

*Proceedings of the British Academy 118: Fifty Years of Prosopography: The Later Roman Empire, Byzantium and Beyond.* By Averil Cameron (ed.). (Oxford, Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2003; pp. xvii + 171; 7 plates. £35).

This volume consists of eleven essays gathered together to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the British Academy's grant to The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (PLRE) – its first to a prosopographical project. It is divided into three primary sections. The first section includes papers that discuss studies spanning the Roman and Byzantine empires, the second section focuses on Byzantium alone, and the third section looks beyond these ancient empires. This quasi-geographical delineation could be better fashioned, and several of the papers could have been fitted into either section one or two. Topical organization would, perhaps, have served these essays better, especially when principles of definition and methodology are applicable across the breadth of prosopographical studies.

*Fifty Years of Prosopography* contains three broad types of essay: memoir, source analysis, and discussion of problems of conceptual definition – in particular, of the nature of identity. Additionally, almost all of the essays wrestle with the broader justification of prosopography as a methodological tool. The need to justify this approach to historical research is perhaps a reaction to continued disagreement over the boundaries of prosopography and the ways in which such studies should be undertaken. The very last essay, placed in a section of its own, seems out of place in this scheme. Janet Nelson, David Pelteret and Harold Short have contributed a paper on the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England project, the only paper to reach beyond the bounds of antiquity. Unfortunately, it is too brief to provide an indication of the breadth of medieval prosopography. The book would have benefited from consideration of prosopographical work set outside the ancient world, but this paper, left on its own, feels like an afterthought.

The problems of definition and validity are evident in the first section, 'Prosopography: Rome and Byzantium'. Included here are four essays, by J. R. Martindale, Werner Eck, Ralph Mathisen, and Paul Magdalino. The first three are largely histories of the PLRE project. Martindale's is a personal memoir, while Mathisen takes a more evaluative approach, trying to give the reader a sense of the project's importance. In this essay he also does what prosopographers find that they have to do all too often: he justifies the value of the method for historical research. Mathisen argues that PLRE is not just a significant academic achievement in its own right, but will provide the foundations for many future works of scholarship. Werner Eck, in his contribution, also includes a good methodological discussion. The collection as a whole is obviously not aimed at a student

audience, but these two pieces should be particularly useful to those non-experts seeking firm discussions of the validity of prosopography. The final piece in this section is Paul Magdalino's essay on the nature of Byzantine identity. Magdalino highlights the different ways in which historians have devised criteria for the inclusion of individuals in studies of the Byzantine Empire, such as giving varying weights to ethnicity, geographic location, and the sources from which their names are derived. Simultaneously, he attempts to provide yet another defence of the utility of prosopography. Given that this essay is almost entirely concerned with concepts of Byzantine identity, it would have been better placed in the second section, with other essays on similar topics.

Though section two, 'Byzantium and Prosopography: Definitions and Methodologies', purports to address new issues, it actually re-engages with many of the questions touched on in the first section. It begins with an essay by Thomas Pratsch on the potential of hagiographical literature as a biographical source. This is a technical piece, signalling a change in focus from the general to a narrower discussion of the problems raised by a particular set of sources. Pratsch claims to identify the unarticulated assumptions, present within existing hagiographical studies, that are relied upon to separate fact from fiction. He then argues that these assumptions are ill-founded, and asserts that individual pieces of hagiography must be evaluated separately and according to a unique set of criteria based on the individual merits and problems associated with each piece. His conclusion is convincing, if unsurprising. Pratsch does not convey to his reader the sense that he is being innovative in the face of much dissent. Werner Seibt contributes another essay dealing with a problematic source; in this case, seals. He discusses the importance of seals as evidence and the proper way in which to categorize and evaluate the information they contain. However, unless the reader has considerable experience of sigilography, he would not know that Seibt is presenting a revisionist viewpoint. The third source-based essay is by Jean-Michel Carrié. He discusses the vast potential that papyri present as a source material. This is a particularly good contribution. Not only does it outline in some detail the specific ways in which papyri are useful to the historian and prosopographer, it also suggests segments of the population whose lives would be illuminated by their study. Carrié illustrates this point by stressing the biases in PLRE, based on differences in the amount of papyrological versus epigraphical source material. Carrié's work may usefully be read alongside the contributions of Mathisen and Eck, if only because of the final part of his piece. It is a plea in favour of using prosopography. Carrié seems to be seeking to stretch its boundaries to include adjoining methodologies, such as onomastics, arguing that they can be used in complementary ways toward the same ends. It is a persuasive argument.

From sources, section two moves on to questions of identity, an issue already touched on by Magdalino. There are thought-provoking contributions on the subject by Wolfram Brandes, Evangelos Chrysos, and Jean-Claude Cheynet. Brandes discusses the pitfalls of

imposing modern definitions on historical situations or individuals, illustrating his point with a discussion of the seventh-century Monothelete heresy. It is an important argument, but Brandes's detailed account risks distracting the reader from the original point. Chrysos writes about what it meant, or might have meant, to be Roman during the course of the Imperial period. He discusses the Roman/foreigner dichotomy in terms of its social/cultural and legal/political dimensions. He is essentially arguing that descriptive terms are not always what they seem: one must continually question what words like *Romanitas* and *Romania* meant to the people who used them. It is a question of definition from a distance, much like Brandes's essay. Chrysos stresses the ambiguities inherent in such descriptive terms, and offers a critique of how PLRE, PLRE II, and Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire have all addressed the issues involved. However, despite having shown that conceptual clarity in this area cannot provide an accurate reflection of the realities of ancient Roman society, he also attempts to delineate a sharp boundary between being Roman and being foreign. The piece asks important questions, but ultimately, the author's desire to provide his own definitional structure risks the same hazards that he identifies in the work of others. Jean-Claude Cheynet's essay is an exercise in defining power. He attempts to elucidate categories of power, in particular public and private power, and then further identify people who fit into each category. Unfortunately, he wanders into a discussion of the type of information that scholars can derive from seal evidence and how that relates to the exercise of power in Byzantine history. It is an interesting discussion of the limits of sigilography, but he falls short of making the comprehensive argument promised in his introduction.

*Fifty Years of Prosopography* is a fascinating collection, containing contributions from some of the finest and most well-known prosopographers and ancient historians. It addresses the core issues of prosopographical theory: definition, identity, and approaches to sources. It is unfortunate that this work maintains a narrow focus on ancient history and does not offer explanations of the technical jargon that many of the contributors employ. Many of the essays are so dense with assumptions about the readers' knowledge that they will be completely comprehensible only to expert scholars. This volume's appeal would have been greatly enhanced if the editor had expanded its scope to include contributions by medieval and modern historians, who have been utilizing prosopography for almost as long as their ancient counterparts.

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