

Vincent Puech: *Les élites de cour de Constantinople (450–610). Une approche prosopographique des relations de pouvoir*. Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions 2022 (Scripta antiqua 155). 367 p., 6 maps. € 25.00. ISBN: 978-2-35613-475-2.

Elites of the later Roman Empire have already received a lot of attention, including some specific prosopographies.<sup>1</sup> However, no book so far started from the imperial court and has spanned as many reigns as Vincent Puech does. During the period from 450 until 610, this book studies the members of the imperial court and their background to reveal some of the tendencies at the court. Therefore, the book is divided into three chronological parts<sup>2</sup> in which every chapter treats a different emperor, except for Justinian (chapters 6 and 7) and Justin II and Tiberius II (chapter 8). In the different chapters, Puech always treats the important office-holders, divided into the region they were originally from and/or, depending on the amount of information, their religion. Based on these factors, and others such as family, he tries to identify the various factions at the court during an emperor's reign. This includes analysing the uprisings and revolts to show the different actions and reactions of different (factions of) aristocrats, and more specifically how this can be related to imperial policies. Especially the two chapters on

1 Some examples are A. Demandt: *Der spätrömische Militäradel*. In: *Chiron* 10, 1980, pp. 609–636; C. Begass: *Die Senatsaristokratie des oströmischen Reiches, ca. 457–518. Prosopographische und sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*. München 2018 (Vestigia 71); C. Kelly: *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*. Cambridge, MA/London 2004 (Revealing Antiquity 15); C. Olariu: *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Fourth Century. A Case Study: the *Ceionii Rufii**. In: *C&C* 8, 2013, pp. 271–285; D. Schlinkert: *Ordo senatorius und nobilitas. Die Konstitution des Senatsadels in der Spätantike. Mit einem Appendix über den *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, den “allmächtigen” Eunuchen am kaiserlichen Hof*. Stuttgart 1996 (Hermes-Einzelschriften 71); J. Matthews: *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, AD 364–425*. Oxford 1975; J. Weisweiler: *From Republican Empire to Universal State: Emperors, Senators and Local Elites in Early Imperial and Late-Antique Rome (c. 25 BCE–400 CE)*. Philadelphia, PA (Empire and After) forthcoming; L. Sguaitamatti: *Der spätantike Konsulat*. Fribourg 2012 (Paradosis 53); M. Claus: *Der magister officiorum in der Spätantike (4.–6. Jahrhundert). Das Amt und sein Einfluß auf die kaiserliche Politik*. München 1980 (Vestigia 32); M. Moser: *Emperor and Senators in the Reign of Constantius II. Maintaining Imperial Rule Between Rome and Constantinople in the Fourth Century AD*. Cambridge 2018 (Cambridge Classical Studies); P. Brown: *The Study of Elites in Late Antiquity*. In: *Arethusa* 33, 2000, pp. 321–346.

2 For a detailed table of contents, readers are referred to the end of this review (p. 698).

Justinian (chapters 6 and 7), for whom we have the most information, gives us a very clear overview of the situation and how it changed throughout his reign. We see the network of Theodora, how Justinian used his family ties for important military actions in Africa and Italy, and how the emperor tried to balance the different religious factions and people from different regions throughout his reign.

For his prosopography and analysis, Puech has made use of the individuals and lemmata found in “The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire” II, III (hereafter PLRE II, III) and the work of Christoph Begass.<sup>3</sup> For some genealogical matters, the works of Christian Settiani are cited.<sup>4</sup> Puech’s prosopography is a functional one to enhance his own analysis, which means, as he clearly explains, that not all information on every person is selected (p. 20). Prosopographical studies rarely make for light reading, but bring out the variety of persons and offices that made up the elites at the imperial court during the studied period.

Puech states that a book which focuses on a longer period than one emperor’s reign can show things which we otherwise would not see (p. 19). Few scholars would disagree with this. Although most chapters focus on one emperor, Puech makes references to earlier reigns and clearly shows continuities throughout these chapters. One example is the family and descendants of Germanus, a cousin of the emperor Justinian, who continue playing an important role until the beginning of Phocas’ regime. Another example is the presence of Illyrian officers and those hailing from Asia Minor throughout the whole period. This way the reader gets a good understanding of broader dynamics at the imperial court, such as which people were more likely to get certain offices or access to the imperial court based on their geographical origins, family or adhered religion. Thus, the book convincingly positions itself between a general introduction to the topic, and a detailed study of a specific emperor’s reign.

3 Begass (note 1); J. R. Martindale (ed.): *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. Vol. II: A.D. 395–527. Cambridge 1980; id. (ed.): *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. Vol. III: A.D. 527–641. Cambridge 1992.

4 C. Settiani: *Continuité gentilice et continuité familiale dans les familles sénatoriales romaines à l’époque impériale. Mythe et réalité*. Oxford 2000 (*Prosopographica et Genealogica* 2); id.: *Continuité des élites à Byzance durant les siècles obscurs. Les princes caucasiens et l’empire du VIe au IXe siècle*. Paris 2006 (*De l’archéologie à l’histoire*).

Based on the different features of the individuals at the imperial court, Puech draws multiple conclusions. He argues for instance that people from Asia Minor and Syria mostly occupied civil offices, while people from Illyricum, Armenia and Isauria almost exclusively had military positions. On the one hand, under the emperors Marcian, Leo, Justinian and Mauricius, the geographical origin of these elites corresponds well with imperial support for Chalcedonism. On the other hand, during Anastasius, and Justinian's reign (thanks to Theodora's patronage), this was the case for those who adhered to monophysitism. Concerning the main base of support of the reigning emperor, this could mainly be found in the fifth century outside the imperial family, while through the sixth century from Anastasius onwards, the most important source of support came from members of the imperial family, who were assigned to the most important positions. Throughout the whole period, revolts against reigning emperors were often based on a kinship with the previous emperor. The most extensive and dangerous revolts had a strong military character, associated with a particular provincial area.

In a work dealing with so many individuals, one can always point out missing information or alternative interpretations, such as Nadine Viermann's analysis on the importance of the capital for accepting or deposing an emperor compared to the other regions.<sup>5</sup> Some papyri could have been consulted when talking about the situation in Egypt. Notably when describing the familial situation of Apion II and III, it becomes clear that the papyri published in 2018 were not taken into account. They provide us with new attestations and insights into the Apion family at that time.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding the usefulness of Puech's scope and analysis, the book could have dedicated more space to discussing and elaborating on key concepts such as "late-Roman elites" and "the imperial court". Whilst sometimes pointing out errors or weaknesses in other scholarship's conception of elites, this study could have explicitly stated what important factors shape elites, thus justifying the selection of individuals in this book. Furthermore, nowhere do we find what positions and factors were considered important enough to identify a person as an elite member of the imperial court. This

5 N. Viermann: *Herakleios, der schwitzende Kaiser. Die oströmische Monarchie in der ausgehenden Spätantike*. Berlin/Boston 2021 (Millennium-Studien 89), pp. 28 and 37.

6 Most notably Pap. Oxyrh. 5381, 5392, and 5396.

latter point also coincides with the concept of the imperial court. The study gives a very brief overview about different periods of the imperial court, but how the study conceptualises the imperial court is not mentioned. This is nonetheless important since the enumerated criteria and concepts form the basis for selecting people and to argue why certain of them ended up, or did not end up, in the prosopography.<sup>7</sup>

In some places, the book could have gone into more depth about certain events. There is, for example, only a brief mention of a religious conflict between Aspar and Ardaburius on the one side and a Severianus on the other. This Severianus is called “un fonctionnaire appartenant à une famille de notables de Damas” (p. 27). If we look up the references in Begass and the PLRE we see that this functionary, however, could have been either the praetorian prefect of the East, a *praeses* of Achaia<sup>8</sup> or a provincial governor who declined the offer of Zeno to become a praetorian prefect.<sup>9</sup> Depending on the office of Severianus, this conflict gains in importance in a book that wants to study the different power dynamics of elites at the imperial court. We see a similar issue, when the book demonstrates that the *tabellio* Epinicius was introduced to the empress Verina by the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* Urbicius (pp. 45–46). Puech fails to mention that this is an explicit, and specific, example of the influence this position could have within the imperial household, which is important in a study about power relations at the imperial court.

To conclude, this study’s wide scope offers a broad view on court elites in Late Antiquity and draws out important general features. It makes less of a contribution to what makes the elite into an elite and on what grounds we consider them to belong to that social group. But this should not diminish its usefulness for a wide range of scholars. Hence, it will be of profit to scholars working on Late Antiquity as well as those working on ancient courts and elites.

7 An omitted work that could have been useful for these criteria is A. Winterling (ed): *Comitatus. Beiträge zur Erforschung des spätantiken Kaiserhofes*. Berlin 1998.

8 Begass (note 1), no. 191.

9 PLRE II (note 3), Severianus 2.

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