Muriel Moser: Emperor and Senators in the Reign of Constantius II. Maintaining Imperial Rule Between Rome and Constantinople in the Fourth Century AD. Cambridge: 2018 (Cambridge Classical Studies). XVII, 420 pp., 7 fig. £ 90.00. ISBN: 978-1-108-48101-4.

For me, it is an unusual pleasure to review this book. *Emperor and Senators in the Reign of Constantius II* is the revised version of a Cambridge thesis on which Muriel Moser had begun to work just as I was finishing my own doctorate on fourth-century Roman senators in the same university. When in 2010 I moved abroad, she was even kind enough to deposit the bound copy of my own thesis in the library of our university. Yet we have neither collaborated nor exchanged work since then. This hopefully means that no conflict of interests colours the views expressed in this review. But it also has the consequence that I opened the pages of this elegantly produced book with special excitement when it arrived on my desk.

Moser's monograph studies the relationship of the emperors Constantine and Constantius II to senators. It covers an important period in late antique history. In the half-century from the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 until the death of Constantius II in Mopsuestia in Cilicia in 361, the Roman political system changed in significant ways. The Tetrarchic experiment of joint government by two pairs of senior and junior emperors (*Augusti* and *Caesares)* was abandoned. A traditional system of dynastic rule was restored, in which power was transmitted from fathers to sons. At the same time, the political geography of the Roman empire changed. In 330, the emperor Constantine inaugurated a new imperial city on the Bosporus. In subsequent decades, Constantinople would evolve into a second imperial capital. Moser's book explores the impact of these dual developments on senators, the empire's office-holding élite. How did the restoration of dynastic rule and the establishment of Constantinople change the relationship of emperors to their ruling class?

The book begins in the reign of Constantine. The first chapter explores his relationship to the Roman senate (13–44). Moser highlights the intense collaboration between the emperor and this institution. Imperial princes and princesses married into prominent senatorial families (33–35). After the victory at the Milvian Bridge, senators were appointed to high offices from which they previously had been excluded (23–28). And after Constantine in

324 had defeated his last rival Licinius, leading members of the Roman senate also exercised high government posts in the eastern Mediterranean (30–32). Moser may at times underplay points of conflict. Several senators were exiled, others had their careers cut short, some even lost their life under the new régime. Constantine also imposed several new taxes on them and created a new fiscal administration whose exclusive duty was to ensure that senators fulfilled their financial obligations. Yet in general terms, it will come as no surprise that I heartily agree with her assessment that "Roman senators were closely aligned with the imperial government" (14). In earlier publications and in my thesis, I similarly argued that the interests of the Roman ruling class were deeply intertwined with the institutions of the Roman state.

In the second chapter (43-84), Moser traces Constantine's relations to eastern élites. Peter Heather and Alexander Skinner have argued that the foundation of Constantinople was designed to win the collaboration of power brokers in the recently conquered territories of Licinius and that many of them received senatorial status. Moser challenges such views. As is well-known, in the 320s Constantine massively expanded the size of the imperial élite and made many of his followers members of the senate. Less well-known is another development. As Claude Lepelley showed in an important paper[1], Constantine also made many of his followers *perfectissimi,* members of the second-highest status group in the Roman empire. This was advertised in a series of coins and in an often mistranslated passage of Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* (4,1,1–2). Moser suggests that Constantine honoured many inhabitants of the eastern provinces of the Roman empire in this way. This is an excellent point. Lepelley's insight that promotions to the perfectissimate played an important role in Constantine's administrative reforms has been unduly neglected by recent scholarship.

But I am not sure this observation warrants the conclusion that "there was no senatorial recruitment scheme in the East" (57). There is no *a priori* reason to assume that new *perfectissimi* disproportionately came from Licinius' territories. In order to back up her hypothesis, Moser points to four *perfectissimi* governors of eastern provinces that are attested under Constantine (56–57, 343–344). She confidently asserts that "many of them will have come from

1 C. Lepelley: Fine dell'ordine equestre: le tappe dell'unificazione della classe dirigente romana nel IV secolo. In: A. Giardina (ed.): Società romana e impero tardoantico 1: Istituzioni, ceti, economie. Roma/Bari 1986, 227–244.

the curial elites of the East" (57). But this is not clear. In view of their impeccably Latin names (Flavius Iulius Leontius, Aurelius Fabius Faustinus, Claudius Longinus and Valerius Victorinianus), it is at least as likely that they will have come from western provinces. As in the Early Empire, so also in Late Antiquity the perfectissimate was a trans-regional class whose members came from all major parts of the empire.

The same goes for the senate. Moser claims that "senatorial office in Constantine's eastern administration remained the privilege of established Roman senators" (47). This is inaccurate. There are several men from Licinius' former territories who were made senators by Constantine. They include not only the Cretan Flavius Ablabius, who (as Moser rightly points out) already joined Constantine's court before the final victory against Licinius in 324 (68), but also Flavius Philagrius from Cappadocia (who served as the first senatorial governor of Egypt) and Tychamenes (another Cretan who was a key player in Constantinopolitan politics). We should also keep in mind that the relative lack of detailed career inscriptions in Greek makes it harder to trace senators in the East than in the West. All in all, while Moser is right to remind us of the importance of the perfectissimate as a mechanism of élite integration, the neat division between westerners (who were promoted into the senate by Constantine) and easterners (who became *perfectissimi)* seems unnecessarily schematic.

In the third (85–118) and fourth chapters (119–170), Moser continues the story to the first half of the reign of Constantius II, covering the years from his accession in 337 until the assassination of his brother Constans in 350. She rightly emphasises continuities with the government of Constantine. Most notably, Constantinople became a site in which Constantius advertised that he was the supreme ruler of the Roman world and the rightful successor of his father (131–142, 156–166). But according to Moser, despite the importance of the city as a site in which the new emperor displayed his legitimacy, the formal status of the local senate did not change. Through a careful examination of surviving sources, she makes a good case that it had not yet evolved into an alternative imperial élite; eastern senators continued to be formal members of the curia in Rome (86–91, 141–147). According to Moser, Constantius followed the precedent set by his father also in another way. Top positions in his government were still largely filled with men from old Roman families (91–113); easterners hardly ever joined the senate and

usually only penetrated the medium ranks of the imperial hierarchy (121–131).

Again, I am not sure whether this distinction can be maintained. For example, I was not convinced by Moser's novel suggestion that Flavius Leontius, who held the powerful post of *comes Orientis* in 349, was a member of the "Roman aristocracy" (96), or related to it. Flavius is a honorific title that was regularly adopted by *parvenus* who wished to emphasise their close links to the Constantinian dynasty; as Alan Cameron points out, "Flavius was above all things the hallmark of the *newly* important"[2]. Nor is his appointment as urban prefect in 355 a good reason to think that Leontius was of Roman descent. The *praefectura urbis* was not "an office otherwise given only to Roman senators by birth" (96). On the contrary, as André Chastagnol showed long ago[3], 40% of all holders of this post came from outside Italy. Similarly, I am sceptical whether Constantine's *comes consistorianus* Flavius Dionysius (*PLRE* I 11) was related to the urban prefect L. Aelius Helvius Dionysius (*PLRE* I 12) (22). Is the fact that they shared the extremely widespread name Dionysius sufficient reason to assume a familial relationship? On the face of it, the imperial honorific Flavius suggests that the *comes consistorianus* was another 'new man' who owed his success to imperial favour. Yet these slip-ups should not distract from the contribution this chapter makes to our understanding of the character of Constantius' régime. Even if not all of Moser's revisionist identifications are reliable, it is true that several prominent members of Roman families held high office in the East. By showing that western élites participated intensely in Constantius' administration, Moser usefully reminds us that the Roman empire of the late 330s and 340s remained a unified state, despite the fact that sovereignty over it was divided amongst multiple rulers.

In chapters 5 (171–213) and 6 (214–276), we reach the *pièce de resistance* of this book. In 350, Constantius' brother Constans was assassinated, and the Gallic military officer Magnentius became ruler over the western half of the Roman empire (173–180). Moser convincingly argues that this period of civil

2 A. Cameron: Flavius: A Nicety of Protocol. In: Latomus 47, 1988, 26–33, here 33, his emphasis.

3 A. Chastagnol: La Préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-Empire. Paris 1960 (Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines d'Alger. Sér. II, 34) 450.

discord marked a decisive turning point in the history of eastern Mediterranean élites: 'In sum, these sections suggest that Constantius created a substitute senate in Constantinople to legitimize his position against Magnentius in Rome' (173). Moser makes excellent use of the newly-discovered inscription for the praetorian prefect Flavius Philippus to show that in the year 350 there certainly was a senate in Constantinople whose organisation mirrored that of its Roman sister institution and which encompassed all senators resident in the eastern half of the empire (189–196). En route, she usefully disentangles the complex questions surrounding Philippus' career (197–207). Also the subsequent sections are rewarding. Drawing on legal sources, Moser traces the institutional set-up of the Constantinopolitan senate and the career structure of its members (216–221, 234–246). She also makes some interesting remarks on the role played by the Latin language in this "second Roman senate", as she aptly calls it (257–259); beyond doubt, this was not yet the *Greek Roman Empire* described by Fergus Millar in his 2006 monograph on the eastern Roman empire in the fifth century.

The book is concluded with a chapter on Constantius' visit to Rome in 357 (277-312). After a clear-headed examination of the emperor's relationship to his cousin Julian, Moser convincingly reinterprets Themistius' speech in the Roman senate. According to her reading of this text, this was not a polemical attempt to assert the pre-eminence of Constantinople over the old capital, but a reassertion of consensus between Constantine's last surviving son and the Roman senate (292–303). Similar themes were articulated in contemporary coinage, in the new obelisk in Circus Maximus (303–308) and in honorific statuary displayed in Roman public spaces (308–311). On Moser's reading, like his father Constantine, so also Constantius did not abandon the leading families in the senate to their own fate, but maintained an intimate relationship with them: he was "cherished as the focal point of Roman senatorial culture" (311).

How to assess book as a whole? Taken together, Moser makes two interesting contributions to the administrative history of the Roman empire in the fourth century. First, she advances our understanding of the process by which an independent senate in Constantinople was formed. She makes a strong case that the key stages in this development did not occur under Constantine or in the early reign of Constantius II, but only in the 350s. This hypothesis is not entirely new. In its general outline, Moser's view of the institutional history of Constantinople follows that put forward by Gilbert

Dagron.[4] Yet her monograph offers new evidence and new readings to support a late date for the emergence of an eastern senate. Second, Moser refines our understanding of the identity and social composition of this body. She reveals to what extent the Constantinopolitan senate in the fourth century was shaped by political language, political traditions and political personnel whose origins can be traced back to the city of Rome.

4 G. Dagron: Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451. Paris 1974 (Bibliothèque byzantine. Études 7).

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