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Les Présages impériaux d'Auguste à Domitien by A. Vigourt

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amalgamate these two chapters. Finally, the poor standard of illustration of coins makes it very difficult to discern the details discussed.

Nevertheless, this book plugs a gaping hole in epigraphic and Augustan studies, and its presentation of the inscribed dossier is now the first port of call for anyone interested in this festival. Many other points of historical interest are raised in the book, such as questioning the common assumption that the *ludi* were presented as heralding a new Golden Age, and clarifying Agrippa's central role in the rites on the second day. Undoubtedly it will facilitate future studies of the festival, about which many intriguing questions remain.

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ALISON E. COOLEY

H.-F. MUELLER, *ROMAN RELIGION IN VALERIUS MAXIMUS*. London: Routledge, 2002. Pp. xv + 266. ISBN 0-4152-7108-8. £50.00.

This is a book with far-reaching implications for Roman religion. On the whole it will stand up well, although there are times when the virtual elision of (hitherto overstressed) distinctions may leave Mueller exposed to criticism. Put at its simplest, M.'s argument is that Valerius embeds religious considerations into his text, largely (but far from exclusively) through the use of 'abstract deities' which form a connection with the traditional deities. This religion is emotional and moral, as well as being thoroughly and deliberately imperializing: heretical on three counts. Through M.'s account, Valerius moves from being mostly footnote fodder for religionists to representing a coherent and reflective formulation of Roman religion.

Exempla such as those Valerius collects have a didactic function, and M. demonstrates beyond doubt that Valerius has something to say, not just about Roman conduct in general, but also specifically about religion: 'the living gods of a living Roman tradition constitute a powerful faith animated by intense emotion' (177).

This goes well beyond the level of 'did Valerius believe in the gods?' M. explores the way that Valerius links the values that organize his account with the gods: most of the *emulanda* are characteristics that the gods share, and the *uitanda* have been punished over the centuries. The key aspect is that of 'abstract deities': much of the discussion centres on how these act as a fulcrum between men and gods. Here M. makes a good case for the extension of 'religious' issues into all aspects of the life that he depicts.

But there lies the rub: the distinction that is lost, or suppressed rather too often, is that of whose perspective we are studying. Many examples fit the argument perfectly well, but not a few are too loosely formulated for comfort — such as 'an attack on the house of an enemy of liberty is fundamentally a religious act, because pulling down a house slaughters all the household gods (*penates*)' (166). 'Fundamentally' seems too clumsy in this example, though the point might be granted that sacrilege is *inevitable* here. This kind of overstatement ultimately masks the point that M. can make perfectly well without exaggeration — that Valerius sees religious considerations all around him. This particular case is surely also 'fundamentally' political, as is the *invidia* that brings down Lucius Scipio on p. 154. M. assumes, rather than establishes, that we cannot distinguish *Invidia* from *invidia*. There may well be a case to be made there, and Valerius would be a fruitful place to start, but the more general consensus will not yet sustain this jump without some closer work.

Space does not permit a detailed review, which makes throwaway criticism such as this unsatisfactory: essentially, M. (rather delightfully, I confess) dispenses with some of the inhibition that has necessarily characterized religious studies — too long on the cautious defensive and trying not to take up too much conceptual space. Nonetheless, some finer distinctions, often elided here, may need to be renegotiated: the relationship of abstracts like *amicitia* with the traditional gods will bear further study. The result is that M. weaves together an account which, though vulnerable at specific moments, formulates a distinctive position for his author. The fact that in so doing he also outlines promising methodologies for appreciating Roman religion is a bonus.

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A. VIGOURT, *LES PRÉSAGES IMPÉRIAUX D'AUGUSTE À DOMITIEN* (Collections de l'Université Marc Bloch – Strasbourg. Études d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne). Paris: De Boccard, 2001. Pp. 532. ISBN 2-7018-0146-X. €50.00.

When the wall of Velletri was struck by thunder, the explanation of the *haruspices* was 'that a native of that town would some time or other arrive at supreme power', which, as it turned out 'had portended the elevation of Augustus' (Suet., *Aug.* 94.2). Several generations later, at the exact hour of Domitian's death, Apollonius of Tyana was heard shouting 'Bravo Stephanus! Smite the

bloodthirsty wretch!' (Dio 67.18.1–2), which was only one of the numerous signs connected to the last Flavian's demise. Omens were a consistent feature of Roman history, and an important facet of imperial (re)presentation. As such, they appear regularly in Greco-Roman literature of the period and, as such, they are splendidly analysed by Annie Vigourt in this voluminous book.

The period that V. deals with is defined on the one side by portents dealing with Augustus' birth and on the other by Domitian's death. Within this time span, V. has assembled 529 occasions at which ancient texts (predominantly Dio and Suetonius) mention imperial omens. They are usefully mentioned and numbered in an extensive table (22–73), which further summarizes stage, players, action, occasion, interpreter, and meaning. Seven omens that are more general are added in a second table (74). This initial introduction of the core material of the argument allows for easy referencing, and later reassembly on specific topics. Thus, later tables give easy access to the various groups that were convinced by particular omens in individual reigns (151–2) and the different divinities who are mentioned in the omens (206–11).

V.'s purpose, however, extends much wider than merely assembling the material. She sees omens, rightly, as a reflection on the relationship between religion and power (7), and wants to know, in the war of omens, 'qui jette les dés' (15). In order to answer this question, and to place omens in the right literary and historical context, the book is divided into four parts. The first (19–144) deals with the historical value of recorded supernatural signs and provides definitions, types of audiences, and the necessity of omens for both rulers and writers. The second part, 'Culture, croyance et vérité' (147–254), places omens and their interpretation in the context of the different social layers and philosophical notions of the Empire, and looks at the differences between different sorts of authors. Importantly, this part incorporates a substantial chapter on 'présages impériaux et religion romaine' (189–252), which discusses the importance of ritual and priests, the different gods who 'participate' in portents (with a clearly superior role for Jupiter), and the often blurred distinctions between magic and superstition. It is only unfortunate that V. does not here use Fritz Graf's 'Magic and divination', in D. R. Jordan, H. Montgomery and E. Thomasson (eds), *The World of Ancient Magic* (1999), 283–98.

The third part of the book (257–374) is, in many ways, the central part of the thesis, as here the interaction between power and portents comes fully to the fore. One chapter (257–309) shows how imperial power is defined and developed, the next (311–41) how portents could indicate how power was obtained, used, and abused. A third chapter looks at the role of portents in the transmission of power for the establishment of dynasties (343–54), or for individual contenders, either those who were successful (355–65) or those who were not (366–74). The final part of the book is named 'le jeu'. This applies to the ways that various oppositions to the *principes* could employ omens (377–427), illustrating an important theme of V.'s argument; that portents reflect not so much propaganda, but a debate, which may often have gone against the *princeps*. 'Le «jeu des présages»' is equally the title of the last, somewhat concluding, chapter of the book (430–61), where V., once more, puts forward the importance of the emperors and several layers of society in creating, interpreting, and broadcasting omens and their meanings.

As so often, the appearance of this volume coincides with the publication of other works on closely related topics. V. herself notes with regret (471) that she has been unable to make use of Gregor Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike* (2000) and of the small volume, *Divination and Portents in the Roman World* (2000), edited by R. Lorsch Wildfang and J. Isager. To this could now be added the new volume on *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World* (2002), edited by Leda Ciruolo and Jonathan Seidel. Use of Weber's book would have been especially welcome, as V. discusses dreams often, but in a somewhat unfocused manner, and without much reference to Artemidorus. But this is small criticism on a major accomplishment. This book tells us much about the formulation of power, and all we need to know about imperial omens.

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S. J. FRIESEN, *IMPERIAL CULTS AND THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN: READING REVELATION IN THE RUINS*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. xiii + 285. ISBN 0-1951-3153-3. £40.00.

One could read this study from either of two interests. The first half of the book gathers together material on the Roman imperial cult in the province of Asia from the time of Augustus to the early second century. The second half considers how the Book of Revelation relates to the imperial cult as a religion.

The word 'religion' immediately raises questions and Friesen sets out his method in terms of myth and postcolonialism. He uses Lawrence Sullivan's idea of 'critical mythic consciousness'. This has four foci: cosmogony, cosmology, human maturation, and eschatology. These provide categories that F. uses to analyse something as a religion. They work well for him as an analytical base for comparing Revelation with imperial discourse. He did, however, seem rather arbitrary in his