Review Essay: Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire*

Janine Marie Idziak
*Loras College*

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, History Commons, Philosophy Commons, and the Renaissance Studies Commons

**Recommended Citation**
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/rmmra/vol8/iss1/13

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quidditas by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
digs so that correct interpretations of political events and economic trends can be established. His arguments for reinterpreting the Roman coin hoards from third-century Gaul and Britain in economic rather than military terms are most compelling (62-66).

The later chapters of the book survey current techniques of scientific analysis of coins and proper methods of recording numismatic data. Casey shows that the chemical and X-ray analyses now available to numismatists open up a whole new range of information, such as the sources of raw materials and trade routes of coin-issuing powers, and the metrological standards and metallurgical problems of their mints. An electron microprobe analysis has even provided the historical correction that Henry I's moneyers, who suffered castration in 1124 as punishment for issuing adulterated coins, were innocent (137).

The book is a well-written introductory survey, with limited notes and bibliography for further reading. It offers only limited information to political and cultural historians interested in the propagandistic uses of coin inscriptions and iconography (see Michael Grant, Harold Mattingly, J. P. C. Kent, and P. Grierson). However, it does provide the latest information and valuable guidelines to archaeologists and economic historians on the careful treatment and interpretation of numismatic evidence.

Charles Odahl
Boise State University


This monograph is a translation of a work by a professor of Greek and Roman history at the Catholic University of Milan. It is a collection of diverse essays all having to do with the relationship between Christians and the Roman Empire.

Part I is a narrative history in which Sordi sets out an account of the treatment of Christians by the state from the time of the trial of Christ through the reign of Constantine. Writing within the context of a reassessment by historians of the Roman persecution of Christians, Sordi argues that the conflict was fundamentally religious rather than political—in other words, that Christianity was not perceived as a security threat to the state. In Part II, Sordi examines the relationship between Christianity and Roman society. She discusses attitudes and expectations within Roman culture that made it congenial to the reception of Christianity, and concomitantly,
attempts of Christians to find points of commonality with Roman thought. She also treats such varied topics as Christian support of the Roman emperor through prayer, the organization of the early Church on the model of the Roman collegia, and public opinion as a moving force behind the persecution of Christians.

The principal strength of The Christians and the Roman Empire is its inclusion of extensive bibliographic references. References permeate the main body of the text and are complemented by extensive endnotes for each chapter. The breadth of the primary source material upon which Sordi draws is impressive. Her essays bring together biblical texts, apocryphal writings, the works of the Fathers of the Church, and secular, political documents. The secondary sources mentioned span the range of French, German, Italian, and English scholarship. Because of its bibliographic wealth, one can turn to Sordi's book as a point of departure for more intensive research into the issues she broaches. On the other hand, a distinct limitation of this monograph is Sordi's failure to extend her study through the fall of the Roman Empire and Augustine's City of God, a classic record of the tensions between Christianity and Roman civilization.

For the most part, The Christians and the Roman Empire is a work to be appreciated by graduate students and scholars in the field of Church history. It is not a book that reads easily, due to the density and compactness of the content. The frequent use of untranslated Latin and Greek phraseology as well as extended textual citation in Latin also serve to restrict its audience.

The one exception is the very first chapter, which deals with varying interpretations of the trial of Christ. Sordi here displays the historian going through the paces of reconstructing a historical event through critical assessment of primary sources. This chapter might profitably be assigned to undergraduates as an illustration of the methodology of historical inquiry.

Janine Marie Idziak
Loras College


The twelfth century was one of the most innovative periods in Western Europe's history. Abbot Joachim found a new way of seeing both the past and the future. His notion of organically linked status, developing progressively toward a future sabbath, was a true invention, one with a long and important future.