

Louvain Studies

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BOOK REVIEWS

Atlante Storico del cristianesimo antico. A cura di Angelo Di Berardino con la collaborazione di Gianluca Pila. Bologna: Centro editoriale Dehoniano, 2010. 396 pp.; €69,00. ISBN 978-88-10-45304-9.

This book is a handsome gift for every patristic scholar. It is the first atlas which is able to offer a historical and geographical framework for the knowledge of the Church Fathers up to the eighth century. Movements of persons imply movements of ideas. Geography is important for the right understanding of the spread of Christianity. We all know the atlas of the early Christian world by Christine Mohrmann and Frederick Vandermeer which dates from 1958. In the meantime, archaeology has made progress and new texts have been discovered. The new atlas, under the direction of dr. Angelo Di Berardino (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma), consists of fifty-eight maps and gives an outline of the history of antique and early mediaeval Christianity on the religious, social and cultural levels. In this historical atlas the categories of time and space are perfectly interwoven. *Indices* at the back of the book facilitate research, e.g., the two indices on the antique and corresponding modern locations and vice versa on pp. 352-396. Every scholar who has acquired the habit of linking antique and modern locations during lectures or in (scientific) articles, can use the book to his or her advantage. Two examples of good practice: Augustine of Hippo (today: Annaba in Algeria) and Basilus of Caesarea (today: Kayseri in East Turkey). We learn that the ancients had two locations which they referred to with the Latin term Iberia or Hiberia: one place corresponds to the territory which is also called Hispania, south of the Pyrenees, the other place corresponds roughly with the eastern part of contemporary Georgia in the Caucasus (p. 126). Such a correspondence between antique and modern locations deepens knowledge and makes the subject matter livelier for a contemporary audience. In the index of the sections and the maps (*indice delle sezioni e delle carte*) on p. 320-321, one finds references to the geographical maps of a particular region and the respective chapters which are dedicated to these regions. As for Gallia which today includes France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, the geographical maps can be found on p. 62-63 and the historical description can be found on p. 290-302. The maps indicate the principal cities and the episcopal sees. The first episcopal sees largely coincide with the most important cities. But at an early stage episcopal sees also came into being at places where there was not a large centre already dating back to the time of the Roman Empire. This illustrates very well the rapid development of Christianity from the second to the fifth century. There are two maps of Gallia. The first map shows the region in the beginning of the fourth century with thirty episcopal sees. The second map is the region in the sixth century. At that time there were about 130 episcopal sees. Although invasions, destruction and plundering had taken

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place, there was nevertheless a steady development of Christian communities. The descriptions which follow the geographical maps cannot be considered as church history in the strict sense. They provide rather an overview of the languages spoken and of the social, economic and doctrinal issues of the day. In the historical descriptions one encounters not only the principal characters (such as popes and bishops) but also communities: their voices, doctrines and cults. The descriptions conclude with a comprehensive international biography for those who may wish to explore the material more deeply. Finally, the book provides rich visual material. There are plenty of pictures of coins bearing the faces of various emperors and consuls. The illustrations are not only accompanied by a short title, but also by an explanatory text. The picture of the epitaph of Albercius (Vatican Museum) (p. 137), for instance, is accompanied by an Italian translation of the inscription. The book thus offers history with documentation. Furthermore the atlas pays attention to archaeological findings and early Christian iconography. In this sense the book can be used as a guide for biblical-archaeological travelling. Journalists who report about papal journeys which often visit places of historical importance for Christianity can turn this book to their advantage as well.

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