

Review

ANTHONY KALDELLIS and MARION KRUSE, *THE FIELD ARMIES OF THE EAST ROMAN EMPIRE, 361–630*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xxi + 205. ISBN 9781009296946 (bound). £85.00.

Anthony Kaldellis and Marion Kruse have fearlessly entered the cauldron of *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Not. Dign.*) studies, announcing a radical new date for the eastern portion of this contested text (*Not. Dign. or.*), with significant consequences for understanding Roman military organisation and activity from the late fourth to the seventh century. Current orthodoxy holds that the *Not. Dign. or.* was produced c. 400, possibly when the empire was divided at Theodosius I's death, and that its structure of two praesental and three regional armies commanded by specific *magistri militum* (*MM*) persisted for two centuries, albeit with some additions made by Justinian. K. and K. assert that this depends on a fundamental misreading of *Not. Dign. or.*, which they date to the 440s, thereby creating a long fourth century in which Tetrarchic arrangements largely persisted (xii); they give the new arrangements an operational life of only fifty years before changes by Justinian relocated praesental elements, using them for his western conquests and provincial garrisons. There are four short narrative chapters (A.D. 361–395; 395–450; 450–506; 506–630) with a Preface and Conclusion, and then Appendices that almost double the volume's length (105–79). Appendix 3 (127–51) on *mm praesentales* (*MMP*) is particularly important since their dissatisfaction with understandings of the praesental armies triggered their investigation (95), while Appendix 4 (152–79) reviews technical arguments for dating the *ND* and corrects alleged errors, a central aim of the project. The meat of the book is located here rather than in the main narrative.

With regard to the *Not. Dign.*, it is easier to demolish than to construct. K. and K. demonstrate the lack of evidence for significant changes in military organisation in the fourth century apart from the creation before 393 of a dedicated *MM oriens* (17), though they acknowledge this could be attributed to the obscurity of military events after Ammianus' narrative ended. Ch. 2 presents the early fifth century as a period when the East evolved from an under-militarised state through years of increasing Hunnic pressure until Attila's onslaught in the 440s triggered wholesale reorganisation. What needs to be recognised is the extremely limited evidence on military matters until the fragment of Priscus on the 448 campaign provides the first certain evidence for a range of *MM* posts and hence the *Not. Dign.* system, but it is dangerous to exclude the possibility of earlier change on the basis of silence. That the Theodosian law of 441 on the status of appointments to *magister* posts, civilian as well as military (*Cod. Iust.* 12.8.2), does not mention specific *MM* positions is said to be significant (34), but, as subsequently admitted (37), the key distinctions in the law are between active, *vacantes* (titular or non-specific) and honorary appointments. It does not constitute a *terminus post* for the *Not. Dign.* K. and K. have to dismiss as an exception (32–4) the *MM* Thrace attested in 412 (*Cod. Theod.* 7.17.1), as they do (16 n. 69) the *MM* for Africa in 393 (*Cod. Theod.* 9.7.9). The failure of law codes to designate *MM* recipients by region is presented as significant (25, 32, 38), but we are never told how many such laws there are: in fact very few are addressed to unspecified eastern *MMs*, especially after 420, with Macedonius (*Cod. Iust.* 3.21.2, 423) a rare exception. It is misleading to assert that the years leading up to the Theodosian Code's promulgation are 'exceptionally well-documented' with regard to officials (38): for *MMs*, they certainly are not.

In dealing with the unravelling of the *Not. Dign.* system, K. and K. assume that an apparent lack of action by praesental units, e.g. in the 559 Kutrigur invasion, proves that they were no longer located near Constantinople, but there is similar silence when the Gothic warbands roamed the Balkans in the 470s and 480s, when K. and K. accept the *Not. Dign.* system was operating: units may have focused on defending the cities where they were stationed rather than risk action outside, as proved disastrous for Topirus in 551. Justinian exploited these units during the Nika Riot in 532, which indicates they were still in place then, even though there is no evidence for them opposing Vitalian in 515.

The authors assert that much scholarship will have to be revised in the light of their arguments (93), but a more likely response is deconstruction that starts from the elephant in the room, the western *Not. Dign.* They recognise this issue, but leave it to others to explain how the West

overhauled its military structures in the 440s (178–9); sceptics will turn this on its head and use the implausibility of such a late western *Not. Dign.* to start unpicking inconsistencies and misinterpretations in K. and K.'s arguments about the East. I prefer to locate the *Not. Dign.* in the 420s, as did Bury: Valentinian III's restoration offers a context for a joint initiative across the empire, the *MM oriens* and Thrace already existed, and Gainas and Tribigild had demonstrated the need for military units near approaches to Constantinople in both Asia and Europe. By then, the western empire had developed separately for almost three decades, a point well made by K. and K. (177), so its arrangements did not parallel eastern ones, but it had not yet suffered the territorial losses of the 430s.

Agree with its arguments or not, this book is significant and must be taken into account by everyone interested in Roman armies and state structures. At the least, the notion of static military dispositions must be revised, and caution applied to identifications in *PLRE*.

University of Birmingham

m.whitby@bham.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S007543582300093X

MICHAEL WHITBY

© The Author(s), 2024.

Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.