

BOOK REVIEWS

time. He sought to show that they, unlike Rome, had made such progress in "arts and laws and manners" that they were not in the same immoderate danger of decline and fall (226).

This book is accessible to generalists and also fresh and rewarding for specialists. For use in an upper-level undergraduate course or graduate seminar it provides an up-to-date and concise survey of the field and well organized bibliography. For those studying patristic Christianity, chapter nine, "Social Radicalism—And its Limits" should also be highlighted. The authors contextualize unusual examples of Christian social radicalism such as Lactantius in favor of religious toleration, Gregory of Nyssa against slavery, and Augustine against torture. There is only one deficiency of the book worthy of note here. Due to its collaborative and thematic nature, the chapters of the book do not flow smoothly together and it lacks a true concluding chapter which could help unify its content. In spite of this, the authors have given readers much interesting material. Moreover, this book will stimulate further research in several areas of late antique history.

JUDITH HERRIN, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Pp. 304. \$29.95.

Reviewed by David A. Michelson, Princeton University

In AD 787, the veneration of icons was vindicated by the so-called Seventh Ecumenical Council. The canons of this council were upheld against further iconoclast opposition in AD 843. In Eastern Orthodox traditions, this Triumph of Orthodoxy has long been attributed, at least in part, to the piety of saintly women who remained faithful in the face of largely male iconoclasm. While many modern scholars have discounted this interpretation as a hagiographical trope, Judith Herrin has called for a more nuanced approach in her recent book, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*. She reconsiders the lives of three Byzantine empresses who had a hand in the restoration of iconophile doctrine. Without accepting the prejudices or stereotypes of the medieval sources, she nevertheless highlights the fact that these three women were able to wield a surprising amount of political and religious power.

The three empresses in question are Irene (r. 769–802), Euphrosyne (r. c. 820–829), and Theodora (r. 830–856). Besides iconophile affinity, family relation also connected these three women. Irene was Euphrosyne's grandmother. Euphrosyne, as step-mother to Theodora's husband, had hand-selected Theodora to become Empress. Herrin identifies three "resources which helped to legitimise" the exceptional power and ambition of these women in spite of the patriarchal power structure inherent in the Byzantine imperial system (241). The first resource was the symbolic authority of the Virgin in late antique and medieval society. Just as imperial propaganda depicted the emperor as a representative of God, so too the image of the empress was crafted to reflect glory of the Theotokos, the mother of God. Intimately connected with this image and with the power of the empress was "the essential role of the empresses in the construction of imperial dynasties" (243). Besides producing a male heir, the empress was also seen as an indispensable fig-

ure in his protection if the emperor died in the boy's minority. Lastly, Herrin notes that Byzantine empresses had unique and influential roles in the ceremonial life of the court where they were able to wield power through symbolic gestures, favors, and the support of that "third sex", the eunuchs (17).

Herrin highlights the authority that Irene and Theodora, under whom the two restorations of iconophile practice occurred, enjoyed during the long regencies for their minor sons. In legal documents, Irene even styled herself as the masculine "Basileus" rather than the feminine "Basilissa" (100). While both women ended their reigns excluded from power, Herrin argues that this denouement should not diminish their accomplishments. She notes, "to judge Irene by the last five years only, the period of her sole reign, is to ignore her formative influence in the government of Byzantium. . . . For over twenty years she was the dominant figure in the imperial court of Constantinople" (128). In sum, Herrin presents a convincing picture of these empresses as having the political shrewdness and agency to win far-reaching authority in spite of the social limitations placed on their gender.

Some readers will be disappointed while others will be relieved to find that Herrin has chosen a narrative style that eloquently avoids the polemic and jargon of certain types of gender theory. This laudable choice does leave a few passages which are hard to contextualize such as Herrin's conclusion that the empresses played their role in the restoration of icons, "not because they were women but because they mastered and deployed imperial power" (256). Herrin neither presents a case that their support for icons was entirely Machiavellian, nor does she investigate to what extent personal religious belief may have led them to support a doctrine which their husbands and the imperial hierarchy had condemned. While Herrin is right to note that women were not the only supporters of icons, she nevertheless fails to answer the question of why these three women were so attached to the iconophile side. This is hardly a criticism, however, because Herrin has done a fine job of reconstructing the lives of these empresses from admittedly scant source material. The result is a narrative which gives a glimpse into the interworking of power, gender, and religion in medieval Byzantium.

CELIA CHAZELLE, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. xiv + 338. \$70.00.

Reviewed by Caitlin Corning, George Fox University

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This book is a well-written, interdisciplinary study of the relationship between the theological controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries and the portrayals of the crucifixion produced during this same period. Chazelle does an excellent job of examining not only the broader background of these controversies and the differing positions of the major writers, but the developments in manuscript illumination and sculpture as well. The inclusion of thirty-three illustrations also strengthens this text.

The book is organized into eight chapters. After a short introduction, Chapter 2 provides a survey of how Christ's passion is portrayed in Carolingian literature including theological, liturgical, and poetic pieces. Then, Chazelle provides a sum-