs Damasus (366–384)" untersucht S. Diefenbach die Verehrungsstätten der Heiligen in Rom, ebenso wie Damasus' Bemühungen um die Heiligtopyographie. Damasus und seine Bemühungen um die Orte der Märtyrerverehrung behandelt auch Marianne Saghy in "Renovatio memoriae: Pope Damasus and the Martyrs of Rome". Ralf Behrwald befaßt sich mit den heiligen Legenden der Stadt Rom in "Heilsgeschichte in heidnischer Szenerie: Die Denkmaltopyographie in der christlichen Legendenbildung". Diese Untersuchung führt zu interessanten Ergebnissen, unter anderem daß die Verfasser von Legenden weniger die Topopyographie als das Literarische in Auge behielten.

Der dritte thematische Block ist der historischen Erinnerung in den spätantiken Inschriften Roms gewidmet. In "Passato e presente nell'epigrafia tardoantica di Roma" untersucht Silvia Orlandi, wie sich Roms glorreiche Vergangenheit und die christliche Gegenwart in den spätantiken Inschriften begegnen. John Weisweiler analysiert in "Inscribing Imperial Power: Letters from Emperors in Late-Antique Rome" die Bedeutung von fünf spätantiken Ehreninschriften. Philippe Bruggisser behandelt in "'Sacro-saintes statues'. Prétextat et la restauration du portique des *Dei consentes* à Rome" den als Christengegner berühmten Senator Praetextatus und die Restaurierung der *porticus deorum consentium*, ebenso wie die heidnischen Götterbilder, die dort standen. Christian Witschel schließt diesen thematischen Block und auch das Buch ab mit seiner Arbeit "Alte und neue Erinnerungsmodi in den spätantiken Inschriften Roms". Er analysiert den spätantiken Inschriftenbestand Roms und stellt unter anderem fest, daß sich auch auf den Inschriften alte Traditionen und neue Sitten begegnen, nach seiner Meinung nicht ohne Konflikte.

*Rom in der Spätantike. Historische Erinnerung im städtischen Raum* enthält fünfzehn wichtige Beiträge, die das Niveau des Kolloquiums und dessen Teilnehmer widerspiegeln. Die Autoren sind nicht nur Spezialisten auf ihrem Feld, sondern zeigen auch, daß man, um zu neuen Einsichten gelangen, neue Wege bestreiten sollte.

Mirjana Sanader

RAYMOND VAN DAM: *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2011. ISBN 978-1-107-09643-1. XIV, 296 pp. GBP 58, USD 94.

This is the second monograph by Van Dam devoted to some aspect of the reign of Constantine I (306–37). Anyone who enjoyed his first book, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge 2007), will undoubtedly enjoy this also. The basic style and approach remain very much the same, and, indeed, in his footnotes he frequently refers the readers to his earlier work. However, those who value factual accuracy or logical argumentation over strained attempts at novelty will probably find this as tiresome and unconvincing as his first book (see my review in *Classics Ireland* 16 [2009] 113–6, or that by T. D. Barnes in *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2 [2009] 374–84).

The basic thesis of the current book is that the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 was of little or no significance for the history of Christianity, but that successive generations of Christian historians have distorted the memory of this event in accordance with their own confessional agendas. Van Dam argues that the real significance of the battle lay in the strictly

political sphere, what it meant for the style of empire or emperorship, rather than in the religious sphere. In his view, Maxentius represented an older 'Republican' style emperor who paid due respect to the importance of Rome as the capital of the empire, whereas Constantine represented a new Tetrarchic style emperor who preferred to identify with the frontiers rather than Rome.

The book consists of ten chapters. In the first, Van Dam explains his aims and methodology. He seems to think that memory studies and narratology can somehow contribute to a better understanding of the past through a more critical approach to the sources (pp. 8–11), but these terms do not describe anything that critical historians have not already been doing for several decades already, if not centuries. This is merely old wine in new skins. The book then divides into two parts. In the first part, chapters two to seven, he systematically re-examines all the major sources for the circumstances surrounding the battle of the Milvian Bridge, pagan and Christian, literary and artistic, in order, first, to demonstrate the weaknesses in the various Christian versions of events and, second, the existence of an often very different understanding of events in the non-Christian sources. While this first part is concerned to deconstruct the traditional interpretation of the circumstances surrounding the battle of the Milvian Bridge with its emphasis on the religious sphere, the second part, chapters nine to ten, offers a new reconstruction of events with an emphasis on the strictly political sphere. Finally, one should note that Van Dam proceeds in a 'backward' fashion from the present to past in his examination of the sources in the belief that it "allows us to investigate the uncertainties like detectives, to write about the suspense like novelists, and to respond to the surprises like moviegoers" (p. 17). In reality, it simply disorients and irritates the reader and, as quickly becomes clear, represents a classic case of style over substance.

It is difficult to know where to begin in any attempt to convey the sheer misguidedness of this volume. The basic problem is that Van Dam seems determined to project modern secularism back into an era when it simply did not exist in an essentially anachronistic approach. He seems to accept that Constantine did experience some sort of unusual phenomenon before the battle of the Milvian Bridge, whatever it was that is usually referred to now as his 'vision', although he does not commit himself as to the nature of this phenomenon. However, he refuses to accept that this experience could then have had any significant effect upon his beliefs and behaviour. In fact, there was nothing unusual about Constantine's receptiveness to an apparent sign of divine favour or his subsequent efforts on behalf of the religion whose god, so he believed, had shown him this favour. Emperors had always paid some attention at least to alleged omens, some emperors more than others, and had often made determined efforts to propagate their favourite cult. The only difference is that this time Constantine's chosen cult went on to become the last one standing.

A noteworthy feature of this volume is the carelessness with the primary evidence. For example, Van Dam concludes his summary of the contents of Photius' summary of the history of the reign of Constantine by Praxagoras of Athens with the statement that 'his Constantine entered the capital not behind a military standard in the shape of a cross but rather behind a pike carrying the head of his defeated rival' (p. 102). However, the summary of Praxagoras does not actually say anything at all concerning the entry of Constantine into Rome. Furthermore, while it does describe the display of Maxentius' head, it is quite clear that the Romans stuck it on a pole and not a 'pike'. Again, Van Dam's summary of the contribution by the coinage to the debate concerning the interpretation of the claim by Lactantius that Constantine ordered a

symbol of Christ to be marked on the shield of his men before the battle of the Milvian Bridge is vitiated by his failure to distinguish between the mint-marks and other minor details that lay within the control of local officials and the main elements of any particular coin design that were obviously co-ordinated and decided upon at a much higher level and, to that extent at least, were probably a better reflection of official policy (pp. 117–8). A completely misleading impression is given concerning the frequency and significance of Christian marks on the coinage of this period, not least in the reference to "stars that might be interpreted as crosses" where the direct opposite is probably the case. Other straight factual errors include the statement that the father of Magnentius was from Brittany when he was actually from Britain (p. 48), and the stunning claim that "the *labarum*, a *vexillum* with Christian symbols, apparently did not appear on coins until after Constantine's reign" (p. 63, n. 11) which ignores the well known depiction of the *labarum* on a bronze type issued at Constantinople in 327–28 (*RIC* VII, Constantinople nos. 19, 26). It is clear that Van Dam has a poor understanding of one of the most important categories of primary evidence for any discussion of the reign of Constantine, both because of its contemporary nature and its independence from the literary traditions, the numismatic evidence.

More serious than these misleading statements or straight factual errors is the flawed argumentation. Sometimes the problem is that the arguments proceed on the basis on flawed premises. For example, Van Dam argues that the *labarum* as described by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Life of Constantine* cannot have been crafted by Constantine in 312 "since the inclusion of Greek letters would seem out of place for a military standard designed by a Latin-speaking emperor in the western provinces" (p. 63). The hidden assumptions here need to be explored further. Whatever the case, it is no stranger that a Latin-speaking emperor of the West should have placed Greek letters on a new standard in 312 than that, for example, the mint officials at Arles should suddenly have started using Greek letters on the coinage to distinguish the product of the different workshops c. 316 (*RIC* VII, Arles nos. 99–111). On other occasions, it is difficult to reconcile his conclusions with the evidence adduced beforehand. For example, one struggles to reconcile the description of the contents of Porfyrius' poetry with the conclusion that "still in 324 a pagan senator could successfully petition the emperor without highlighting Christianity" (p. 170). Yes, Porfyrius did include nearly all of his Christian references in the intertextual lines and patterns of his poems, but these lines and patterns were precisely the focus of this type of poetry. Similarly, one cannot easily reconcile the description of Constantine's letters to Anullinus, proconsul of Africa, with the conclusion that "Constantine's initial concern was not Christianity in North Africa but the loyalty of his magistrates" (p. 173).

Finally, despite his critical approach towards the testimony of Eusebius and Lactantius on the subject of the battle of the Milvian Bridge, Van Dam can prove surprisingly uncritical at times, as in his acceptance of the claim that Galerius wanted to replace the Roman Empire with a Dacian Empire (pp. 227, 235–6). Furthermore, he can also be quite repetitive. For example, he describes the monument of the five columns which Diocletian and Maximian erected at Rome in 303 on several occasions (pp. 136, 206–7, 238), writing each time as if he had never mentioned it before.

It is impossible to recommend this book to anyone. As I said about Van Dam's earlier volume also, it is likely to mislead newcomers to the field grappling with the problems posed by the reign of Constantine, while it has little of substance to offer more advanced students of this period. If anyone requires a concise, accurate, and well-written discussion of any aspect

of the reign of Constantine, he or she is best referred instead to the relevant section of T. D. Barnes, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion, and Power in the Later Roman Empire* (Chichester 2011), if not directly to the many fine secondary sources that Van Dam drew upon in the composition of this work.

David Woods

DAGMAR HOFMANN: *Suizid in der Spätantike. Seine Bewertung in der lateinischen Literatur*. Altertumswissenschaftliches Kolloquium 18. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2007. ISBN 978-3-515-09139-8. 250 S. EUR 44.

Nella versione elaborata della sua tesi di dottorato (Jena 2007), Hofmann intende analizzare la posizione del suicidio nella percezione morale della tarda antichità occidentale. La scelta cronologica è assai benvenuta, considerando quanti studi nel passato sono stati dedicati al fenomeno del suicidio nella Roma repubblicana e altoimperiale. L'autrice discute con autorità e competenza le opinioni espresse dai filosofi antichi, andando da quelle generalmente permissive degli stoici a quelle dei neoplatonisti che si manifestarono piuttosto critici verso il suicidio. Tra i tanti giudizi dei cristiani in riguardo (che spesso concernevano l'opposizione tra spontaneità e morte forzata nei casi di martirio), particolare attenzione viene naturalmente data all'estrema rigidità di Agostino (*civ.* 1,17: *qui se ipsum occidit, homicida est*), la cui condanna del suicidio è assoluta, mentre alcune altre autorità si esprimevano in toni più miti (Ambrosio e Girolamo, per esempio, hanno accettato suicidio nel caso di donne che lo preferivano per evitare imminente stupro). Tuttavia, come l'autrice ben dimostra, la posizione di Agostino andrebbe vista non come una svolta culminante o decisiva nel continuo dibattito sul suicidio, ma piuttosto come un caso eccezionale maggiormente spiegabile per le dichiarazioni del santo nei confronti dei martiri donatisti (che egli ebbe voglia di rappresentare come spregevoli suicidi). Occorre notare inoltre che l'opinione incondizionata di Agostino sarebbe stata canonizzata solo nel XII secolo. Tra le altre osservazioni dell'autrice possiamo ricordare quella sulla relativa neutralità del codice penale romano rispetto a suicidio anche dopo il trionfo del cristianesimo (II.4). Altrettanto interessante risulta la discussione del noto divieto cristiano per i suicidi di una sepoltura, che trova chiari confronti nelle prassi antiche romane. Nel capitolo sul suicidio dei sovrani (III.3), l'autrice ipotizza, forse a ragione, la morte sospetta di Valentiniano II nel 392 d.C. come volontaria, cosa che potrebbe essere suggerita dal discorso funerario tenuto da Ambrosio.

Il maggior merito di questo innovativo e ben documentato volume, la cui autrice è ben consapevole del fatto che l'esigua quantità di suicidi nelle fonti disponibili non significa la loro infrequenza, è quello di aver chiaramente affermato la continuità attraverso la tarda antichità sia delle opinioni sul suicidio sia delle norme in riguardo, entrambe individuabili nei dibattiti e nelle legislature in ambienti tanto pagani quanto cristiani.

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