

## JUSTINIAN AND HIS IMPACT

HAARER (F. K.) *Justinian. Empire and Society in the Sixth Century*. Pp. xxii + 274, ills, maps. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Paper, £29.99 (Cased, £95). ISBN: 978-0-7486-3678-5 (978-0-7486-3677-8 hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0009840X22002141

Justinian (r. 527–565 CE), one of the five longest-reigning emperors in the time from the principate to the Byzantine period, is among the most dominant figures of late antiquity. Justinian notably shaped the political, social, cultural and architectural sphere of the sixth century CE, and his influence was felt over the following centuries. Besides his status as an emperor, Justinian also stands out as a founder and reformist (legal projects etc.). Justinian's well-documented 38 years of reign were marked by talented jurists, architects (Anthemius, Isidore) and commanders (Belisarius, Narses), which allowed him to realise the reforms he desired. A considerable body of literature has emerged around the theme of the Justinian period (his religious policy, reconquest of the west, Persian conflicts, building programme and legal projects), and the theme still attracts a long-standing interest. The chapters of H.'s monograph are inspiring as they frame the narrative of a long period. The titles of the chapters satisfactorily explore the main themes of the current literature on the subject with references to the primary sources, documents and recent archaeological findings.

H. does not aim to revisit what is already known about the period; she adopts a social gaze, emphasises the key issues and outlines new areas of debate. Therefore, she does not give a vivid and detailed picture of the period; rather, she highlights alternative perceptions of current questions and debates on the people and land affected by Justinian's foreign policy and laws. In terms of presentation, H. ably reports and compares the views of modern scholars. She presents her own translation of the Greek and Latin texts and indicates editions with translations of the Syriac texts. The vast majority of the images in the work belong to the author.

H. captures the scope of Justinian's reign and the social and cultural impact of war and imperialism on the provinces and local people well. She also focuses on his uncle the emperor Justin I (518–27) on the grounds that Justinian's experience in and influence on state administration is not limited to his own time compared to other long-reigning emperors. Accordingly, the role of Justinian in the period of his uncle Emperor Justin is discussed. In the first five chapters H. briefly describes Justinian's rise, the role and power of Theodora, the strategies of conflict and diplomacy on the eastern frontier and the reconquest of the western provinces (North Africa and Italy), church and state relationship, religious policy and governance of the empire (finance and tax, social reform, administration of the provinces, building programmes) based on a wide array of relevant sources and documents. H. suggests that Justinian broke new ground in three key areas (legislation, church building and missionary activity). Accordingly, he was the first emperor to set missionary activity as a policy (see Chapters 1–3). H. also underlines the concept of caesaropapism and draws attention to its growing importance and the role of the church in people's daily lives with a reference to the religious ideology of Justinian, who favoured the idea of a state united around a single religion, behind all his actions. This is exemplified in the devotion of the first book of the laws to religious subjects. The role and power of Theodora should also be emphasised as she was at the

forefront of Justinian's religious policy. H. notes that the most recent discussion about Theodora is on gender. H. states that Theodora was a strong woman, who was subject to the negative prejudices of a male historian in antiquity; thus she is an important figure in gender discussions. But H.'s predominant interest is on how Justinian's actions are reflected in society; so she only briefly discusses the case of Theodora (pp. 21–6).

H. depicts a vivid picture of Justinian's foreign policy of a defensive stance in the east and an offensive stance in the west. H. notes that Justinian did not intend to come into conflict with Persia, 'and his strategy was therefore defensive and usually reactive' (p. 47). However, H. also points out that Justinian did not completely succeed in his actions on the eastern border due to the conflicts among his commanders and the lack of fortifications, which can be affirmed by the fact that many cities on the border, including the city of Antiocheia, gave their own struggle during the Persian attacks. Although the emperor was insufficient in terms of military support, he could compensate through diplomacy, payments, assimilation, acculturation and Christianisation in other cases.

In the last chapter H. describes the reflections of Justinian's laws and religious policy on society, which is embedded in the title of the book. H. questions the cultural structure of the empire and its effects on daily life, through examples of the emperor's propaganda and patronage. H. highlights that there are only two instances when Justinian directly exercised patronage: Marcellinus Comes and John the Lydian. H. persuasively highlights the identity and Christianisation of festivals and games in the sixth century through case studies. She focuses on Justinian's strict attitude against paganism and the ceasing of the Athenian academy activities, where classical influences were critically dominant. It is known that the emperor had three persecutions (527, 546 and 562) against paganism. Accordingly, what is currently discussed is the religious identity of the writers in the reign of Justinian. According to H. the debate is polarised between A. Kaldellis's views and the beliefs of dissimulation. She also underlines that many sixth-century works present a mixture of both traditions.

Part 2, 'Documents', is a noteworthy anthology of 82 translated ancient texts, legislation, chronicles, epigraphic and other documents, such as a gold coin of Justin and Justinian, and an inscription from the church of SS Sergius and Bacchus and its images. H.'s perception of the Justinian period is far beyond the accounts of Procopius, who is labelled the witness of the age. Instead of being listed systematically, the translated resources in this section could have been classified with reference to the main headings in Part 1.

In conclusion, H. focuses on the age of Justinian, who was on the throne for a long time and strengthened the imperial administration through legislation and reforms, pursuant to the key issues in the light of recent archaeological findings, ancient resources and modern research, and discusses the impact of the emperor's actions on the local population. It is admirable that H. aptly and ably presents such a long, comprehensive and indeed complex period. The innovative perceptions of current debates in the monograph and translations of a variety of primary sources will serve masterly for research on the reign of Justinian and late antiquity. The monograph may also attract the interest of non-specialists. Accordingly, the bibliography of recent literature provides readers with a comprehensive list of the major secondary works on the period. This monograph is both a textbook for students and a guidebook for interested intellectuals.

*Antalya*

EMINE BILGIÇ KAVAK  
[emineblgc@windowlive.com](mailto:emineblgc@windowlive.com)