

to express her majesty and transcendence. Not content with the obvious, the author embarks on a wide-ranging journey that takes him from Roman attitudes to costly display to the symbolism of precious metals, the exegesis of the Song of Songs and the book of Revelation (why not Solomon's Temple?), early Christian wall mosaics, which have so much gold in them, perceptions of colour by the ancients and even by the Ndembu people of Zambia (whoever they may be), all of this with generous ladlings of social anthropology and an overwhelming bibliography of secondary literature that fills thirty-three closely-packed pages. I cannot say that I have been greatly enlightened by this laborious exercise. The reader's patience is further tried by the pervasive misspelling of Latin terms and sentences such as, 'The symbolic understanding of Scripture constructed paradise as like the best things of this world but better.'

EXETER COLLEGE,
OXFORD

CYRIL MANGO

Alexandria in late antiquity. Topography and social conflict. By Christopher Haas. (Ancient Society and History.) Pp. xviii + 495. Baltimore, MD-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. £37. 0 8018 5377 X

This detailed and valuable study of the Egyptian metropolis, covering the period from Diocletian to the seventh century, is centred on the description and analysis of three 'communities' based in religion, namely Jews, pagans and Christians, and of their history of conflict. Throughout Haas seeks to show this history taking place in the physical realities of Alexandria, often along the long east-west axis of the Via Canopica. Although aware (p. 334) of the risks of 'merely parroting the literature produced after the fact', he argues that inter-communal competition and topography are the two most rewarding approaches to 'mapping out the contours of social life in late antique cities'. That Christians formed a community is in some sense true, although as Christianisation proceeded that statement probably meant no more than that Alexandria was a community. That Jews did is undeniable, but Haas does not persuade me that this community was substantial in the fourth century. That pagans eventually did (from c. 350), Haas thinks is a late result of Christianity; they hardly did before. Overall, it remains unclear that the centrality of the sharp divides of religion is as great as the Christian sources make it seem. The evidence is drawn from a great range of materials, and Haas's writing is often vivid. The treatment of the evidence, however, is often uncritical or careless (perhaps worst on 'Jewish' papyri, where *CPJ*'s inclusions - solely on the basis of names - are taken at face value), and press editing was desultory. As a result, although the book is well worth reading, users are advised to proceed with caution.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ROGER S. BAGNALL

Optatus. Against the Donatists. Translated and edited by Mark Edwards. (Translated Texts for Historians, 27.) Pp. xxxi + 222 incl. 2 maps. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997. £12.50 (paper). 0 85323 752 2
The inclusion of Optatus of Milevis's tract against the north African Donatists