

REVIEWS

Don Nardo. *The Fall of the Roman Empire.* San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1998. Pp. 143. Paper, \$12.96; ISBN 1-56510-738-1.

This short book is one of a series of "Opposing Viewpoints Digests" published by Greenhaven Press. The series aims to present "thought-provoking argument and stimulating debate" on various topics. This example succeeds admirably. It begins with "A Short History of Rome's Fall," which presents the facts and chronology of events with as little interpretation and opinion as possible. Similarly, the appendices to the book provide longer quotations from primary and secondary sources quoted briefly in the text, as well as a timeline of events, the chronology of Roman emperors, and an annotated bibliography. Between these two information sections, four explanations of Rome's fall are presented: changes in population, internal (class and religious) disunity, economic decay, and invasion and military conquest. A fifth chapter proposes that "Rome Did Not Fall in the Fifth Century." Within each chapter, three different views are presented. For example, in Chapter 1, "Changes in Population Caused Rome's Fall," the subdivisions are as follows: "Manpower Shortages Weakened the Empire," "Intermarriage Led to Rome's Fall," and "Intermarriage Played No Part in Rome's Decline and Fall." The viewpoints are summarized by Don Nardo, with ample questions from various historians. Nardo writes clearly and succinctly, and he glosses the vocabulary of his quotations in a way that should make them accessible even for students whose vocabulary is limited.

The book should be useful at a high-school honors level or in a college survey of "western civilization," of Rome, or of the early Middle Ages. It could be used as an introduction to the period, with class discussion of the points raised. Students could use the bibliography to expand one viewpoint or another for an essay. In each section, Nardo has left plenty for students to discuss and question. For example, in Chapter 2, "Christianity Dampened Rome's Martial Spirit" is given as a factor in Rome's fall. Arguments to counter this view are not given, but this seems less a weakness to me than a chance for the instructor to start discussion and encourage students to think about issues not raised: How many Christians were there in the empire? How were they distributed geographically? Do we have any hard evidence of Christians causing military defeats? And so on. One of the great virtues of this book is that it presents all the big issues, but never exhausts their possibilities or answers its own questions.

Every reviewer will have at least one picky point to make. In the aforementioned section on Christianity and martial spirit, Nardo's summary of the pacifism of Christian leaders presents as simple a situation that was in actuality quite complex and contested. He cites Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea, as an example because Basil "advocated that any soldier who killed someone in the performance of his duty was guilty of murder and must be excommunicated from the church." This is not quite an accurate depiction of Basil's ruling, which anyway was not accepted by most of his

contemporaries. Soldiers in the Roman army of Basil's time (which was, after all, a Christian Roman army) were accompanied by military chaplains and took communion without hindrance. But this is indeed a picky, specialist's criticism of an admirable presentation of the debate about Rome's fall. I highly recommend it for classroom use.

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John Carmi Parsons, ed. *Medieval Queenship*. New York: St. Martin's Pres, 1998. Pp. 264. Paper, \$17.95; ISBN 0-312-17298-2.

This collection of articles on various subjects concerning Europe's queens, *ca.* eighth century to *ca.* sixteenth century, is a valuable contribution to all students: scholars, teachers, and undergraduates alike. Both new and established scholars present a "palette of images" of medieval queens in their roles as mothers, daughters, wife, consorts, regents, rulers, political "insiders," and foreign "outsiders." The geographic range of the articles is broad. Little-studied areas such as medieval Hungary and Denmark are included, as well as the better-known realms of Capetian France and Angevin and Plantagenet England. In both style and content, this is a remarkably consistent scholarly collection. Each contribution emphasizes the complex relationship between family and power that characterized the roles of prominent women in the Middle Ages. The creativity with which some contributors, in particular Janet Nelson and Lois Honeycutt, used non-traditional sources to reconstruct women's royal roles is impressive.

The book appeals on a number of different levels. For scholars of the medieval family and of women, the articles of Nelson, André Poulet, Elizabeth McCartney, and Pauline Stafford offer new approaches to well-studied areas. They attribute to medieval queens--long regarded merely as pawns in the diplomatic marriage market--a far wider variety of experiences and power. The careers of Elvira of León, Louise of Savoy, and Giovanna of Naples clearly demonstrate that queens could wield significant authority beyond "merely" producing and educating their children. The articles, taken collectively, challenge a traditional interpretation of women's roles--that the emergence of a more patrilineally organized society after 1000 sharply limited the access of women to power. The interpretation of "power" is a central theme in the discussion. Few of the authors directly address the link between the changing status of queens and the evolution of state-like structures in Europe (exceptions include Poulet and Parsons); however, the articles provide ample material for further investigation of such issues.

In the classroom the book could easily serve as an introduction to the issues, vocabulary, and sources of aristocratic women's history. Paron, Poulet, János M. Bak, Inge Skovgaard-Peterson, and Stafford summarize key scholarship on women and