

Book Reviews

Gregory Timothy E., *Vox Populi: Popular Opinion and Violence in the Religious Controversies of the Fifth Century A. D.*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1979, 245 pp.

With this work, Professor Gregory has provided a most welcome addition to the growing field of late Roman studies. He has chosen for his monograph a subject which is both timely and much needed. Scholarly examination of the internal history of the late Roman empire has advanced very considerably in recent years and Professor Gregory has made an important contribution to our understanding of East Roman social history.

The book focuses its attention on Constantinople, Ephesus and Alexandria. The author has not included Antioch or Jerusalem for reasons which are not defined clearly enough given the ecclesiastical importance of these cities and the focus of the book on violence related to religious controversies (of which there was a surfeit in both Antioch and Jerusalem). Chronologically, the study is limited to the first half of the fifth century. When considering the subjects of popular opinion and violence, the author's concentration on religious controversies has some important limitations which he does confront in his introduction. Through an analysis of the formation of popular opinion and violence in Constantinople, Ephesus and Alexandria, Professor Gregory has attempted to delineate the foundations and causation of extensive popular violence in the religious controversies of the first half of the fifth century A. D.

By way of an introduction, the author provides a summary of the relevant methodology and hypothesis from religious and political sociology. He has found the work of Mary Douglas and George Rudé to be of particular value, provided one recognizes the problems of translating theories related to the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries to the 5th century.

After a further useful chapter on the nature of late Roman urban society and incipient unrest in the cities, Professor Gregory begins his study of the religious controversies that form the focus of this work: the episcopacies of John Chrysostom and Nestorius, the Latrocinium and the Council of Chalcedon. All of these episodes were extensively reported in contemporary sources and demonstrate the high state of interest in religious affairs displayed by the urban masses in Constantinople, Ephesus and Alexandria throughout the first half of the fifth century.

From these individual episodes, the author has drawn a number of conclusions. While he has shown a general absence of class conflict in these controversies, it does not seem possible to extend this conclusion to include all incidents of popular violence even in the first half of the fifth century. His conclusions, while significant, must be limited to the context of religious controversies and are not readily translated or necessarily valid for the extensive civil and political unrest that plagued the empire in the fifth century where the presence or absence of class conflict has not yet been clearly demonstrated.

Within the narrower religious confines which he has chosen for himself, Professor Gregory has provided some useful explanations of popular involvement in the religious controversies of the period. He has explored the importance of bishops as directors and formers of public opinion: Their positions as the traditional legitimate leaders of the local Christian community gave them power and influence; when the bishop was that of Con-

stantinople or Alexandria the influence of the bishop and the significance of his involvement in a particular controversy was escalated.

According to the author, public opinion in most controversies began by being relatively fluid and remained so until fixed by persuasion or violence. The importance of persuasion emphasized the role of oratorical skills, processions, songs and slogans. The success of a leader in a religious controversy rested on his ability to present an issue of the lowest common level of comprehension in order to gain the widest possible support. The most successful appeals were those made to faith, tradition and justice, but where persuasion was not sufficient, religious leaders did not hesitate to use force to neutralize the promoters of opposing opinions. At the early stages of a controversy, violence was important in the formation of public opinion: violence allowed only one point-of-view to be presented to the public. Yet all violence in religious controversies was not the result of calculated attempts to suppress opposing opinions. Spontaneous violence existed and demonstrated the passionate interest of many people in religious questions.

Urban life was dangerous in the fifth century since the state had abolished the urban cohorts and devoted most of its attention to frontier defense and the collection of taxes. The central government only intervened in urban unrest after the eruption of open violence, when the army was brought in. Why did the government not intervene earlier? Professor Gregory relates this question to the quasi-constitutional role of public demonstrations in the later Roman empire. The government did not encourage open opposition but it did tolerate limited criticism and recognized the importance of popular opinion in the safety and stability of the Empire. Because of excessive centralization, Christianization and residual republicanism, the Emperor realized his own dependence on the goodwill of his subjects and assumed that popular opinion represented the will of God, whether communicated by violent or peaceful demonstrations. Since the right answers to religious questions were important in the personal salvation of the individual and the divine protection of the empire, the eastern Roman empire experienced an intense concern for the successful resolution of religious controversies. In Professor Gregory's opinion, popular involvement in religious controversies was proof of the vitality of urban life in the late Roman empire in the East.

Professor Gregory has made an important contribution to our understanding of the late Roman empire. One would hope that he will expound his research and establish a broader base for his preliminary conclusions by considering a wider chronological and geographical context within the eastern Roman empire as well as by including popular political opinion and civil violence.

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Roy E. H. Mellor, *Eastern Europe: A Geography of the Comecon Countries*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1975, pp. x+358.

Eastern Europe ranks among the most ignored regions by geographers of the Western World. When the region is dealt with, the Soviet Union is usually included, and often dominates a volume. Similarly, when a text on Europe appears, Eastern Europe is overshadowed by the discussion of Western European nations. There are several reasons for this imbalance. Most notable are the difficulties encountered by Western scholars in obtaining reliable data