The history of Roman Gaul is bracketed with two famous, pithy quotations, each emphasizing, in its different way, the unity of the region. From the first century BC comes Julius Caesar’s famous opening: *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres* (‘the whole of Gaul is divided into three parts’; *De bello Gallico* I 1); while the fifth century AD produced a line of elegy almost as frequently cited as Caesar, though penned by an infinitely less well known author, the Gallic bishop and poet Orientius of Auch: *uno fumavit Gallia tota rogo* (‘all Gaul reeked in a single funeral pyre’; *Commontorium* II 184). In fact, neither the programmatic ethno-geography of the conqueror, nor the bishop’s melodramatic account of a spectacular failure of the Roman frontier system, were accurate reflections of reality. The region we call Gaul had no unity before one was forced on it by Roman administration and exploitation; and the departure of imperial rule from the Gallic provinces in the fifth century was by no means a uniform tale of woe. It is no little achievement that the volume reviewed here brings to the forefront of the reader’s attention the variety and specificity of the end of five centuries of imperial rule.

Late Antiquity - the periodisation embracing the break-down of the ancient civilisations of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean and the Middle East together with the beginnings of the mediaeval cultures of western Europe, Byzantium, and early Islam - continues to swell as an area of research. No longer seen solely as regrettable clutter following Rome’s decline and fall, these centuries are now widely examined on their own terms, not as deviations from the trajectory of classical civilisation but as its product. The greatest weight of recent books, conference proceedings and reference works in the period leans significantly towards the Greek-speaking East, reflecting in part the mass of literature produced by the voluminous eastern Fathers of the Christian Church. So it is pleasing to see this volume, devoted to one of the most important regions of the West, Gaul, in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Though Late Antiquity makes only a tentative appearance in HSC curricula (where a lonely Constantine sits largely unbefriended alongside other Personalities of the Past) and has a low profile even in most university Classics and Ancient History programs within Australia (unlike the USA and UK), Classicist readers of this volume will find that they are not in an unfamiliar world. Many of the voices they are accustomed to encountering will speak to them here: letters knitting together Plinian networks of
friendship, coin legends as pocketable projections of ruler cults, inscriptions intended as eternal commemorations of the departed, epic and elegiac poetry. The accent of these voices, however, and some of what they are saying, may sound a little curious and exotic. The letters of friendship are between Christian clergy; the epic poetry sets the early books of the Old Testament to verse, the elegiac commiserates the death of a Visigothic princess and Frankish queen; and the coins, though bearing the names and images of Roman emperors, were not struck by them (and indeed, it is characteristic of the numismatics of the period that we cannot say with absolute certainty who did issue many of its coins). Religion and barbarism, Gibbon’s culprits for Rome’s fall, are immediately evident in such examples, but these permutations of the old and new are more significant as confirmations of the important capacity of classical modes of communication to serve their purposes in changing circumstances.

The prominence of familiar source types in this volume is a function of the editors’ laudable decision, announced in the sub-title, to focus on ‘what really matters: the sources,’ to give equal weighting to both literary and material sources, and to encourage the contributors to present unashamedly specialist accounts of the methodological and interpretative issues involved in dealing with their individual disciplines (2). This policy provides a tighter focus for the contributions to the volume than most multi-authored works display; as a result, for the non-specialist, the volume as a whole can serve as something of an introduction to the range and nature of sources for the period. The level of attention to source types is detailed to the extent that the volume includes re-editions of two literary texts (the brief but informative Gallic Chronicles of 452 and 511, re-edited by Richard Burgess) and a corpus of coins with descriptions and photographic catalogue (of the pesky ‘quasi-imperial’ coinage of post-imperial Provence, assembled by Kevin Uhalde).

Yet by no means does the volume’s focus on source issues ignore the major, dramatic problems in the history of this period. Throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, Gaul shifted from being a wealthy and secure province of the Roman empire to becoming first a series of autonomous kingdoms ruled by barbarian military elites (Goths and Burgundians), then to be re-integrated as a unified geopolitical region under another barbarian nobility, the Franks (whence both the name and roughly the borders of modern day France). How Roman was post-Roman Gaul? How barbarian? How Christian? And on which side of the continuity-versus-change ledger should Gallic Christianity be counted? These issues are the stuff of centuries of scholarship, and indeed the present volume was conceived in part as a follow-up to another multi-authored collection from a decade ago, the title of which sets issues of
political, ethnic, and cultural continuity firmly at the heart of the matter: John Drinkwater and Hugh Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity*? (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1992). The 'big questions' are for the most part not the main subject of the contributions to the Mathisen-Shanzer volume. Nonetheless, important contributions are made to these perennial questions, all the more valuable because they are insights generated from close inspection of contemporary traces of events and ideas, bringing to the debate not only new evidence but new questions (Is it important whether citizens of post-imperial Gaul thought of themselves in modern terms as 'ethnically' Roman or Frankish? Or were they more concerned with negotiating the demands of a localised agrarian economy; a regional, militarised governmental and social structure; and a universalist Judeo-Hellenistic religion?).

The volume is divided into three sections, one political ('From Roman to Barbarian Gaul'), the second focusing on the interaction of religious beliefs and forms with social functions, and the third examining 'Intellectual Life.' The last section may seem to provide the most obvious classical continuities, with one paper on Platonist and Neoplatonist thought (by Charles Brittain), and three on epic and elegiac poetic traditions. One of these latter contributions (by Mark Vessey) discusses a work contrasting Virgil with a contemporary late antique Christian poet (and friend of the author) with regard not only to their poetic merits but also to the still-living practice of decorating private and public libraries with busts and statues of authors; through such passing references do we glimpse the physical environment of the late antique Roman world.

But continuities and developments in many aspects of the ancient world are evident elsewhere, too. One of the few papers to treat directly a 'big question' of the period is Michael Kulikowski's on the settlement by imperial officials of the Goths in the south of Gaul in the late 410s; this was the first major 'barbarian kingdom' and would outlive the western half of the Roman empire by over a century. Kulikowski suggests that the settlement was neither a desperate attempt to appease an irresistible barbarian foe, nor an exploitation of barbarian forces as auxiliary defence against other barbarians (two dominant interpretations), but the use by the military junta which constituted imperial government of conveniently available manpower in order to repress permanently the civilian aristocracy of Gaul, a region notable for playing host to an impressive series of usurpations from the mid-third century to the fifth. Such an ascendancy of a military oligarchy over a civilian aristocracy was of course in the best Roman tradition.
In a more urbane vein, Danuta Shanzer examines the transformation of a perfectly classical tradition - the exchange between aristocratic acquaintances of small gifts of food, accompanied by playful, contrived, and recherché letters - into a characteristic pastime of Gallic bishops. Her study highlights vigorous continuity in the content and functions of Roman literary culture, here evidenced not by familiarity with Virgil or Cicero but, perhaps more revealingly, by minor witticisms, innuendos, and old, familiar, bad jokes about shared indulgences. It also casts into relief a gap between the personal lifestyle of noble-born Gallic bishops and a significant part of the church over which they presided, which was in large part fuelled by a zeal for asceticism radiating out from monasteries located on islands off the coast of Marseille, an asceticism which did not embrace the pleasures of the table lightly celebrated by these episcopal communiqués. As with other papers in the volume, close attention to minor and overlooked sources yields surprisingly informative results.

Specialists in Late Antiquity will discover much meat in this well-produced collection, but those from other fields will also find this a rewarding glimpse into a cross-section of the continuum of Greco-Roman culture.

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