Introduction

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> One had only to open the pages of Ammianus to see that this was a source for late Roman history that . . . was a wonderfully effective introduction to a new age, combining the unexpected features of this new age with a more or less traditional way of describing them. After the well-practiced regularities of early imperial history, what was striking about the later Roman empire was its richness and diversity, and its massive and varied documentation; and here was a writer prepared to address it in the familiar terms of the Classical historian.[1]

The work of John Matthews can be described in much the same terms that he uses to introduce the historian Ammianus Marcellinus in the second edition of his book *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*. Across a long and distinguished career, Matthews has framed late antiquity in classical terms, but with an eye to bringing out the distinctive contours of the new age. Like Ammianus, Matthews never pretends that the structures and routines of the high empire survive unchanged into late antiquity. Yet, again like his most famous subject, Matthews also recognizes the advantages of using classical tools to draw upon the great range and relative abundance of sources available to reconstruct the history of the later empire.

Matthews's Ammianian approach has made significant contributions to a fertile period in late antique studies. Early in Matthews's career in the 1960s and 1970s, Peter Brown led a push to bring scholarship on the period beyond the pessimistic Gibbonian paradigm as well as the contemporary (and more deliberate) historical model of A. H. M. Jones.[2] In their stead came a series of studies highlighting the period's cultural and religious dynamism as well as its continuities with the Roman imperial past. Recent years have seen a reaction against this trend, with the history of (particularly western) political and economic disruption again being prioritized.[3] While

[1] Matthews 2008: ix–x.
[2] Jones 1964a. The most notable of Brown's early work tending in this direction is Brown 1971.
[3] E.g. Heather 2005 and Ward-Perkins 2005.

these larger discussions have certainly influenced Matthews, his scholarship connects to them by implication: his career is marked not by expansive arguments about the character, shape, and limits of late antiquity, but by a Symian close exploration of particular elements of the later Roman world. In a field of study where grand military, economic, and religious narratives often predominate, Matthews stands out as a proponent of close, analytical history, and as someone who has succeeded in bringing a great number of individual events, people, and texts into view or into clearer focus. His work, with its own richness and diversity, as well as its own extensive and varied documentation, has made late antiquity more intelligible and vital to new generations, just as Ammianus opened up that age to him. The Roman empire that emerges neither marches inexorably toward its decline and fall nor strides confidently along the path of continuity and adaptation. Its history instead moves more naturally, and therefore more irregularly, as the inclinations, interests, and interactions of individuals determine the course of events.

Though the power of Matthews's approach was already apparent in a series of articles in the late 1960s and early 1970s, his first book, *Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court, AD 364–425*, fully demonstrated its promise upon publication in 1975. In its focus upon both the political and personal characteristics of the later Roman aristocracy, *Western Aristocracies* described in an original way a world in which later Roman political, cultural, and religious narratives intertwined with one another across individual lives and careers. The book reveals an age in which elites from across the empire found themselves drawn towards the imperial court. The court functioned as the center of their ambitions and a facilitator of their relationships, but ultimately became captive to the private interests of these aristocrats. Nevertheless, *Western Aristocracies* serves not as a narrative of decline, but as a careful profile of a broad and extremely important social milieu and network. As one reviewer commented at the time, the ability of *Western Aristocracies* to outline the enduring concerns of the ruling elite alongside their changing religious sensibilities creates a picture in which one part is "as reminiscent of Tacitus as is the other of Augustine of Hippo."[4] One finds not a world unchanged, but one in which change progressed at a human pace and gradually moved along lines that those familiar with the cultural and political landscapes of the Roman empire could recognize and understand.

[4] Wormald 1976: 217.

Not only was *Western Aristocracies* "one of the most influential and challenging studies of Late Antiquity to appear in the 70s,"[5] as the many and significant reviews that it received both in English and in several European languages show,[6] but it also remains a fundamental study for late antique scholars and students alike. A clear sign of the sustained appeal of *Western Aristocracies* was its reprint in 1990 with only minor corrections and a substantial Postscript.[7] While addressing the points raised by reviewers of the first edition, Matthews refused to engage in what "the awful parlance of modern Universities" would call a "thorough reappraisal."[8] That would have called for the circular scrutiny of a vast body of literature that was ultimately inspired by *Western Aristocracies* itself.

The same feeling Matthews displays in *Western Aristocracies* for the human dynamics that underlie institutions, events, and movements informs his second monograph, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (1989).[9] Inspired in part by Syme's *Tacitus*,[10] Matthews's *Ammianus* offers a monumental treatment of the history of Ammianus Marcellinus and the world that gave it shape. The study is divided into two sections, which elucidate the life and times of the author in different fashions. The first (*Res Gestae*) interprets and expands upon Ammianus's narrative by offering a detailed reconstruction of the events and personalities featured in the historian's text. The historian himself stands as the central figure in this inquiry, as the focus rests upon events as he experienced them. The second section of the book (*Visa vel Lecta*) develops a set of topics "for which Ammianus is a source and on which his views are of interest."[11] These thematically organized sketches provide a comprehensive view of much of the fourth-century Roman world. They touch upon topics as diverse as the position and functions of the emperor, the foreign and domestic enemies of the Roman order, social relationships in the Roman world, and Ammianus's religious attitudes. Matthews then concludes with a chapter investigating

[5] Browning 1991.
[6] In addition to Wormald's review cited above, see Fontaine 1975, Giardina 1977–1978, and Rosen 1977. The book also received notice beyond the world of academe and was reviewed by John Wilkes in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 May 1975.
[7] With characteristic humor, Matthews remarks that the decision to reprint *Western Aristocracies* was prompted by the desire "simply to assist in making available once more a book which . . . has enjoyed the doubtful accolade of being stolen both from University libraries and from the bookshelves of colleagues." Matthews 1990: 399.
[8] Matthews 1990: 399.
[9] Between *Western Aristocracies* and *Ammianus*, Matthews produced Matthews and Cornell 1982. In the interest of space, however, we treat only Matthews's monographs in this introduction.
[10] Syme 1958. [11] Matthews 2008: x.

Ammianus's own conception of his work, which further explores his historiographical method and what we can learn from it and through it.

Ammianus has been praised for its "great originality of both substance and style,"[12] its richness of detail,[13] and its "immensely entertaining and stimulating" content;[14] but it has also proven the most controversial of Matthews's books. The three areas of greatest controversy seem to be Ammianus's place of origin,[15] his religious attitudes,[16] and the degree to which Ammianus's rhetorical aims have distorted the "real" Roman world in his history.[17] In response to the first of these issues, Matthews himself mounted a thorough defense of Ammianus's Syrian origins in a 1994 article that treats in detail the reasons for identifying Ammianus Marcellinus as the recipient of Libanius's *Ep.* 1063.[18] Despite some dissent,[19] meanwhile, Matthews's nuanced perspective on the historian's religious attitudes continues to be influential. Finally, regarding the possible distortions introduced by Ammianus's rhetorical aims, Matthews has recently argued that "factual description and rhetoric are not clearly separable features of Ammianus's writing," owing to the author's great skill in abruptly moving between the two.[20] He thus suggests that the presence of rhetoric need not preclude a record of facts, and that one can responsibly recover the latter while acknowledging the former. In whatever way these debates are eventually resolved,[21] *Ammianus* remains a monument to Matthews's extraordinary erudition and care.

Matthews's 2000 book *Laying Down the Law: A Study of the Theodosian Code*, finds him moving from the writing of Roman history to the writing of Roman law. The study appeared during a period of increased scholarly interest in the Theodosian Code, a collection of laws published in 438 CE under Theodosius II.[22] Matthews examines not only the content of the Code, but also the processes whereby the collection was put together and promulgated. The clarity that Matthews is able to achieve on these matters is all the more admirable when one considers the density and complexity of the Code itself. The talent he displays for taking the formidable and making it accessible – a process that, not irrelevantly, finds him often responding to

[12] Bowersock 1990b: 245. [13] Acknowledged even by Barnes 1993: 57.
[14] Drinkwater 1991: 84.
[15] Arguments against an Antiochene origin were first raised by Charles Fornara in a 1987 Oxford lecture and repeated by others in subsequent venues (e.g. Bowersock 1990b, Barnes 1993: 57).
[16] E.g. Barnes 1993: 68; Barnes 1998. [17] This is the overriding argument of Barnes 1998.
[18] Matthews 1994. [19] E.g. G. Kelly 2004: 167 n. 126. [20] Matthews 2008: xii.
[21] A recent article by Sabbah (2003) that offers an overview of both Ammianus's work and secondary scholarship endorses Matthews's views in all three areas of controversy.
[22] See the studies of Honoré 1998 and Harries 1999.

Mommsen's work on the Code – can also be seen as a talent for extracting significant historical information from what might appear to be inhospitable sources. As *Laying Down the Law* vividly exemplifies, Matthews reconstructs ancient history from much more than ancient historiography.

Despite his (good-humored) concern that it will be the "least popular" of his books (p. xi), *Laying Down the Law* has become essential reading in the study of Roman jurisprudence: as one reviewer put it, Matthews provides "a firm foundation on which to build historical discussions from the Code."[23] Scholars interested in the history of legal codification in Rome, the circulation of laws in the Empire, and, more locally, the sources, substance, and uses of the Code itself now have Matthews to guide them through what remains a disciplinary labyrinth. By also rooting the Code so firmly in its historical context, Matthews makes *Laying Down the Law* an invaluable resource for material on late Roman administrative history, the place of law in late Roman society, and the political and legal landscape of fifth-century Constantinople.[24]

Matthews's most recent book, *The Journey of Theophanes: Travel, Business, and Daily Life in the Roman East*, shows him once more finding history in unexpected places. *Theophanes*, for which Matthews received the American Historical Association's Breasted Prize in 2007, uses materials from a papyrus archive to reconstruct the journey from Hermopolis Magna in Egypt to Syrian Antioch that the lawyer and public figure Theophanes and his entourage undertook in the early 320s. It is a mark of Matthews's great scholarly imagination and acuity that, when encountering a set of sources that largely document travel expenses, he did not equate the quotidian with the pedestrian and the insignificant, and instead saw the archive as a valuable source for social and cultural history.[25] Not only does the study offer insights into what it was like for individuals to live (including in no small measure what it was like for them to eat) in the late antique world, but it also connects the Theophanes archive to a broader context, so that a more panoramic view of the period emerges from its details. Matthews impressively shows how much historical information is contained in everyday objects and events. Along with advancing our understanding of ancient travel,[26] *Theophanes* joins with his other scholarship in enabling his audience to continue to discover late antiquity anew.

[23] Lenski 2003b: 340. Other reviews include those of Ando 2002 and Humphries 2004.
[24] Humphries 2004: 525 makes these points similarly.
[25] R. J. A. Talbert expresses a similar admiration for Matthews in his insightful review of *Theophanes* (Talbert 2007).
[26] For a recent work that deals with late antique travel, see Ellis and Kidner 2004.

This volume marks John Matthews's scholarly accomplishments, but it would not exist without his equally impressive achievements as a teacher, mentor, and colleague. He possesses a remarkable ability to instill in those around him the same love of intellectual experimentation, attention to detail, and sensitivity to the contours of individual experiences that typify his own work.[27] The assertion of distinct historical schools founded by particular scholars has (perhaps rightly) been discouraged in recent years, and we do not claim that Matthews has established such a school or that he ever aimed to do so. Indeed, this very notion would likely embarrass him. And yet the work of those he has taught and influenced reflects his belief that an understanding of the later Roman world benefits from the consideration of diverse and sometimes obscure sources, and his concern to reconstruct the Roman past from the ground up, through the close analysis of the primary material. Matthews has made us all appreciate that the philological tools of the classicist remain indispensable to scholars of late antiquity.

Inspired by John Matthews's example, our volume gathers essays that coherently explore topics figuring prominently in his interpretation and reconstruction of later Roman society. These include politics and elite culture in late antiquity; late antique historiography; ancient legal theory and juristic texts; late antique authors' engagements with the classical past; and the interplay between classical culture and Christianity. The chapters will largely focus upon the period from the age of the emperor Diocletian (284–305) to that of the emperor Theodosius II (408–450), a period that we call "the long fourth century." By this we do not mean to evoke the oft-debated concept of a "long late antiquity."[28] Instead, we seek to reveal different transformations from those that generally interest advocates of that idea. In the process we follow Matthews in highlighting specific features of a late classical world, rather than of a postclassical one.[29] For our contributors, this is a matter of viewing historical events, cultural institutions, and literary texts against precedents both within the era in question and across Roman history more broadly, so as to bring out different examples of social, political, and literary evolution in the period from 284 to 450.

[27] Also deserving mention are Matthews's abilities as a prose stylist: the clarity, force, and wit with which he writes call to mind one of his favorite writers, Gibbon. (The influence of Gibbon on the Matthewsian footnote is in itself a subject worthy of exploration.)

[28] For a recent example, see Marcone 2008.

[29] For a notable case where late antiquity is conceptualized as "postclassical," see Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar 2001.While Matthews is certainly attuned to what is unique about the period, meanwhile, he is consistent in treating it as the later Roman empire rather than as a postclassical age.

The volume is organized into three Parts. The first deals with political life and elite experience in late antiquity. The contributors together convey that in spite of the rise of Christianity and the emergence of alternative sources of political and personal authority, many elements of Roman political and social life remained only slightly changed. Part I begins with David Potter's division of Roman history into three distinct phases of self-definition that shape both its political behaviors and its ability to respond to crises. Potter attributes the eventual dissolution of the western part of the Roman empire to the inability of a state increasingly beholden to regional aristocratic office holders to respond flexibly to the demands of Goths and other outsiders. And yet, Potter argues, even this later Roman world grew slowly and organically out of earlier models of imperial self-definition.

Peter Garnsey follows Potter with another far-reaching essay, this time on the institution of Roman patronage. Garnsey argues that patronage, long thought to be a vestigial part of Roman social life by the fourth century, retained its vibrancy as an organizing principle for Roman personal and political interactions. Like Potter, Garnsey sees institutional evolution across Roman history; but patronage's changes proceed more gently and result in a less dramatic outcome. In a related paper, Cristiana Sogno uses the correspondence of Symmachus to show how marriage alliances created and cemented political relationships within the Roman aristocracy much as they had done since at least the late republic. Sogno shows how the general model that Garnsey traces actually operates in cementing and securing particular sorts of later Roman social relationships.

Two other contributions show that the slow and steady evolution of social and political institutions across the period had the effect of muddying popular perceptions about the working of the Roman system. In the first, Jill Harries looks at Constantinian and Theodosian assumptions about the practical mechanisms for communicating and enforcing law. Harries goes on to explore the possibility that when political change occurs slowly, as in the period she examines, administrators may not recognize the degree to which their social and institutional context diverges from that of their predecessors. Part I concludes with Serena Connolly's study of a Constantinian law that shows the emperor working to uphold his traditional duty to respond to the requests of his subjects while adapting the structure of his responses to a new ceremonial context. In this, Connolly shows an emperor responding to the regional concerns that Potter identifies as so typical of the later imperial system.

Part II analyzes cultural developments in the long fourth century by focusing upon varied kinds of biographical texts. The aim is to offer fresh

insights into how authors from the Tetrarchy to Theodosius II worked with traditional modes of discourse, but adapted them to new material and new functions in ways that brought about changes to inherited forms. What emerges, therefore, is a focused picture of late antique innovation, in which texts evolve in light of particular literary and cultural developments.

Edward Watts begins with a paper describing philosophical biography as a literature defined by a particular rhetoric that illustrates the practical application of ideals of conduct. Watts illustrates a broad structural similarity between fourth- and fifth-century pagan and Christian philosophical biography in which Christian texts like the *Life of Antony* and Theodoret's *Life of Simeon Stylites* develop the traditional rhetorical strategies of pagan philosophical biography to define idiosyncratically Christian behaviors in philosophical terms. Augustine's *Confessions*, by contrast, subtly alters this rhetoric to argue simultaneously against the positive moral effects of classical philosophy and for the redemptive power of its Christian counterpart.

Each of the remaining chapters of Part II centers on the biographical work of a single author. In one, Josiah Osgood's study of Paulinus of Pella's *Eucharisticon*, Augustine continues to figure prominently. Osgood argues that Paulinus follows the rhetorical lead of the *Confessions* and uses his hexameter *Eucharisticon* to suggest that, in a Christian context, traditional education stands among other unnecessary worldly trappings. Osgood contends, however, that this rhetoric hides a more nuanced approach to the classics, in which Paulinus simultaneously disavows their importance and appropriates their language. Like Osgood, Scott McGill examines a biographical poem with links to the classical past and the world of education. In a chapter on the grammarian Phocas's hexameter biography of Virgil, McGill investigates how the author deviated from his chief model, Aelius Donatus's fourth-century Virgilian *Vita*, and crafted a new profile of Virgil's infancy. McGill goes on to explore why Phocas adapted Donatus as he did, a topic that leads him to consider the biography's fiction, function, and possible audience. Finally, to conclude Part II, Susanna Elm investigates the pragmatics of biographical discourse in Gregory Nazianzen's two orations against the emperor Julian. Elm argues that Gregory's speeches should be read not as indictments, but as a metaphorical stele that publicly displayed the emperor's shameful deeds. While Gregory's orations attack Julian, they also suggest a set of ideal behaviors that a Christian emperor ought to adopt. The aim is to instruct through polemic, rather than through the positive, prescriptive biographical paradigm explored by Watts.

Part III of the volume works in much the same way as John Matthews's most important studies. It explores the broader political, cultural, and

religious consequences of the challenges presented at one important historical moment, the return of Theodosius I to Constantinople following his unsuccessful campaign against the Goths in 380. Peter Heather's chapter begins Part III by outlining the precarious political and military position in which Theodosius found himself during the winter of 380/1. He describes how, despite his reputation as a resolute Christian champion, the weakened emperor turned to the Constantinopolitan pagan senator Themistius for help in rhetorically reinforcing his position. Echoing Potter's portrait of an inflexible empire beholden to regional aristocracies, Heather then describes how the Gothic settlement for which Themistius provided rhetorical cover created ambiguities and challenges that the Roman administration proved unable to resolve. The resulting rebellion of Alaric that resulted from this particular set of circumstances began the process that culminated in the end of Roman control of the west.

In chapter 11, Neil McLynn evokes Gregory Nazianzen to show the measured and ambiguous actions connected to Theodosius's assertion of Nicene control over the churches of Constantinople. McLynn's Theodosius resembles the careful and politically astute emperor described by Heather and displays a similar concern for effecting change without angering local elites. McLynn goes on to show how Theodosius's deft handling of public opinion also left him respected by Nicenes, Arians, and Gregory himself. The political savvy of this emperor is further revealed in Brian Croke's ensuing chapter. Croke demonstrates how deliberate changes to the physical and ceremonial space of Constantinople encouraged popular recognition of a new political order. Croke outlines how, in the 380s, Theodosius and his family instituted a calendar of political rituals that reaffirmed both Constantinople's status as an imperial capital as well as the important role that the Theodosian sovereign played in affirming its primacy.

Part III and the volume conclude with Mark Vessey's discussion of Jerome's *Chronicle*. Vessey locates the Chronicle's composition at just the moment when the Latin literary and Roman political contexts began to make impossible the classicizing, triumphalist historiography of authors like Ammianus Marcellinus. He argues that the projects of Jerome and Ammianus differed most significantly in how they sought to shape time and define the identities and achievements of the age's central players. Yet even Jerome's remarkable redefinition of historiography's scope and content shows a deep reliance upon sources and themes drawn from earlier periods. Together, these contributions show that the first years of the Theodosian dynasty saw significant innovation in how imperial power operated, how it was presented, and how it was commemorated. Yet the

essays also emphasize that change need not entail rupture, and that the new Theodosian age maintained deep ties with the past's political practices and textual forms.

Throughout his distinguished career, John Matthews's work has shown particular sensitivity to the unique aspects of later Roman politics, elite culture, law, and literature, while remaining appreciative of how the period so often saw the assimilation and modification of existing models, structures, and practices. To draw out this late antiquity, viewed as a complex of individuals and of individual episodes, institutions, and texts,[30] has been his chief enterprise. This he has done by practicing inductive history and telling specific stories that fill in a world piece by piece. Matthews's method complements the grand narrative approach to later Rome and works toward producing several localized narratives of the period.[31] At the same time, Matthews's scholarship is of a scope that includes traditional oppositions like east and west, imperial center and provincial periphery, and polytheism and Christianity. The wide-ranging work he has produced treats historiography, epigraphy, prosopography, poetry, law, and even an ancient travel ledger. This volume honors Matthews by gathering a range of papers from his former students and friends that reflect his interest in accumulating varied information and giving diverse, detailed accounts of the politics, society, and culture of late antiquity. The essays are also meant to convey the deep gratitude that their authors feel towards someone who has offered guidance, support, and compassion throughout their careers and lives.

mentis agitator meae,
Consilia nullus mente tam pura dedit.
Ausonius, Prof. xv.15–16

[30] The language here echoes Scourfield 2007: 2.
[31] Matthews's concern, as he puts it in Matthews 1990: xii, to "integrate the elements of political, social, and cultural history into a narrative structure" marks his work as a whole, and certainly remains keenly evident in his latest book on Theophanes.