

A final quibble — which does not detract from the quality of the book as a whole — is that S.'s discussions of Gaul are not as well developed or nuanced as those dealing with other regions: for example, the arguments about Sidonius and the integration of barbarians (42–53) are sometimes oversimplified and out-dated and do not interact with much recent scholarship on this issue (e.g. that of Veronika Egetenmeyer or Tabea Meurer), and the characterisation of Ausonius as living in a 'fragmented late Empire' (143) is problematic, since Ausonius' Gaul was at the heart of the western empire, with the imperial residence in Trier for much of this period.

S.'s novel approach to education — focusing on contemporary theorising rather than the historical realities of schools — is a welcome contribution to the study of Graeco-Roman education. Moreover, S.'s detailed studies of an impressively wide range of authors, texts and genres make this book a valuable resource for any scholar interested in the intellectual and cultural history of Late Antiquity.

All Souls College, Oxford
alison.john@classics.ox.ac.uk

ALISON JOHN

doi:10.1017/S0075435823000175

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

YULIYA MINETS, *THE SLOW FALL OF BABEL: LANGUAGES AND IDENTITIES IN LATE ANTIQUE CHRISTIANITY*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xvi + 418. ISBN 9781108833462. £90.00.

Despite ancient historians' growing interest in language and attitudes towards languages in recent years, there have been few studies devoted exclusively to Late Antiquity (the work of Fergus Millar being a notable exception). This is a surprising lacuna, particularly since late antique historians generally have had a broader linguistic training than most classicists. Yuliya Minets ably shows how to make use of that linguistic training, and how much there is to say about the role of language in late antique thought and practice.

The Tower of Babel of the title of this book is both one of the subjects of discussion and one of the articulating principles of the work. As the ostensibly monoglot or diglossic worlds of Greek, Roman and Hebrew/Aramaic speakers came into contact with one another, there was an increased recognition of and interest in the diversity of languages. Aristotle's seemingly insatiable curiosity did not extend to languages other than Greek. When Quintilian was writing, an educated Roman was expected to know Greek, but there was no need for further linguistic proficiency. Christian authors writing in Latin might have downplayed the importance of Hebrew (Rufinus even argued, against Jerome, that the Latin Old Testament should be translated from the Septuagint), but they could not ignore its existence. Some members of Christian congregations translated sermons for their neighbours, holy men were sought out by those who did not speak their language, and scholars and theologians read and translated texts between Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac.

The Slow Fall of Babel is mainly concerned with the question of how this increased awareness of linguistic otherness changed views of language and language diversity, and how it was interpreted through a Judaeo-Christian world view. The major achievement of the work is to have tracked the views of early Christian writers in Greek, Latin and Syriac on language, showing how earlier Classical and Biblical views were adapted and reinterpreted. This book will not be the first place to turn to for those wanting to find out about language contact and linguistic change during the period; there is no discussion of, for example, code-switching in Coptic letters or Visigothic interference in the Latin of Spain. That is not to say, however, that M. ignores the issue of what is happening to the language in the street, and there is a great deal here that is of interest on wider questions of bilingualism, language use and language change in the first millennium after Christ.

After an introduction detailing research questions, terminology and the geographical and temporal scope of the work, M. devotes the first two chapters to setting the scene. The first, devoted to the 'socio-linguistic landscape of the ancient Mediterranean', gives an overview of the language situation at the dawn of the Christian era and the range of languages with which early Christian missionaries came into contact. The second, on languages and identities, traces Greek, Roman and Jewish ideas on language, with particular attention to how far language was used to constitute notions of communities and identities and how far speakers were aware of other languages. Both

chapters can be highly recommended as excellent distillations of a wide range of earlier research and can be read as stand-alone pieces, although, given the nature of the field, it is always possible to point out other things that could have been included or referenced (for example, the Oxyrhynchus glossary, POxy 1802 + 4812, published by Francesca Schironi in 2009, reveals a greater Hellenistic interest in foreign languages than is apparent from literary texts).

The main bulk of the book comes in the following four chapters. The first pair are devoted to the reception of two Biblical accounts in the Greek, Latin and Syriac traditions. First, the story of the Tower of Babel is considered from a number of different angles, including the language spoken before the construction of the tower, and views on linguistic diversity. While for most writers in the Jewish tradition it seemed obvious that Hebrew was the language of Eden, there was resistance elsewhere. Ch. 4 looks at the ways in which speaking in tongues was understood in later centuries. Was each disciple given the gift of speaking a specific language, which they could later make use of for proselytising the gospel (this was the view of some of the writers in the Syriac tradition)? Or was the miracle that the hearers could suddenly receive the message from God unmediated by human language?

The next two chapters address language attitudes among Greek, Roman and Syriac writers and the representation of language use and intercultural communication in the records of saints' lives. Here M. shows how prejudices held since classical times continued after the rise of Christianity (as Rufinus' preference for the Septuagint over the Hebrew Bible mentioned above) and tracks Latin's claim to be the third *lingua sacra* (greatly bolstered by its inclusion on the *titulus crucis*). As elsewhere, the discussion in these two chapters is greatly enhanced by inclusion of Syriac material. In Syriac hagiography, there is an easy acceptance of a multilingual milieu usually downplayed, if not omitted, in Greek and Latin accounts.

In summary, this is an extremely readable and enjoyable account of language attitudes in Late Antiquity, bringing together the results of an admirably wide reading of original sources, with detailed attention to the actual language used. The book is largely error-free and deserves to be widely read and should inspire more work in this area.

University of Cambridge

jptc1@cam.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S007543582300045X

JAMES CLACKSON

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

MATTIAS P. GASSMAN, *WORSHIPPERS OF THE GODS: DEBATING PAGANISM IN THE FOURTH-CENTURY ROMAN WEST*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp xi + 236, illus. ISBN 259780190082444. £55.00.

Who were 'the pagans of Rome' in the fourth century? This is the question at the heart of Mattias Gassman's *Worshippers of the Gods*. To answer it, G. turns to Christian apologists along with testimonies about adherents of traditional roman cults. Throughout the book he shows that the concept of a unified paganism — today mostly considered a rhetorical construct of Christian apologists — has a basis in Roman senators' own view of their (traditional) religion as a philosophical henotheism.

G.'s starting point is to go beyond the idea that apologists simply constructed paganism as a foil to Christianity and to develop 'an account of fourth-century ideas on Roman religion that is grounded more firmly in contemporaries' own portrayals of traditional cults' (13–14). He approaches his goal 'by situating and interpreting a text or body of texts within its own intellectual, social, and religious world, and so revealing [...] the nuances of both Christian and non-Christian conceptions of polytheistic religiosity' (16).

The first two chapters are erudite studies of Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* (ch. 1) and Firmicus Maternus' *De errore profanorum religionum* (ch. 2). While Lactantius argues for a worship that has its place in the heart and not the forum and reveals the gods of Rome as deified virtues and men, Firmicus demands the destruction of everything pagan because it emerged from the devil's aim to morally destroy its adherents. Firmicus thereby 'developed a new, explicitly Christian way of conceptualising the traditional religions of the Roman world' (72–3).